

**Post-war Britain's First Youth Subculture: The Bebop Scene
in Soho, 1945–1950**

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Abstract

In late 1945 to early 1946, bebop, also known as re-bop and modern jazz, migrated across the Atlantic from New York City to Soho, London, where it was reproduced and rearticulated by a racially diverse bunch of musicians in gritty basement clubs. This thesis maps the emergence of this scene by exploring the intersection of race, class and gender through a wide range of archival sources, many of which have been unresearched, such as: oral history archives, the music press, national and local newspapers, autobiographies, police reports, and photographs. In order to question received narratives about subcultural history, it employs an interdisciplinary approach, crossing the boundaries of the following fields: music studies, race and ethnic studies, fashion studies, media studies, and subculture studies. In documenting and analysing the avant-garde aesthetic styles that constituted the scene – the music and sartorial style, as well as the cultural rituals of drug consumption and transracial relations – the thesis establishes for the first time the ways in which bebop identities were constructed and articulated, how they spread to the London suburbs, and how they were received by the authorities and the mainstream media. In so doing, it shows how bebop in Soho became a moral panic which led to a police clampdown on the scene which saw the main clubs raided. The thesis demonstrates that bebop was not just a scene, but was in fact the first youth subculture in post-war Britain.

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THE BEBOP SCENE



1919

Jazz arrives in Britain from America

1939

Outbreak of WWII

1942

African American servicemen and US Army swing bands enter Britain and descend on Soho

1945

End of WWII

First bebop records arrive in Britain

Musicians begin playing bebop at the Fullado Club

1946

Cecil Gee's Outfitters opens

Paramount Dance Hall introduces bebop

1947

Independent tailors start producing bebop clothing

Launch of Britain's first bebop label, Esquire Records

Beboppers begin making transatlantic journey's to New York

Fullado Club raided by police and closed down

David's Menswear shop opens

1948

Surge in Trad jazz

SS Windrush arrives at Tilbury from Jamaica

Beboppers start playing in other bands in various west end clubs

Feldman Club hosts bebop nights on Sundays

Metropolitan Bopera House opens and closes

Club Eleven opens

1950

Bebop goes suburban then nationwide

Club Eleven raided by police and closed down

Paramount Dance Hall raided by police and closed down

Bebop banned by Wimbledon Palais

Bebop banned by BBC

1951

Studio '51 opens and closes

Williams' Menswear shop opens

1952

Flamingo Club opens

1955-1964

The birth of the teenager

Rock and roll enters Britain

Bill Haley and the Comets' film, Rock around the Clock, shown in British cinemas

Ronnie Scott and Pete King open up bebop club, Ronnie Scott's

The Beatles and Rolling Stones record their first albums

Bill Haley and the Comets play first London gigs

The rise of skiffle and trad-jazz

The rise of Tin Pan Alley

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Introduction

Overview

This thesis tells the hidden history of the bebop scene in post-war Soho, London, and maps its humble beginnings in late 1945 to the point at which it sparked a moral panic in 1950. Via an exploration of the intersection of race, class and gender it demonstrates how the scene first came into existence and then developed in the underground spaces of Soho in the aftermath of World War Two, amidst the bomb-blasted landscape.

This is a history from below, and though there are a few musicians in the story that are relatively well-known, the narrative gives voice to many of its social actors that have remained unheard until now. The thesis details the hybrid identities that were created by these protagonists through their distinct blend of music, fashion and transracial fraternisation across gender. More than this, though, the story examines the social and political impacts of these identities on society in the post-war years. In other words, it assesses the culturally transformative significance of beboppers – not only in their influence on subsequent youth subcultures, but also their reception by the media, the development of popular culture more generally and, crucially, Soho's role in this during the 1950s. Classic notions of subculture, then, will be utilised, as will Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of the carnivalesque, which will help shed light on the transgressive social and cultural nature of post-war Soho.

The story is as much about movement and migration as it is about cultural hybridity and improvisation. I therefore make use of Paul Gilroy's concept of the 'Black Atlantic' and Fernando Ortiz's notion of 'transculturation', employing them throughout the thesis. These conceptions are highly important for critically illuminating the rich tapestry that is woven when the various cultures in the narrative come together and amalgamate.

Simultaneously, though, the research reveals a parallel narrative about political nationalism and imperial hegemony, and explores the ways in which the establishment wielded power over the rebellious social actors constructing these brand-new post-war identities. In this respect, cultural theorists Stuart Hall, Stanley Cohen and Nachman Ben-Yehuda are all important for media analysis and for questioning the role of the dissemination of the bebop scene in the media.

Key terms: Definitions

A number of key terms are applied throughout this thesis. Andy Bennett has defined a 'scene' as 'the context in which clusters of producers, musicians, and fans collectively share their common musical tastes and collectively distinguish themselves from others'.¹ Bennett's definition is suitable for this research as it reflects the way in which the bebop scene in post-war Soho operated. In terms of 'subculture', Hebdige's notion that 'subcultures cobble together (or hybridize) styles out of the images and material culture available to them in the effort to construct identities which will confer on them "relative autonomy" within a social order fractured by class, generational differences, work etc.'² is the most suitable definition for demonstrating how beboppers, at a time of economic austerity and clothes rationing, utilised the limited resources available to them to collectively construct style and meaning within the post-war moment.

With regard to 'bebop', Kenny Clarke, one of the first wave of drummers to play the style, recalled that the term was coined by the press: 'Bebop was a label that certain journalists later gave it, but we never labelled the music', Clarke has explained. 'It was

¹ Andy Bennett and Richard A. Peterson (eds.), *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal and Virtual* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), p. 1.

² Dick Hebdige, 'The Function of Subculture', in Simon During (ed.), *Cultural Studies Reader*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 441–450 (p. 441).

just modern music, we would call it. We wouldn't call it anything, really, just music.'³ *Melody Maker* music journalist Seymour Wise was amongst the first English writers on bebop. Wise described the music as 'an entirely new jazz medium, a style based on augmented chords, elaborate phrases apparently unconnected to each other, departing from the traditional use of chord progressions, assimilating fabulous technique and drive, while disregarding conventional jazz accentuation'.⁴ Wise's definition is most appropriate for this thesis. However, it is important to note that I am not a musicologist. The thesis seeks to unravel the myriad social, cultural and political codes that became embedded within the music once it migrated to Britain and landed in Soho. As elucidated by Clarke, the music as made by its New York originators was labelled by the media. The following chapters in this thesis are very much more interested in demonstrating how the label 'bebop' became a metaphor in Soho for a myriad other meanings.

'Soho', meanwhile, is a spatial location situated in the borough of Westminster, in the centre of London (see map on p. 16), bordered by Shaftesbury Avenue to the south, Oxford Street to the north, Regent Street to the west and Charing Cross Road to the east. The area signifies, however, and always has signified, more than merely a topographical location. Cultural historian Judith Walkowitz defines Soho as an area whose 'geographic and social identity has always been more mobile, fluid, and contested than... mappings of Soho would suggest'.⁵ This definition of Soho best captures the themes of this research.

³ Paul Du Noyer, *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Music* (London: Flame Tree Publishing, 2003), p. 130.

⁴ Seymour Wise, 'What is Bebop?', *Melody Maker*, 31 August 1946, p. 5.

⁵ Judith Walkowitz, *Nights Out: Life in Cosmopolitan London* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), p. 18.

Contribution to knowledge

Histories of jazz in Britain

There are several existing histories of jazz in Britain. Jim Godbolt's *Jazz in Britain: 1919–1950* (1984), George McKay's *Circular Breathing: The Cultural Politics of Jazz in Britain* (2005), Catherine Tackley's *The Evolution of Jazz in Britain: 1880–1935* (2005), Hilary Moore's *Inside British Jazz: Crossing Borders of Race, Nation and Class* (2007), Duncan Heining's *Trad Dads, Dirty Boppers and Free Fusioneers, British Jazz, 1960–1975* (2012), Dave Gelly's *Jazz in Britain and its Audience: 1945–1960* (2016), and Jason Toynbee, Catherine Tackley and Mark Doffman's *Black British Jazz: Routes, Ownership and Performance* (2014) all make significant contributions to the history of British jazz.

However, no single book deals specifically with British bebop. While Godbolt's account presents a comprehensive look at jazz from its introduction to Britain, including early definitions of the term, key players and the various genres of the music, he dedicates only one chapter to bebop in 1940s London. Not only that, but Godbolt, like most other writers on British jazz, privileges 1948 as the starting point of bebop in Britain. While his portrait of the participating musicians in his story is accurate, he overlooks a whole racial demographic that contributed to early British bebop, and does not include the first bebop club in Britain in his story, which started developing the music in late 1945 and early 1946.

McKay's work is concerned with jazz and the politics of race. His book focuses specifically on 'jazz accompaniment to protests at Aldermaston and jazz festivals such as Beaulieu'.⁶ However, although the book is not about bebop in particular, when

⁶ Katherine Williams, 'Post-World War II Jazz in Britain: Venues and Values, 1945–1970', *Jazz Research Journal*, 113, 2014, pp. 113 – 131 (p. 115).

McKay does mention the idiom he, like Godbolt, suggests that a group of musicians pioneered the music at a specific club in Britain in 1948, and then proceeds to discuss bebop players in terms of the 1950s.

Tackley's book is also highly informative, tracing the trajectory of jazz in Britain, but concludes in 1935; while Heining – although observant on some aspects of the bebop scene in 1940s London – provides a 'more documentary and anecdotal report... illustrating the different jazz venues utilised by trad and modern jazz musicians, and alluding to the importance of the Little Theatre Club and Ronnie Scott's "Old Place" in the development of British Free Jazz'.⁷ These clubs, however, did not open until the 1950s.

Hilary Moore's study is concerned with jazz in Britain and its relation to race, nation and class. Her text does cover some features of the 1940s, in particular the renowned venue for George Webb's Dixieland band, the Red Barn, in Barnehurst, Kent, but is only concerned with the trad jazz from that period.

Toynbee, Tackley and Doffman's narrative periodises specific moments in black British jazz. While their book is an important contribution that details musical hybridity and the cultural significance of race, 1940s bebop is overlooked in their story. This is perhaps due to the exclusion, found in most other literature concerning British jazz, of the black contribution to bebop in 1940s Britain from most dominant narratives.

Dave Gelly, on the other hand, does touch upon the history of early British bebop. His text is precise in terms of particular historical dates, venues and geographical locality with regard to the starting point of bebop in Britain. However, like Godbolt, Gelly dedicates only one chapter of his book to bebop, and moreover his overall view is

⁷ Ibid.

discursive and does not offer an in-depth academic analysis of the scene and the culture that formed around it.

The first aim of this thesis, therefore, is to fill these gaps and offer a full and comprehensive history of the bebop scene in Soho between 1945 and 1950, insofar as the sources allow, and to demonstrate that the music was pioneered by both black and white artists in transracial bands at the clubs.

Histories of post-war youth subcultures in Britain

There have been several histories of youth subcultures in Britain. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson's *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain* (1975), Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979), and Sarah Thornton's *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (1995) were important foundational texts, followed by David Muggleton's *Inside Subculture: The Postmodern Meaning of Style* (2000), Andy Bennett's *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal and Virtual* (2004), Rupa Huq's *Beyond Subculture: Pop, Youth and Identity in a Postcolonial World* (2006), and, most recently, Peter Webb et al.'s *Hebdige and Subculture in the Twenty-first Century: Through the Subcultural Lens* (2020). All these texts offer academic analysis of the history of British youth subcultures.

The writers of *Resistance through Rituals* founded the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS; along with Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams), and their outstanding work on youth subcultures was pioneering. Specifically concerned with class struggle and primarily focusing on white working-class youths, the approach of the CCCS, mainly via a semiotics framework, positions subcultures as resisting the dominant culture through symbolic style.

Hebdige further developed the CCCS's approach. However, he was not wholly concerned with class, but rather was more interested in style, principally arguing that subcultural youths are bricoleurs. The collective work of the CCCS takes the 1950s as the starting point of post-war youth subcultures in Britain. Beginning with the Teds, they work their way through specific historical moments, including the emergence of mods, skinheads, punks and Rastas, and the social, political and economic contexts in which they materialised.

Sarah Thornton's text represents a shift in technique and perspective away from the CCCS approach. In producing an innovative study of the acid house and rave scenes of the late 1980s and early 1990s, Thornton conducted ethnographic research and drew from the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu. She reads youth subcultures as being marked by 'distinctions' of taste. For example, in assimilating Bourdieu's theory of 'cultural capital' into her story and re-purposing the term as 'subcultural capital', Thornton demonstrated how 'insiders... both distinguish themselves from outsiders and internally differentiate themselves from others', and display 'authenticity through knowledge of, and commitment to, their scene'.⁸ Thornton's analysis also revealed how 'Niche media like the music press construct subcultures as much as they document them. National mass media, such as the tabloids, develop youth movements as much as they distort them.'⁹

Muggleton and Bennett's work, on the other hand, applies a postmodern approach to subcultures, inferring that they are more fragmentary, and that they 'react imaginatively through consumption and identity to construct creative meanings that can be liberating from subordination. Postmodern subcultural theory seeks to move away from models of

⁸ Patrick Williams, 'Youth-Subcultural Studies: Sociological Traditions and Core Concepts,' *Sociology Compass*, 2007, pp. 572–593 (p. 586).

⁹ Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995), p. 117.

social constraint and places greater emphasis on agency in the search for individual meaning in subcultural practice.’¹⁰

None of these histories include 1940s bebop and beboppers in their stories. Not only that, but classic subculture histories *Resistance through Rituals* and *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* both exclude women from their canon. With regard to race, both the CCCS and Thornton posit subcultures along racial lines as mainly white, although Hebdige emphasises the influence of black cultural styles on white youth subcultures, and Thornton acknowledges that subcultures are not strictly delineated along class lines.

The second aim of this thesis, then, is to argue that the bebop scene in Soho, 1945 to 1950, was Britain’s first post-war youth subculture. The thesis also contends that beboppers blurred the boundaries between race, class and gender: it seeks to demonstrate that black men and white women were both an integral part of the bebop scene in post-war Soho.

Hebdige and Thornton’s texts are the most suitable models for the purposes of this research: thus, I draw from their theories and apply the necessary strands to my narrative. In this way, the thesis seeks to hone the ‘classic’ approach to subcultures.

Methodology and approach

The methodology is archival and interdisciplinary. The interdisciplinary approach draws from fields of cultural studies, racial and ethnic studies, music studies, fashion studies, media studies, and subculture studies. The methods consist of extensive historical primary research that I have undertaken at specialist archives including the British Library in London, the National Jazz Archive in Loughton, Essex, the Bishopsgate

¹⁰ Shane Blackman, ‘Youth Subcultural Theory: A Critical Engagement with the Concept, its Origins and Politics from the Chicago School to Postmodernism’, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 8:1, 2005, pp. 1–20 (p. 8).

Institute in London, the Black Cultural Archive in Brixton, London, and the British Newspaper Archive. The majority of the primary sources are historical reports in the music press – many of them hitherto unexplored – and clippings from the popular press. In addition to this, I have gleaned a wide range of oral history accounts from the British Library’s National Sound Archive project, *Oral Histories of Jazz in Britain*, as well as local newspaper articles, interviews, police reports, photographs and extremely rare autobiographies written by eyewitnesses to the bebop scene in post-war Soho.

As newspaper reports comprise a major part of the primary sources utilised in this thesis, it is important to note that they constitute a discourse and are therefore not neutral. They embody their own biases and do so for a multitude of reasons. These biases are reflected through the agendas of the owners, the implied readerships, the limited spaces that writers are allocated within newspapers and the views of the journalists. Furthermore, the experience of reading newspaper articles is not the same for everyone. Social class, race, gender, sexuality and religion can all influence and shape the way in which knowledge is consumed and interpreted. John Richardson has argued that ‘textual meaning is *constructed* through an interaction between producer, text and consumer rather than simply being read off the page by all readers in exactly the same way’.¹¹ This is due to the fact that, as David Machin has noted, ‘people from different cultures will interpret and experience [media products] differently’.¹² The other sources I have utilised – oral histories, police reports, autobiographies and interviews – are likewise not neutral. All of my sources, therefore, will be treated critically.¹³

¹¹ John Richardson, *Analysing Newspapers: An Approach from Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: Red Globe Press, 2007), p. 15.

¹² David Machin and Theo van Leeuwen, *Global Media Discourse: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Routledge, 2007), p. 1.

¹³ See Matthew Partington and Lisa Sandino, *Oral History in the Visual Arts* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), for more information on how oral histories contain their own biases.

An interdisciplinary approach to the material is the most suitable methodology for the purposes of my research. Lisa Lattuca has argued that the ‘exponential growth of knowledge in the twentieth century revealed how disciplinary cultures and perspectives could discourage inquiries and explanations that spanned disciplinary boundaries. Disciplines, it now seems clear, are powerful but constraining ways of knowing.’¹⁴ Interdisciplinarity, therefore, has the power to ‘interrupt disciplinary discourse and to challenge traditional notions of knowledge and scholarship’.¹⁵

The ideas explored in this thesis have been tested at a number of specialist conferences and symposia focusing on the study of subcultures and popular culture. These include the *Interdisciplinary Network for the Study of Subcultures, Popular Music and Social Change*, which took place at the University of Reading, United Kingdom, in 2018 – an event which is also the biggest annual occasion in the field. Following that I attended *The European Popular Culture Conference* held in Limerick, Ireland, in July 2019. In addition to this, the research was tested at *Subcultures and Mediated Representations*, a symposium that I co-organised, held at the University of the Arts London, United Kingdom, in October 2019. We organised this event in order to kickstart a year-long series of events about subcultures in conjunction with Amy de la Haye and the Centre for Fashion Curation (CfFC) at the London College of Fashion, to mark the 25th anniversary of *Streetstyle: From Sidewalk to Catwalk*, a ground-breaking exhibition about subcultures which was staged at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1994.

¹⁴ Lisa Lattuca, *Creating Interdisciplinarity: Interdisciplinary Research and Teaching among College and University Faculty* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2001), p. 2.

¹⁵ Ibid.

The chapters

Chapter one is about place. It sets the scene and contextualises Soho, mapping not only the social, cultural and historical importance of the area prior to the bebop scene, but also the district's spatial significance. Utilising a wide range of primary and secondary sources, the chapter shows how the area evolved into a melting-pot of multinational and transracial peoples during the period from the nineteenth century to 1945.

During the nineteenth century, the redevelopment of London's West End saw the construction of Soho's surrounding commercial thoroughfares – Oxford Street, Regent Street, Charing Cross Road and Shaftesbury Avenue. This renovation project, a symbol of imperial power, sharply contrasted with the square mile's tightly woven web of streets, thus helping to contain the independent spirit and the unique cosmopolitan culture that began to flourish there. People from across the globe gravitated to Soho to let their hair down and indulge in the area's exotic hedonisms. Chapter one, therefore, critically explores how various medias, mediums and material forms imagined Soho as London's cosmopolis and as a carnivalesque place of transgressive cultural pleasures. Bakhtin's notion of the carnival is utilised to emphasise these ideas.

During the interwar years, Soho was also the site of many short-lived jazz clubs. This chapter details the various peoples and types of music of the African diaspora that migrated to Soho and found expression within these spaces, as well as the radical racial politics that arose in them. In the 1930s the area was also awash with 'bottle parties', a term used to describe after-hours drinking dens. The chapter examines archival and historical reports in the newspapers and shows how the latter imagined Soho as a space where dominant social values were upended.

Finally, chapter one shows how during the Second World War, amidst the blackout and the Blitz, African American servicemen gravitated to Soho, adding to the transracial

cosmopolitan melting pot that comprised the area's streets, courtyards and alleyways. Once they landed there, they formed an integral part of the burgeoning swing scene, before the advent of the avant-garde musical form bebop.

Chapter two captures the birth of a scene. It documents and analyses bebop and the point at which the music migrated to Britain at the end of the Second World War, where it landed in Soho. The chapter details the roots, routes and flows of the music as it came into the area from New York, and the small network of people that embraced it, developing the scene locally in the area's gritty basement clubs. These clubs – the Fullado Club (1945/6–1947), the Metropolitan Bopera House (1948), the Feldman Club (1948), Club Eleven (1948–1950) and the Paramount Dance Hall (1947–1950) – and the musicians and fans that created these spaces, are explored in detail.

Perhaps as important, though, is that the chapter demonstrates how bebop – a transatlantic and transnational cultural form – became reshaped locally once it was transferred to Britain and its Soho setting. This, the chapter argues, was due to various musicians from across the continents of Europe, Africa, the Caribbean and the Americas converging to play the music. The chapter argues that bebop in Soho was a transcultural phenomenon, a music of the 'Black Atlantic', characterised by cross-fertilisation and transracial exchange. In so doing, the chapter challenges received cultural narratives that erase the contribution by black musicians from the history of early British bebop by claiming that modern jazz was pioneered, in the beginning, mainly by white musicians. Additionally, the chapter shows that once the music spread beyond the boundaries of Soho, due to the transracial exchange and cultural symbolism evoked by beboppers, the music was banned in suburban dance halls and by the BBC.

Chapter three analyses the men's and women's fashion that signalled the beboppers' identity in the post-war moment, distinguishing them from trad jazz fans and wider

society in general. Although the New York pioneers were associated with a fashion specific to bebop, across the Atlantic in London the style was articulated differently.¹⁶ This look, the first in post-war Britain to be affiliated with a specific type of music, was also the first in post-war Britain to be cobbled together into a coherent semiotic style and thereby to communicate resistance. Moreover, this look was influenced by a number of images embedded in popular culture.¹⁷

In terms of the men's style, many of these images were fashioned bodies drawn from the iconography of American gangster films, transmitted in cinemas in London's West End. Some were inspired by movies and musicals depicting black American jazz. Others had their roots in post-war spiv culture – a group of black-market hustlers around Soho during and after the war who were often represented in the popular press as a threat to national identity. The chapter shows how the male beboppers took strands from all of these seemingly disparate styles and fused them together to create their own unique aesthetic. In this regard, the work of Hebdige is important for an analysis of semiotic style, as is that of Thornton for demonstrating that the media documents, transmits and distorts subcultures, thereby helping to develop them. Additionally, the chapter grounds the primary research in fashion theory – especially the work of Crane, Entwistle, Simmel, Kuchta, Breward and Barnard – in order to demonstrate that this style reversed the way in which fashion was historically diffused: rather than flowing from the top of society downwards, the bebop look 'bubbled up' from the ground.

¹⁶ Much evidence exists showing Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk and the other legends of bebop wearing dark glasses, berets and goatee beards. No photographic evidence exists showing the London beboppers wearing hats of this type, or beards. Therefore, this suggests that the English visual style that signalled the beboppers' identity in post-war London was markedly different to that of their New York counterparts.

¹⁷ The images that influenced the bebop look were diverse and derived from cinema: gangster films, both American and British, and mainly American musicals depicting black jazz culture.

In terms of the female beboppers, the chapter shows how their style, a type of sleek black modern chic inspired by Dior's New Look, and also involving black drainpipe jeans, monochrome sweaters and dark sunglasses, distinguished them from female trad jazz fans and provided them with a sense of agency and independence.

Chapter four continues with the themes of female agency, cultural hybridity and improvisation, developing these notions further, but the chapter is also about fear. Between 1947 and 1950, the Fullado Club (1947), Club Eleven (1950) and the Paramount Dance Hall (1950) were raided by police. The former two clubs were closed down permanently, and the latter, when it reopened, banned bebop from being played live. The chapter presents hitherto unexplored archival reports from the music press, police reports and oral history accounts of the raids by eyewitnesses, shedding light on the cultural processes shaping the clubs on the nights in question.

While on the surface the clubs were raided due to the perceived threat of drug dealing and drug use, the chapter explores the underlying fears concerning not only the social make-up of the clubs but also the dancing within these spaces. The chapter demonstrates that these fears were racialised, gendered and rooted in the imperial power structure, and thus projected by the media. Not only the transracial cross-gender fraternising, but bebop music itself and the fashioned bodies that constituted the scene posed a threat to British social values and the image of a national identity. The work of Cohen, Hall and Ben-Yehuda is utilised to critically interpret the structural implications of the police raids on the clubs.

Chapter five assesses the social, cultural and historical impact of the raids on the Soho bebop clubs at the beginning of the 1950s, exploring a number of ideas. Contextualising the social and political transformations during that decade, the chapter maps the changes in popular culture more generally and shows how Soho was the

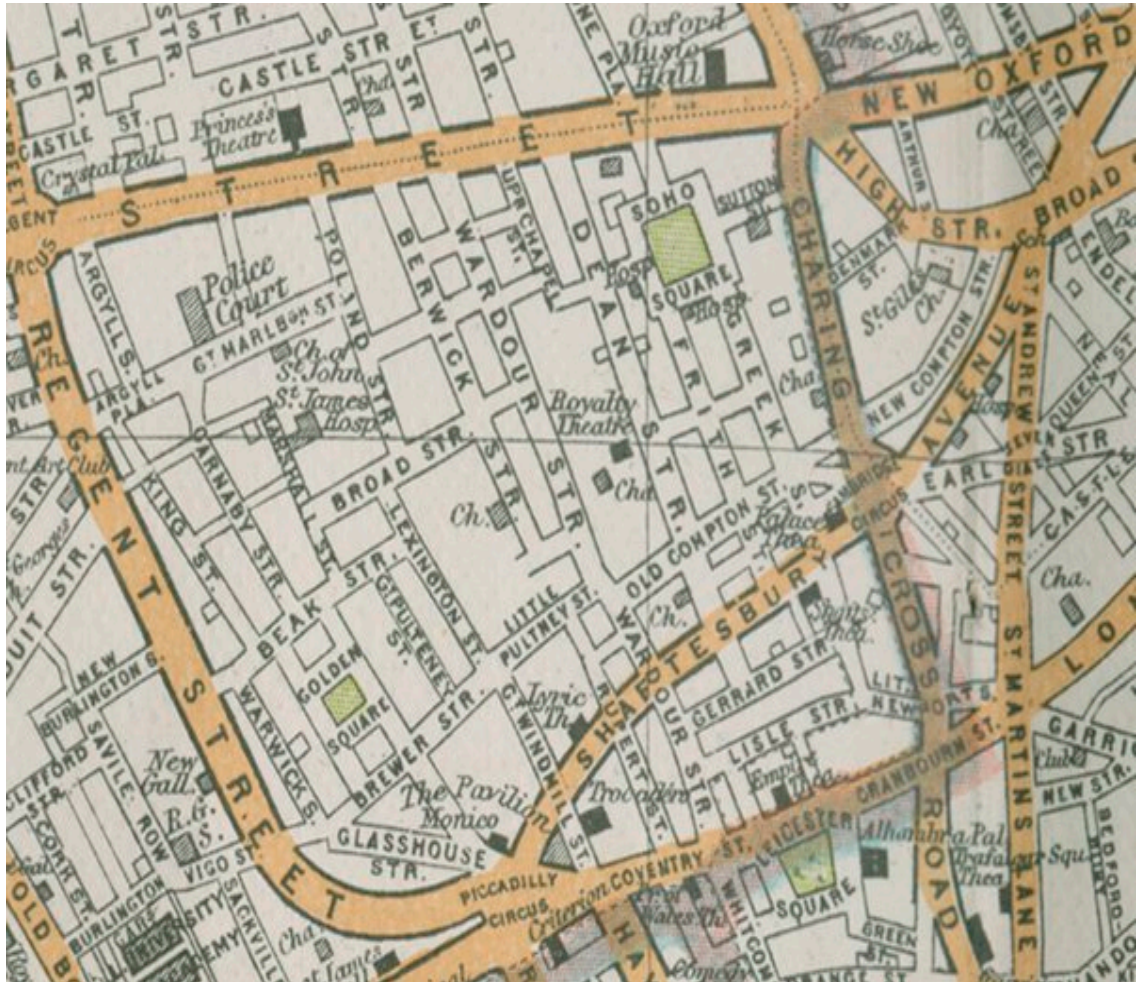
epicentre of the teenage revolution. Skiffle, rock 'n' roll, and trad jazz, for instance, were all burgeoning scenes in Britain during that decade, but nowhere were they more conspicuous than in the coffee shops and clubs of Soho.

In exploring these various cultural forms in relation to bebop, the chapter critically examines the modern jazz scene's continuous role within the popular culture landscape of the area in the 1950s, and explores the influence of beboppers on the Teds and the mods' subcultures. In addition to this, in critically examining bebop in Soho at the dawn of the new decade, the chapter looks at the live scene, record labels, and the rise of Tin Pan Alley during the 1950s and early 1960s.

Having explored the hidden history of the bebop scene in post-war Soho through this wide range of sources, many of which have not previously been researched, chapter six asks the question, is this a subculture? In this way, the PhD is brought to a natural conclusion.

Chapter One

Contextualising Soho, 1800–1945



*Map of Soho by John Bartholomew, published circa 1895.
Source: the Newbury Library, Chicago*

Introduction

Soho is a neighbourhood situated in the centre of London, renowned for its pulsing nightlife. The city's cultural heartbeat, the district has historically been home to a myriad clubs and niteries, many of which were underground spaces located within the tightly woven web of streets threaded throughout the area. In terms of Soho's social geography, immigrants from across the globe, artists, musicians, aristocrats, bohemians, criminals, drug addicts, dealers, prostitutes and political activists have all shared a collective space within the community, socially and culturally intersecting with club owners, restaurateurs, waiters and waitresses, street traders, and tailors, dating back to the seventeenth century.

Through a synthesis of archival and historical primary sources drawn from local and national newspapers, oral histories, social and cultural histories, and academic journal articles, this chapter will first demonstrate how Soho came to be known as London's cosmopolitan centre, and how the mixture of multinational and multiracial people shared the social, economic and cultural spaces of the area. Next, the chapter explores how Soho's unique culture was contained by its physical and geographical boundaries, and how the area's commercial and modernised outer borders helped to construct Soho's uniqueness. Following that, the chapter demonstrates how Soho can be seen as a *carnavalesque space*: a space where, in Bakhtin's terms, transgressive behaviour upends the dominant social order. Finally, I paint a picture of Soho during the Second World War and the popular music – swing and Dixieland jazz – that permeated musical tastes before the advent of bebop in late 1945 and early 1946.

Soho: London's cosmopolis



*Berwick Street, Soho, in 1927.
Source: glitteringartofsoho.com*

There is a large degree of historical continuity from the seventeenth century until the present day in terms of Soho's physical form and shape. This is noted by cultural historian Judith Walkowitz who claims that: 'Soho's street patterns would persist into the twenty-first century, but Soho's geographic and social identity has always been more mobile, fluid, and contested than ... mappings of Soho would suggest'.¹ During the seventeenth century St Anne Soho was one of the wealthier parishes in London due to the members of the aristocracy that lived in the area.² However, when 'the cholera epidemics... afflicted London, between 1831 and 1866' many of the landed classes vacated the district.³

¹ Walkowitz, p. 18.

² Peter Atkins, 'The Spatial Configuration of Class Solidarity in London's West End, 1729–1939', *Urban History*, 17, 1990, pp. 35–36 (p. 35).

³ Stephen Halliday, 'Death and Miasma in Victorian London: An Obstinate Belief', *BMJ*, 323:7327, 2001, pp. 1469–471 (p. 1469).

Soho's boundaries have, in fact, transmuted throughout history, owing to roadways, the development of business, and the ways in which governmental and philanthropic institutions have overlapped and changed. The area's formal borders, according to Walkowitz, 'also shifted in reaction to changing social usages and informal annexations of contiguous spaces by Sohoites'.⁴ According to Walkowitz, during the decades preceding the twentieth century, a space was opened up and dedicated to multicultural consumption, constructed along the street developments of Regent Street, Shaftesbury Avenue, Charing Cross Road, and the older vicinities of Oxford Street and Leicester Square. These thoroughfares not only helped to produce Soho's modern identity, they also created a space for commercial and industrial development: 'Nineteenth-century thoroughfares ripped through the central rookeries of Old London', says Walkowitz, 'displacing thousands of residents from the noisome slums that resisted police supervision. Simultaneously, they transported new social actors into the district, including legions of service and theatrical workers who assisted and entertained suburbanites and tourists descending on the West End to visit the shops and the shows.'⁵

In terms of the area's social milieu, Soho encompassed a wide range of cultural identities from Europe and beyond, blurring the lines between race, gender, class and ethnicity. Historian Jerry White points out that Soho continued to be the main cosmopolitan locality of central London at the end of the nineteenth century. Initially including a large French population, White says that by the 1890s the 'French hold was beginning to slip... [they] were not even the largest minority in Soho in the late 1890s – there were 900 French to over 1,000 Germans... with recent influxes of Jews (about

⁴ Walkowitz, p. 18.

⁵ Ibid.

700), Italians (650) and Swiss (260). Even Swedes, Norwegians and Danes had begun to make their presence felt in the Soho tailoring and shoemaking workshops'.⁶ In addition to this, as Paul Willetts has pointed out, by the 1940s Greek communities were also an integral part of the cosmopolitan demographic that populated Soho and owned businesses in the area.⁷ Poet Oliver Bernard, for example, recalled 'Sitting in Tony's, a Greek Cypriot café in Charlotte Street'.⁸ This was an area which was, in the early part of the twentieth century, known as 'North Soho' by its inhabitants.⁹

Contemporary newspaper reports also depicted 'Cyprians' in Soho, in some cases demonising them in representations that cast them as an overwhelming mob of deviants. In January 1931, for example, *The Illustrated Police News* wrote about a confrontation between Cypriots and the police in Carlisle Street. The article reported that a mass of people were involved in the altercation on the night of 14 December. According to Detective Baker, 'there was a crowd of about 100 Cyprians outside a café in Carlisle Street' on the night in question, painting a threatening picture of Soho's Greek community.¹⁰

Local and national newspaper reports in which Soho is presented as a cosmopolitan melting-pot of violence are numerous. In April 1926, a story was published with the headlines '*Shot in a Club – Tragedy of Soho*', stating that 'Soho was thrown into a state of emergency last night by the discovery of a tragedy in one of the many cosmopolitan clubs in that neighbourhood'.¹¹ Police were called 'between six and seven o' clock [to the] basement premises of 24, Frith Street', where a man had been shot in the neck. The

⁶ Jerry White, *London in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Vintage, 2008), p. 144.

⁷ Paul Willetts, *North Soho 999: A True Story of Gangs and Gun Crime in 1940s London* (Stockport: Dewi Lewis Publishing, 2007), p. 11.

⁸ Oliver Bernard, *Getting Over It* (London: Peter Owen Publishers, 1992), p. 82.

⁹ Willetts, p. 11.

¹⁰ 'Cyprians and Police in Clash – Continual Warfare in Soho', *Illustrated Police News*, 8 January 1931.

¹¹ 'Shot in a Club – The tragedy of Soho: Man Detained at Newhaven', *Lancashire Evening Post*, 6 April 1926, p. 4.

newspaper reported that ‘the basement [was a] club frequented largely by Frenchmen and Italians’ portraying an image of Soho as a lawless area inhabited by ‘foreign’ criminals.¹²



*Berwick Street Market, Soho, November 1933.
Source: Fox Photos/Getty Images*

Other forces combined to fix Soho in the popular imagination not only as London’s cosmopolitan centre, but also as the city’s nexus between the demi-monde and risqué cultures. Walkowitz has noted that in the period between late Victorian and early Edwardian London, at the dawn of the twentieth century, a combination of literatures such as social surveys, fiction and popular journalism imagined Soho as a contagious space where crime on an international level, dissident politics and forbidden sex could all be found. Walkowitz suggests that these literatures mapped Soho’s new position as an appealing centre stage for

bodily pleasures, appetites, and modern technologies of the self. A new genre of Victorian local history was especially crucial to Soho’s enhanced cachet. Soho reformers and ethnic entrepreneurs exploited books on Soho and its historical associations to advance contemporary Soho’s reputation as the repository of

¹² Ibid.

memories of old London and as a benign site of sophisticated, cosmopolitan pleasures.¹³

During the First World War the local press depicted Soho as an alien locality of exotic culinary and sartorial consumerism, perhaps reflecting the heightened xenophobic attitudes of the time. The *Ealing Gazette and West Middlesex Observer*, for example, proclaimed, in April 1917 that

Soho is the market of continental London, hence it comes about that shops and stalls here display many things in the way of edibles which are unfamiliar to the average English housewife, she would do well to become acquainted in these times of enforced economy... the Frugal Frenchwoman prepares epicurean dishes that seem without the scope of our English saucepan... Of late the Hebrew vendor of milliner and wearing apparel has found his way into Walker's Court, where a decade ago nought but English traders cried their wares.¹⁴

As far back as the late nineteenth century, a number of poor black and Irish people added to the mixture of multinational identities, rendering the district that comprised Soho and its surrounding streets a transracial melting-pot. These social clusters congregated at the edges and on the peripheries of Soho, seemingly a symbolic reflection of their banished social status. Jerry White has noted that a proportion of these men drifted into London from the docks, including 'men crippled in accidents at sea [and] others who reckoned they could sell a skill or grift... on London's golden pavements. They lived beyond the margins of wage labour at the hand-to-mouth end of economic independence. The cluster of black beggars who shared the Holy Land with the Irish went by the title of "St Giles Black-Birds".¹⁵ While 'black beggars declined in numbers as policing grew more effective after 1829... black men were still to be found on London's streets as musicians and tract sellers'.¹⁶

¹³ Walkowitz, p. 18.

¹⁴ 'The Street Markets of London – No 2 – Soho', *Ealing Gazette and West Middlesex Observer*, 7 April 1917, p. 7.

¹⁵ White, *London in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 144.

¹⁶ Ibid.

In his classic study of poverty, *The Life and Labour of the People in London* (1901), Charles Booth demonstrated that the St Giles area was not only poverty-stricken but also displayed a chronic ‘amount of crowding’.¹⁷ This area, which blurred the boundaries of Soho due to what Walkowitz calls, as previously noted, changing social usages and informal annexations of contiguous spaces by Sohoites, was home to one of the most important clubs that this thesis is concerned with, the Fullado Club (1946–1947). The Fullado Club, its cultural production, and the creative and social actors involved in its history are explored in the subsequent chapters of this thesis.

In addition to the literary fiction and social surveys that popularised Soho as a space of transgression and cosmopolitan otherness, during the 1920s and 1930s films that dramatized and romanticised crime and deviance in Soho nightclubs flourished. These cinematic representations were further enhanced by the popular press, both the local and national newspapers, who disseminated images of Soho as a space of danger and excitement across the depth and breadth of Britain. ‘Vine Street Police Station’, announced the *Londonderry Sentinel*, for example, ‘has been the scene of much of the recent camera work on “Murder in Soho”, the current associated picture. Here Martin Walker, as a police detective, has been interrogating various patrons and employers of the Soho night club, which has been the scene of a gangster killing.’¹⁸ However, the ‘gangster proprietor of [the] Soho club’ was represented as ‘Kind and big-hearted’.¹⁹

Having looked briefly at historical representations of Soho’s cosmopolitan social identity and the ways in which it was imagined, it is now important to demonstrate how the area came to be defined by its unique culture, entertainment and spatial topography,

¹⁷ Charles Booth, *The Life and Labour of the People in London* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1902), p. 11.

¹⁸ ‘Vine Street for “Murder in Soho”’, *Londonderry Sentinel*, 12 November 1938, p. 10.

¹⁹ ‘Jack La Rue For “Murder in Soho”’, *Derry Journal*, 10 October 1938, p. 6.

in contrast to forms of standardised mass consumerism and the development of the surrounding grand imperial thoroughfares.

A short comparison of Soho with its surrounding imperial thoroughfares



*Regent Street Quadrant, Westminster, London, late nineteenth century.
Source: Museum of London/Heritage Images/Getty Images*

During the nineteenth-century redevelopment of London's West End, Soho's built environment was, according to Frank Mort, largely untouched. Compared to the regeneration and mass cultural consumption that engulfed the neighbourhood's outer boundaries, Soho maintained an independent spirit. Government buildings were non-existent in Soho. There were hardly any official attractions; the few that the area did contain, such as the statue of Charles II in Soho Square, commemorated Soho's pre-Victorian past. In terms of the area's cultural consumption, Mort notes, 'Soho's vaudeville shows and nightclubs were internationally renowned, but they were intimate and small scale. They were generally owned or supervised by individual entrepreneurs and impresarios, who often had a strong economic or cultural stake in the area, rather

than by managers of London's corporate entertainment culture', demonstrating the district's uniqueness when compared with its surrounding boundaries.²⁰

The outer borders of Soho – Oxford Street, Charing Cross Road, Regent Street and Shaftesbury Avenue – aided the narrative of modern Soho because they helped to define the area's distinct culture. Soho's spatial geography, for instance, consisted of older narrow streets, squares, courts and alleys, in stark contrast to Oxford Street's modern layout. Not only that, but a significant number of Soho's shops were artisanal outlets and small family-run businesses, unlike the large department stores that had begun to line Oxford Street at the end of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century.²¹

During the twentieth century, although it was accessible by taxi, car and van, London's bus routes avoided Soho, although they ran along the surrounding thoroughfares. Nor were there any tube stations, 'except at its outer edges. This sense of Soho as culturally amenable to the pedestrian rhetorics of strolling, spectating and loitering was seen as a significant asset for widely different groups of users.'²² Among the social categories that strategically manipulated Soho's unique spatial configuration to suit their economic endeavours were a proportion of the bebop clubbers in post-war Soho. This group is detailed in chapter three, where I explore the role and representation of the spivs in the Soho bebop clubs.

The grand outer-thoroughfares that bounded Soho – cultural, political and physical signifiers of hegemonic corporate power and imperial authority – as opposed to Soho's tightly-knit streets and spaces that embodied a unique and independent spirit, heralded the type of standardised mass consumption that was not found inside Soho. As Mort notes, 'mass leisure, shopping, tourism... business culture... styles of feminine

²⁰ Frank Mort, *Capital Affairs: London and the Making of the Permissive Society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), p.146.

²¹ Ibid.

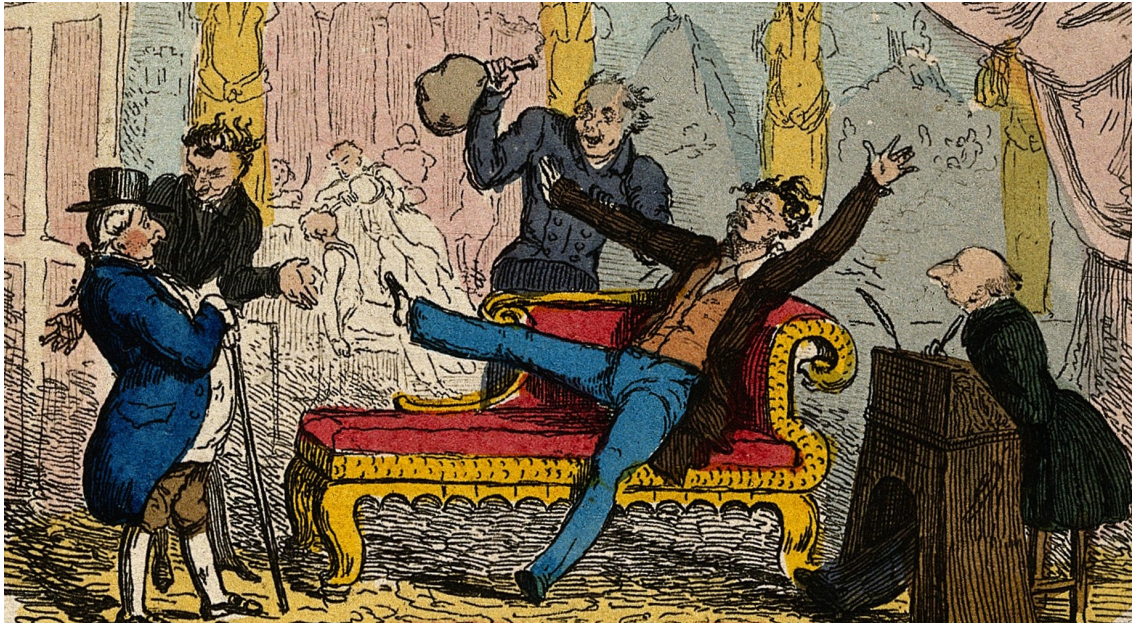
²² Ibid.

consumerism, mass heterosexual nightlife and the masculine cultures of corporate business' were reserved for Soho's outer borders, or at least 'differently inflected within its extreme localised spaces'.²³ The absence of these modern urban features marked Soho as a neighbourhood that was entirely unique, and an area which became renowned for its alternative culture and which was completely separate from conventional life in London.

These features contributed to how Soho became constructed and represented historically as a Rabelaisian playground: a carnivalesque space of transgressive cultural pleasures where different races, classes, genders and sexualities coexisted and turned the dominant cultural world upside-down.

²³ Ibid.

The mythologization of Soho as a carnivalesque place



The Laughing Gas Parties of the 1700s

Source, abc.net.au

Political theorist Andrew Robinson describes how Mikhail Bakhtin, in *Rabelais and his World* (1965), posits the notion of the carnivalesque. He states that:

A carnival is a moment when everything (except arguably violence) is permitted. It occurs on the border between art and life, and is a kind of life shaped according to a pattern of play. It is usually marked by displays of excess and grotesqueness, it is a type of performance, but this performance is communal, with no boundary between performers and audience. It creates a situation in which diverse voices are heard and interact, breaking down conventions and enabling genuine dialogue. It creates the chance for a new perspective and a new order of things, by showing the relative nature of all that exists.²⁴

There a number of ways in which Bakhtin's theory could relate to Soho; indeed, it could be said to be the ultimate place where the notion of *carnival* existed historically (and, arguably, today). As demonstrated throughout this chapter, Soho's cultural spaces have been mythologised as places of excess and transgression, but also spaces where varieties

²⁴ Andrew Robinson, 'Bakhtin: Carnival against Capital, Carnival against Power', *Ceasefire*, 9 September 2011, p. 1.

of race, gender, class and sexuality intersected, sharing common ground and a sense of egalitarianism.

To give another example of the way in which this collective experience within clubs in Soho has been historically depicted, Thomas Burke recorded his observations of a Soho club in 1919 as follows: ‘in a grey street off Tottenham Court Road we found a poor man’s cabaret... Two schonk boys [Jews], in straw hats, were at a piano, assisted by an anaemic girl and a real coal-black coon, who gave us the essential rag-times of the South. The place was packed with the finest collection of cosmopolitan toughs I had ever seen in one room.’²⁵ Although Burke alludes to the cultural expression within this space as artistically inferior to mainstream and elitist interpretations of art (‘poor man’s cabaret’), it can be seen in his portrayal that, as in Robinson’s depiction of the carnivalesque, ‘there is no boundary between performers and audience... diverse audiences can be heard’.²⁶ In Burke’s portrayal of the jazz club, the contours of race, gender and class are blurred and performers and audience share a collective space. Similar to what Robinson describes with regard to carnival, ‘rank... is abolished and everyone is equal’.²⁷ This would suggest that, to use Bakhtin’s terms, the social order is upended; in other words, dominant social and cultural values are turned upside-down.

The notion of Soho as a place of carnival, a utopian place of equality, has been represented in other historical literature. For example, in Joseph Conrad’s classic novel *The Secret Agent* (1907), Conrad’s narrator presents an image of one of his upper-class female protagonists venturing into Soho:

The change from the Belgravian square to the narrow street in Soho affected her legs adversely. They became an enormous size. On the other hand, she experienced a complete relief from material cares.²⁸

²⁵ Jerry White, *Zeppelin Nights: London in the First World War* (London: Vintage, 2014), P. 162.

²⁶ Robinson, p. 1.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 6.

Throughout recent history, Soho has been depicted as a place that imposes a sense of equality and has the power to transcend social hierarchies. The quoted passage exemplifies this notion through the tensions that the female character feels internally and physically. On the one hand, the transition from the grand, wide-open spaces of Belgravia to the poky alleyways of Soho seems to metaphorically affect her legs – she is too big for this place, or, in other words, her social position is above the myriad cosmopolitan working classes and underclasses that populate Soho’s cramped streets. On the other, she feels a sense of nonchalance towards her hierarchical position in society. Her internal and emotional world has been turned upside-down, simply through her experience of entering Soho’s boundaries.

Plays about Soho also helped popularise the area as a Rabelaisian space. In 1931, a play entitled ‘Greek Street’ was

the special attraction at the Shepherd’s Bush Pavilion... Greek Street, as most of us know, is one of the streets in Soho where nightclubs have their homes. The story tells the adventures of a cabaret singer, her struggles to become famous, and her ultimate realisation that success does not necessarily bring happiness. She eventually returns to the little Soho café to love and happiness.²⁹

This theatrical dramatization of Soho typifies the idea of the Rabelaisian playground that the area has historically symbolised. This is exemplified not through the transgressive, grotesque or misbehaving aspects of the carnivalesque, but is rooted in the idea that the central protagonist in the play feels happier when detached from the social and economic order of mainstream society, and when she is back in her Soho community, where ‘rank is abolished and everyone is equal’.³⁰

Portrayals of Soho as an embodiment of the carnivalesque, where, on the other hand, ‘unacceptable behaviour is welcomed and accepted... and one’s natural behaviour can

²⁹ ‘Shepherd’s Bush Pavilion’, *West London Observer*, 23 January 1931, p. 4.

³⁰ Robinson, *Bakhtin: Carnival against Capital, Carnival against Power*, p. 1.

be revealed without the consequences', can be seen in newspaper reports from the 1930s. Under the banner headline 'Club Catered for Soho Scum', the *Daily Mirror* ran a story regarding a club that received a visit from the police. Describing the social make-up of the club and the cultural expression inside the space, the newspaper claimed that 'among those present were women in male attire, effeminate men and coloured people. The most disgusting and obscene behaviour took place there. This was said at Bow-street, London, yesterday [by the prosecutor] concerning the Frivolity Club in Rupert Street'.³¹ The secretary of the club

was fined a total of £175 and ordered to pay twenty-five guineas costs for keeping premises for public dancing and as a refreshment house and selling tobacco, in each case without a license. Inspector Gavin said that about 150 people were dancing in a basement room. "The club caters for the scum of Soho," he said... [and] was struck off the register.³²

This article epitomises the way in which the carnivalesque has been represented historically in the media. In this instance, social roles and norms are said to have been upended within the club, and everyone, despite their race, class, gender or sexuality, is equal. The name of the club – the Frivolity Club – also reflects the carnivalesque. Frivolity is a synonym for playfulness, unimportance and triviality. The club's members are thus conceptualised as unconcerned with the social conditions of mainstream society, and thereby able to be themselves without fear of repercussions or judgement.

³¹ 'Club Catered for "Soho Scum"', *Daily Mirror*, 13 June 1939, p. 29.

³² Ibid.

Entertainment, nightlife and jazz in Soho during the interwar years



Murrays Club, Soho, London circa 1920s, photo by Historica Graphica Collection.

Source: Getty

In the first half of the twentieth century, Soho remained ‘the home of important wholesale business houses, the land of cosmopolitan restaurants, and part of London’s theatre centre’, but the area was also where ‘the headquarters of the film industry’ was based.³³ Historically, ‘the focus of the film industry [was in] Wardour Street. It was really in the 1920s that Wardour Street was redeveloped with investment from US... [with] companies seeking to secure a foothold in the UK.’³⁴ Besides the corporate organisations, independent film companies were, and are still, a major function of Soho’s local economy.

The music industry was also historically concentrated in Soho, attracting musical pioneers to the area. This was true as far back as the eighteenth century, when Wolfgang

³³ ‘Fewer but Newer Homes for Soho in Future Plan’, *West London News*, 7 January 1948, p. 3.

³⁴ Andy Pratt, ‘The Governance of Innovation in the Film and Television Industry: A case Study of London, U.K.’, in A. C. Pratt and P. Jeffcut (eds), *Creativity, Innovation and Cultural Economy* (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 119–136 (p. 134).

Amadeus Mozart lived at 21 Frith Street. During his time in Soho, ‘Mozart, then aged nine, composed his first symphony – the “London”’.³⁵ Other ‘distinguished musical visitors to Soho have included Haydn, Wagner and Johann Straus’.³⁶

Throughout the nineteenth century, the area was home to a number of printers and sheet music publishers. These included A. S. Mallett, Allen and Co[.] of Wardour Street.³⁷ A cluster of music publishers was huddled together in Soho Square. Amongst those were D’Almaine & Co., who sold ‘New and Important Musical Works’ from their premises at No. 20,³⁸ and G. Walker & Son, publishers and retailers of classical music, based at No. 17.³⁹ Music publishers continued to be based in Soho throughout the twentieth century, with many record labels and the nascent music press making their homes there, points that will be explored further on.

In terms of independent culture and nightlife, in the early part of the twentieth century Soho became the focal point of forbidden entertainment. Walkowitz has noted that just before World War One, a cluster of bohemian dance clubs sprouted up in the area. These clubs were located in poky basements and tiny attics that were accessible by steep, rickety staircases. Walkowitz claims that these often-transgressive spaces were a by-product of the

renaissance of theatrical and social dancing [and] prided themselves on their un-English atmosphere. They were places to go after the theatre and the closing time at the Café Royal. These prewar nightclubs mobilized the elite privileges of private membership clubs – organised by committee, protected by burly commissionaires, unmolested by the police – to mount a rebellion against Victorian respectability.⁴⁰

The repressive social and political conditions that were imposed during the war caused Soho’s illegal after-hours economy to rapidly flourish. The 1915 Defence of the

³⁵ Richard Tames, *Soho Past* (London: Historical Publications, 1994), p. 99.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ ‘Partnerships Dissolved’, *London Evening Standard*, 2 June 1888, p. 8.

³⁸ ‘New and Important Musical Works’, *Taunton Courier, and Western Advertiser*, 14 April 1841, p. 2.

³⁹ ‘New and Classical Music’, *Newcastle Guardian and Tyne Mercury*, 7 March 1846, p. 8.

⁴⁰ Walkowitz, pp. 214–215.

Realm Act (DORA) restricted public sociability and outlawed the sale of alcohol after 9 p.m., driving late-night drinking and dancing underground. This led to a surge of unregistered nightclubs that were set up in dingy Soho basements. Wartime Soho became the epicentre for gambling, drugs, illegal drinking dens and transgressive erotic encounters that cut across social class.⁴¹ Jerry White has noted how prostitutes, ‘harassed by stringent policing of the blacked-out streets, found refuge in the clubs’, and that ‘Soho’s reputation as London’s racy cosmopolis only intensified as French, Belgian, and Serbian soldiers headed for it as their leisure centre, as did American, Canadian, and African troops’.⁴²

That African troops formed a part of the transnational mix of soldiers that created a cultural space of leisure in Soho during World War One and the interwar years is a significant historical detail. Much has been written about the bohemian set that frequented Soho’s clubs during the 1920s; writers Jean Rhys, Ezra Pound and Virginia Woolf formed a part of the modernist art movement and were regulars at iconic clubs such as the Mandrake, the Cabaret Club and, perhaps most famously, the Gargoyle, opened by David Tennant, who is said to have ‘lived among distinguished connections’.⁴³ These literary figures and the clubs they attended have been well documented within the received cultural narratives about bohemian Soho, but the African diaspora’s contribution to the area’s social, political and cultural innovation has largely been ignored. One of the venues that the pioneers of British bebop hired, Club Eleven (1948–1950), explored in subsequent chapters, was the site of black political subversion during the 1930s. Situated at 50 Carnaby Street, the venue had strong affiliations with black colonial radicals and jazz music at least fifteen years before a

⁴¹ Walkowitz, p. 216.

⁴² Jerry White, *London in the Twentieth Century* (London: Vintage, 2008), p. 160.

⁴³ ‘New Night Club’, *Dundee Courier*, 16 January 1925, p. 10.

cohort of post-war musicians pioneered the modern jazz scene at that venue (amongst others).

During the 1930s, 50 Carnaby Street was home to the Florence Mills Social Parlour. Although the club was named after African American entertainer Florence Mills, who in the previous decade was ‘one of the most popular performers of the period, taking a lead in African American Vaudeville productions, and admired by working class and elite black and white audiences’, the club was actually opened by Marcus Garvey’s former wife, the intellectual and activist Amy Ashwood Garvey.⁴⁴ Ashwood ‘quickly became a major figure in London’s black anticolonial circles, and to many, her business provided a welcome respite from a damp, strange country,’ also offering her clientele a sense of community in a foreign city.⁴⁵

Amongst the Florence Mills Social Parlour’s renowned members were Trinidadian intellectual and writer C. L. R. James, who recalled that the club was ‘very important to me’; political activist Jomo Kenyatta, who later led the Mau Mau revolution in Kenya and who would become the president of that country at independence in 1961; Trinidadian journalist George Padmore; and Guyanese pan-Africanist T. Ras Makonnen.⁴⁶ At the club, described by Ashwood Garvey’s friend and earliest biographer, Lionel Yard, as a ‘club with bamboo decorations, creole food, and the

⁴⁴ Caroline Bressey and Gemma Romain, ‘Staging Race: Florence Mills, Celebrity, Identity and Performance in 1920s Britain’, *Women’s History Review*, 28:3, 2018, pp. 380–395 (p. 380); Davarian L. Baldwin and Minkah Makalani, *Escape from New York: The New Negro Renaissance beyond Harlem* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), p. 214.

⁴⁵ Baldwin and Makalani, p. 214.

⁴⁶ Marc Matera, *Black London: The Imperial Metropolis and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), p. 146. It is well documented that James, Padmore, Makonnen and Kenyatta, amongst others, frequented the Florence Mills Social Parlour. See John C. Walter, ‘Tony Martin, Amy Ashwood Garvey’, *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History*, 32:2, 2008, Gale Academic Onefile, accessed July 3, 2020, pp. 89+.; Davarian, Baldwin and Makalani, *Escape from New York*, (Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 2013), chapter three.

haunting melody of American jazz,' these historical figures exchanged radical ideas which would help shape black politics not only in Britain but also globally.⁴⁷

Jazz and the Musicians' Union

British jazz scholar Katherine Williams has explained how the 'First live jazz performances by American musicians in the UK took place in 1919. The all-white Original Dixieland Jazz Band (ODJB) and the all-black Southern Syncopated Orchestra (SSO) presented different styles of jazz in venues with differing cultural connotations to audiences with differing expectations.'⁴⁸

The ODJB, a five-piece consisting of white American musicians Nick LaRocca (cornet), Eddie Edwards (trombone), Henry Raga (piano), Larry Shields (clarinet) and Tony Sbarbaro (drums), made their transatlantic voyage to Britain on board the *Adriatic*, disembarking in Liverpool on 1 April 1919. On arrival, they continued their journey by train to London to perform their first show at the Hippodrome, Leicester Square, where they began their London season.⁴⁹ The band were deliberately fitted to the music-hall and variety-show formats, and following their one-off performance at the Hippodrome they continued their London shows at the Palladium and thereafter the Dixie Club on Bond Street. The Palladium hosted a non-dancing audience, but the band were accompanied on stage by a dancer. The Dixie Club, on the other hand, allowed its members the space and freedom to dance. Williams outlines how 'By performing first in a venue associated with variety shows, and then moving to a venue that had the

⁴⁷ Matera, p. 146.

⁴⁸ Williams, 'Post-World War II Jazz in Britain', p. 117.

⁴⁹ Jim Godbolt, *Jazz in Britain, 1919–1950* (London: Grafton Books, 1984), p. 7; Williams, 'Post-World War II Jazz in Britain', p. 117

physical characteristics to contain a dancing audience, the ODJB's reception in the UK rested upon the venues in which they were heard'.⁵⁰



*The Original Dixieland Jazz Band, date and photographer unknown
Source: David Norris, The Irish Times, July 8, 2017*

The SSO, on the other hand, arrived in Britain in June 1919. According to historian Howard Rye, the band travelled to London in three separate parties on three different dates. The first party arrived in Liverpool on 12 June from Philadelphia on American lines SS *Northland*; the second disembarked in Liverpool on 29 June from New York onboard Cunard's SS *Carmania*; and the third party arrived in Liverpool from New York on White Star's SS *Lapland*. The band, which consisted of up to 100 musicians, subsequently made their way to London to perform their first show at the Philharmonic Hall on 4 July, where they were scheduled to take the stage at 8.30 p.m.⁵¹

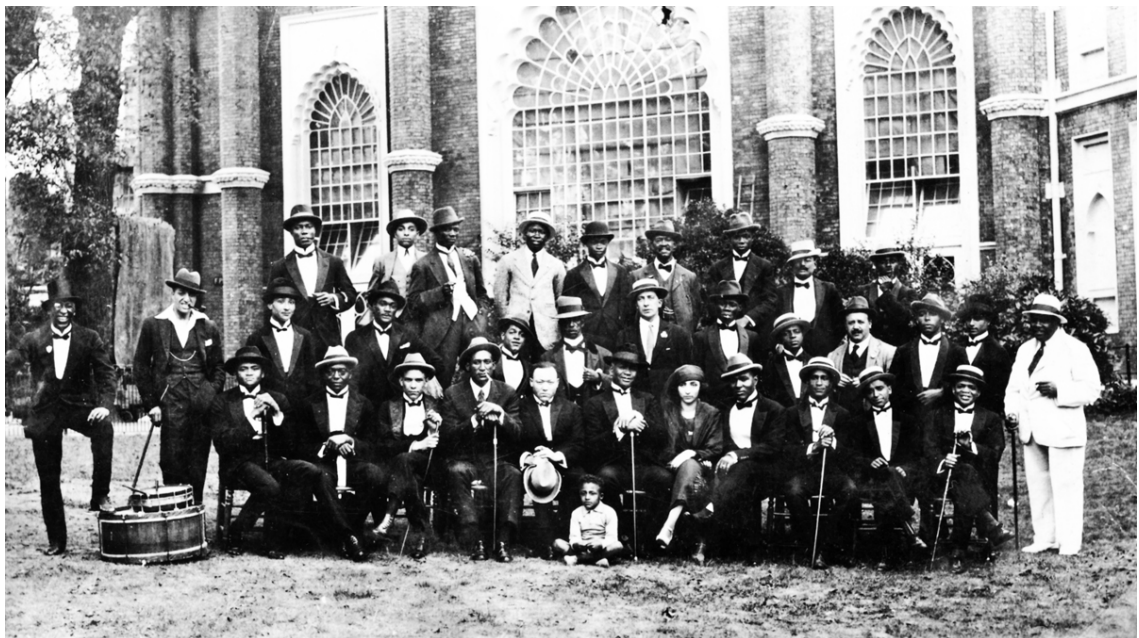
The *Pall Mall Gazette* described the outfit as a band that play 'Southern Folk Songs'.⁵² This was perhaps based on the fact that the SSO did not merely utilise only

⁵⁰ Williams, 'Post-World War II Jazz in Britain', p. 117.

⁵¹ Howard Rye, 'Chronology of the Southern Syncopated Orchestra: 1919–1922', *Black Music Research Journal*, 30:1, 2010, pp. 5–17

⁵² *Pall Mall Gazette*, 3 July 1919, p. 8.

standard jazz instruments nor solely play jazz music; they also made use of orchestral percussion and incorporated strings into their performances, and frequently integrated ragtime and light classical repertoire into their programmes. Following their opening show at the Philharmonic Hall, the band played at Free Concert, People's Palace, Mile End, in East London on 3 August, and thereafter they performed at a dance at the Albert Rooms, also in London. During this period, writers and audiences were unfamiliar with 'many styles of music, and the audience numbers were small. Reviews were generally positive, but even in London (which can be understood to be the most adventurous city in Britain) black music remained recognised on a small scale'.⁵³



The Southern Syncopated Orchestra, circa 1919, place unknown.

Source: Brighton Dome website, 23 November 2018, by Amanda Allen

American jazz musicians continued to visit London during the 1920s, which perhaps led to the many imitative British bands that emerged during that decade. At that time the music was heard primarily in three different ways: 'performed by dance bands at socially respectable venues such as hotels; performed by black music theatre

⁵³ Rye, p. 5; Williams, 'Post-World War II Jazz in Britain', p. 117.

companies; and performed by small groups of musicians in West End clubs.⁵⁴ As British audiences embraced the music, demand for American jazz musicians grew. This triggered anxiety in the British Musicians' Union (MU), who saw competition and growing demand for foreign musicians as denying work for Britain's homegrown talent, especially in light of the growing economic hardship of the period.⁵⁵ The MU began to lobby the Ministry of Labour 'to deny work permits to any applicant', and in March 1923 the MU issued a statement to that effect. Katherine Williams explains how 'An extension of the Musicians' Union dissatisfaction was the legislation issued by the Ministry of Labour in 1935, which resulted in the Union [being] effectively able to veto the visits of most foreign musicians; in practice this banned most visits by American Jazz musicians.'⁵⁶ Glenn Miller and his American Airforce band were immune from the ruling, however, and other American jazz musicians often eluded the ban.

The way in which the MU worked to banish American jazz from being played in Britain helped to create, I argue, an unintended hybridised version of jazz that was performed in underground spaces in Soho by transcultural and transracial bands. Marc Matera explores this impulse. He observes that during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries myriad styles of music emerged across the African-Atlantic diaspora. The materialisation of the blues, ragtime, jazz and swing in the United States; *paseo* and calypso in Trinidad; tango in Argentina; *son* and *danson* in Cuba; and palm-wine, juju, konkoma, highlife and Muslim sakara music in West Africa 'travelled to, and with varying degrees, found a home in London. Black musicians sojourning or based in Europe transformed these styles in ways reflecting their new setting.'⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Williams, 'Post-World War II Jazz in Britain', p. 118.

⁵⁵ Ibid.; Martin Cloonan and Matt Brennan, 'Alien Invasions: The British Musicians' Union and Foreign Musicians', *Popular Music*, 32:2, 2013, pp. 277–295 (p. 280).

⁵⁶ Williams, 'Post-World War II Jazz in Britain', p. 118.

⁵⁷ Matera, p. 148.

Matera indicates the ways in which black artistic cultural production migrated to Britain, and once there was expressed in a localised, hybrid form. In other words, once these musics, which I aim to demonstrate can be viewed as musics of the ‘Black Atlantic’, landed in Britain, they were reshaped as a result of the unique social and cultural relations in which they were produced. Matera’s hypothesis will be explored in relation to the bebop scene in Soho and its cultural formation between 1945 and 1950 further on, and throughout this thesis.

Artists from across the ‘Black Atlantic’ – African American, Caribbean, African and black British musicians – played a significant role in the introduction and development of jazz in Britain. However, as Matera has pointed out, a host of memoirs by musicians – from Jack Hylton’s recollections of the 1930s to Ted Heath’s 1959 autobiography – as well as ‘catalogues of recordings released on disc at the time’, have led many authoritative voices and historians of early British jazz to claim, ‘as Jim Godbolt does, that the black contribution to British jazz was slight’.⁵⁸

Black musicians were often barred from playing gigs in high-end establishments, so they gravitated to Soho. By the 1930s, these ‘Black Atlantic’ musics had become synonymous with the area. Among white British clubbers and pleasure seekers, the area became known as ‘the heart of the Black Mile’, while for musicians, bands and peoples of African descent, Soho signalled ‘employment... a platform for creative expression within a profession in which they remained marginalised [and] provided an affirming sanctuary in a hostile city’.⁵⁹

These clubs not only provided both a shelter and a space for pan-African social and political resistance, as well as acting as sites and platforms for ‘Black Atlantic’ cultural

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Matera, p. 149.

forms; they were also, usually, partly black owned.⁶⁰ Although, as Andy Simons points out, ‘as has always been the case with jazz clubs, exact ownership of these clubs is probably impossible to pin down’.⁶¹

Soho’s black clubs in the 1930s, which were often short-lived and located in dingy basements, dotted along the western, southern and eastern edges of Soho, included:

moving clockwise, the Blue Lagoon and Frisco’s on Frith Street just south of Soho Square; the Shim Sham at the southern terminus of Wardour Street and the Big Apple and Cuba Club on Gerrard Street; and the Nest and Bag O’ Nails on Kingly Street. Jigs [Club] lay near the centre of this triangular zone of black frivolity and musicianship.⁶²



Frith Street, Soho, 1930s.

Source: Rob Greig for Time Out, 2015

Portrayals of Jigs Club provide us with an important snapshot of the sociality of the black jazz clubs in 1930s Soho. Situated in St Anne’s Court, an alleyway between Dean

⁶⁰ Ibid. Matera notes that many of the 1930s black clubs in Soho were at least partly owned by Cyril ‘Happy’ Blake, a Trinidadian musician.

⁶¹ Andy Simons, ‘Black British Swing’, *IJRC Journal*, 41:3, p. 37.

⁶² Matera, p. 168. Matera says that ‘The map frontispiece of [Jack] Glicco’s book shows the Blue Lagoon on the corner of Carnaby Street and Beak Street. [Musician] Leslie Thompson recalled that Frisco’s was on Dean Street, which is one block west of Frith, but Walkowitz places both on Frith Street.’ Matera, p. 353.

Street and Wardour Street, Jigs was dubbed ‘Little Harlem’ by the music press due to the transatlantic and transcultural nature of the clientele and the music played at the club.⁶³ However, Jigs was not frequented only by people of African descent; the club blurred the lines between race, class, gender and sexuality, and

attracted blacks [*sic*] of all classes and jazz aficionados as well as homosexuals [*sic*], socialists, and young white Britons drawn by the mix of exotic pleasures it offered. Visitors from as close as the suburbs and as far away as the continent, North America, and the colonies and dominions cavorted with same-sex dance partners, bohemian writers and artists, pimps, prostitutes, and gamblers.⁶⁴

Black-owned and bohemian clubs patronised by the modernist literati were not the only spaces to provide entertainment and jazz during the interwar years. Along with black musicians and proprietors, Jewish and Irish club owners also contributed to Soho’s night-time economy during this period, with jazz being the prevailing musical force in their clubs.



*Kate Meyrick and her four children, circa 1920s.
Source: photo by Daily Herald Archive/SSPL/Getty Images*

⁶³ Billy Bragg, *Roots, Radicals and Rockers: How Skiffle Changed the World* (London: Faber and Faber, 2017), p. 64. Further evidence that the music press dubbed Soho ‘Little Harlem’ will be presented in the subsequent chapters of this thesis, when I present historical articles from *Melody Maker* and other papers.

⁶⁴ Matera, p. 162.

Kate Meyrick (above centre), was an example of an Irish club owner; she was branded the ‘Queen of the Nightclubs’ by the tabloid press.⁶⁵ According to Walkowitz, Meyrick, an Irish woman of a distinguished upbringing, transformed the basement of a cellar in Gerard Street into the renowned 43 Club – the centre of her nightclub empire during the 1920s – which was also said to be the most infamous nightclub in London. Walkowitz notes that the club

was raided by police in February 1922 for selling alcoholic drinks after hours; one month later, it gained heightened notoriety when Freda Kempton, a dance hostess of the club, died of a cocaine overdose. Kempton had last been seen at the 43 in the company of Brilliant Chang, a Chinese restaurateur who was accused of supplying her with drugs.⁶⁶

The roles of race, gender and drugs consumption is explored in chapter three, when I analyse the miscegenation fears projected by the establishment and the dominant media onto bebop clubs in post-war Soho; an important factor which led to the raids on, and the closure of, the clubs that this thesis is concerned with.

With regard to the 43 Club, though, according to musician Jack Glicco, Meyrick’s club was where ‘you could hear the world’s greatest artists at jazz.’⁶⁷ These Soho clubs, and others like them, cyclically sprang-up and closed down during the ensuing decades.

⁶⁵ *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 16 January 1930, p. 2.

⁶⁶ Walkowitz, p. 210.

⁶⁷ Jack Glicco, *Madness and Midnight* (London: Elek Books, 1952), p. 10.

Bottle parties, 1930–1945



Dean Street, Soho, after dark, circa 1930s.

Source: Hulton Archive/Getty Images

During the 1930s and throughout the Second World War, other forms of illicit nightlife were centred in the submerged spaces of Soho's streets, courtyards and alleyways. The area became a renowned site of the bottle party; an after-hours drinking den. According to various cultural historians, bottle parties 'took over the entertainment and symbolic functions of the 1920s nightclub.'⁶⁸ They were attended by a wide range of social types, including working girls seeking business and soldiers in search of solace and female company.⁶⁹

Historians have noted that bottle parties emerged when the nightclub had started to 'experience continuous pressure from the authorities, particularly under the regime of the Home Secretary William Joynson-Hicks'.⁷⁰ During the Great War, restrictions were

⁶⁸ Christopher Hallam, *White Drug Cultures and Regulation in London, 1916–1960* (Palgrave MacMillan: London, 2018), p. 85

⁶⁹ Julia Laite, 'Common Prostitution and Ordinary Citizens: Commercial Sex in London, 1885–1960', *Genders and Sexuality in History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 299.

⁷⁰ Hallam, pp. 87–88.

placed on alcohol consumption, but with the introduction of the 1921 Act they were slightly relaxed. This legislation permitted pubs in London to open until 11.00 p.m. or until 12.30 a.m., providing that food was served with drinks. During the early 1930s bottle parties began to surface as a result of the ‘repressive regulatory apparatus’ caused by the ‘constraints of alcohol licensing (and the restrictions on music and dancing)’.⁷¹ However, although the ‘licensing regulations of the period were tight [they] did not cover private parties – a fact exploited with enthusiasm by the originators of the bottle party system, who circumvented the law to make alcohol, dancing and music available throughout the night’.⁷² Oral history testimonies by jazz musicians recall how ‘bottle parties were *slightly* illegal, people used to have their bottle of scotch and they could drink it as long as it was their own. The punters used to mark the level and leave it in the club.’⁷³ There are said to have been more than 200 bottle parties each night in the West End, of which Soho hosted its fair share.⁷⁴

The media on either side of the political divide, and in both local and national newspapers, reported extensively about these events being raided and closed down. Between 1937 and 1940 stories proliferated in the press in which Soho bottle parties were represented as sites of forbidden pleasures. Some of these stories had an Americanised theme to them. For example, ‘the Skyscraper Bottle Party [in] Ham Yard’ was raided in March 1937 and the proprietor, ‘Richard Day of Soho’, was fined for holding an event which included ‘public music and dancing without a licence’.⁷⁵ The prosecutor explained to the court that ‘two police officers visited the club with women friends in the early hours of March 13 and found people dancing to the music of a

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Tommy Whittle, *Oral History of Jazz in Britain*, The National Sound Archive, British Library, 1992.

⁷⁴ Mike Hutton, *The Story of Soho: The Windmill Years, 1932–1964* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2012), p. 67.

⁷⁵ *The Stage*, 22 April 1937, p. 7.

band'.⁷⁶ Another headline in the *Daily Mirror* in 1940 sarcastically bellowed 'Girl of Seventeen is Nightie Queen'; the newspaper reported that 'Eileen Nicholson, aged seventeen, of Manor Avenue, Brockley, London... along with two men, was summoned on Thursday at Marlborough Street Police Court for selling drinks without a license at the New Continental Bottle Party in Frith Street, Soho, of which she was the owner'.⁷⁷

The shaping of Soho as a space of illicit activity was disseminated throughout every corner of Britain. For instance, at the other end of the country, in north-east England, *The Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette* wrote that 'Fines totalling 345 were imposed on Horace Douglas Thompson, of Albert Square, Clapham Road, London... at Bow Street yesterday for keeping Slim's Bottle Party, Gerrard Street, Soho, for music and dancing without a license from the London County Council, and for selling alcoholic liquor without a license'.⁷⁸

Furthermore, the press often racialised Soho bottle parties, or over-emphasised gender, with a focus on girls and women. This notion can be seen in an article entitled 'West End Den of Vice' printed by the *Daily Herald*, 27 August 1937, in which it is reported that a twenty-two-year-old man, 'Michael Arnold Block... was fined... at Bow-street [magistrates court] in respect of the Suzi-Q Bottle Party establishment, Gerrard Street, Soho. The place, it was stated, was a low-class bottle party house, attended mostly by coloured people'.⁷⁹

By 1937, a special police force had been constructed to combat the illicit cultural practices that were occurring at the bottle parties in Soho, leading to the creation of Scotland Yard's first vice squad. Scotland Yard chose six special officers in 'a great drive to put an end to improper behaviour and exhibitions in the "dives" of London after

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ 'Girl of Seventeen is Nightie Queen', *Daily Mirror*, 6 January 1940, p. 3.

⁷⁸ 'Bottle Party Fines', *Sunderland and Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, 18 March 1938, p. 10.

⁷⁹ 'West End Den of Vice: £50 Fine', *Daily Herald*, 27 August 1937, p. 7.

dark’, explained the newspapers, and a ‘special office [was] set aside in Vine Street Police Station, the station which polices Soho’, to operate as the headquarters of the Vice Squad.⁸⁰ This was due to ‘the spreading practice... of putting on improper and “strip-tease” acts at clubs and bottle-parties’, which had led to an avalanche of complaints to Scotland Yard and the Home Office.⁸¹ These representations in the popular press demonstrate how Soho was constructed in the national imagination as a district where race, gender and social class was blurred in after-hours drinking dens, and how this, together with other illicit practices such as unlicensed dancing and immoral behaviour, led to the formation of the first vice squad in London.

Another historically important part of Soho’s geographical space was Archer Street, known as the ‘music exchange’, where musicians congregated not only to look for work, but to socialise.

⁸⁰ ‘Scotland Yard To Round Up “Strip Tease” Bottle Parties’, *Gloucester Citizen*, 26 August 1937, p. 7.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

Archer Street: a meeting point for musicians



Musicians in Archer Street, Soho, circa 1920s–1930s.

Source: John Williamson, Musicians' Union Archive

During the 1920s and the economically depressed 1930s, Archer Street became the central meeting point for musicians. The mass unemployment of the period saw the street crammed full of artists on a daily basis, where they would congregate to look for new gigs and watch the day go by.⁸²

Some historians have suggested that the ‘reasons that Archer Street became the hub for musicians (rather than, for example, nearby Denmark Street which was the home of music shops and publishers) was down to its proximity to work places (nearby theatres and clubs) and places to drink and socialise’.⁸³ Gordon Thompson argues that: ‘Archer Street served a purpose beyond paychecks and contracts: here musicians gathered to

⁸² Charles Graves, *The Sphere*, 13 July 1935, p. 28; Martin Cloonan and John Williamson, *The Musicians' Union: A History, 1893–2013*, www.muhistory.com [last accessed 20 August 2019]; Gordon Thompson, *Please, Please Me: Sixties British Pop, Inside Out* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 124.

⁸³ Thompson, *Please, Please Me*, p. 124.

network and to share stories about gigs, owners, patrons, and, of course, other musicians.’⁸⁴

The area continued to be the nucleus of the London ‘musicians’ exchange’ during the 1940s. In an oral history account of the area, musician Lennie Bush paints an evocative picture of the geographical space, the sociality and the cultural consumption that took place in Archer Street just after the war:

[Archer Street] is a little short street that runs between Great Windmill Street and Rupert Street at the other end of it, it’s only about 200 yards long. In those days it had a newsagent in it, and up an alley was the Len Hunt drum company. Across the road from Len Hunt’s was a barber’s called Sid Seiger’s – the first durex machine I ever saw was outside there. There were also a couple of cafes, and eventually there was a place that was run by a Polish gent whose name escapes me, but it was called the Harmony Inn. Next door to the Harmony Inn were the Stage Door and the Windmill Theatre. Musicians used to meet there on Archer Street, and around the corner, on the corner of Shaftesbury Avenue and Denman Street was the Rainbow Corner, which was an American service club. In Denman Street there were various drinking clubs, they used to open at three in the afternoon and close at ten thirty [at night]. The whole area was geared towards musicians. So, in Archer Street the musicians used to meet there socially, and get work there. Someone who needed a band for a gig would go down and get someone, and also pay out for a gig that someone had done for someone last week. Everyone was out on the street. You used to see musicians you admired and think, “Oh Christ, he’s coming up the street.” At the beginning I used to just stand about down there in doorways, looking forward to seeing someone I knew. It was like the musicians’ labour exchange on a Monday. As the week progressed, it would be more about the people that never had anywhere else to go[.]⁸⁵

Bush’s vivid portrait of Archer Street just after the war demonstrates the conviviality and collectivist nature of the space for aspiring musicians. Another musician, however, Jack Parnell, recollected Archer Street from a different perspective, revealing a slightly different emotional experience: ‘I remember walking up there with a snare drum, so that they knew I was a drummer, and standing on the end of the road and they were all milling about and talking to each other. Nobody took a blind bit of notice of me. I just

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Lennie Bush, *Oral History of Jazz in Britain*, The National Sound Archive, British Library, 1992.

stood there for about three hours and nobody said a bloody word – and I walked off again.’⁸⁶

From the 1920s (and before) to the 1940s (and beyond), Archer Street, as Parnell and Bush’s accounts hint, was not only the focus for musicians, their socialising and their scouting for work, but was especially geared towards the rhythm sections of bands. As Bush explained, Len Hunt, who had a store on the street, specialised in all aspects of drums. Newspaper reports of the time provide a snapshot of the cultural significance of Hunt’s shop, explaining that he has been

beating a drum (on and off) for the past twenty years. What’s more, he’s provided the drums for thousands of other people to beat [in his] shop off Archer Street, Soho, where he turns out drums and drumsticks by the dozen. The B.B.C., the Royal Horse Guards, and many other regiments get their drumming apparatus from Mr. Hunt. That’s his job and he likes it. But he has hobbies, too. They are playing drums and repairing drums and thinking up new ideas from drums. Drum sticks, which last, on an average, three months, can be turned out at the rate of one a minute. Drums take longer.⁸⁷

These evocative accounts of Archer Street throughout history demonstrate that while Soho was popularised in the literary and cultural imagination as a carnivalesque space where the demi-monde and risqué social groups rubbed shoulders with aristocrats and immigrants, the area was also a communal space shared by out-of-work musicians during a time of bleak social and economic hardship.

⁸⁶ Jack Parnell, *Oral History of Jazz in Britain*, The National Sound Archive, British Library, 1995.

⁸⁷ ‘People are Queer’, *Good Morning*, 4 October 1945, p. 4.

Popular music during the war: Swing and Dixieland jazz



The Spirits of Rhythm – Joe Deniz, Tommy Lytton, Frank Deniz, Clare Deniz, Jimmy Skidmore – at the Coconut Grove Club, Soho, circa 1944. Source: blackbritishswing.wordpress.com

During the Second World War, Soho continued to swing to popular music. The basements and attics gathered in the centre, and the dance halls that were situated at the edges of Soho, were attended by flocks of revellers that defied the blackout and the Blitz. Two forms of dance music – swing, and original New Orleans-style jazz, also known as Dixieland – were the dominant forces in popular musical taste.

With regard to swing, Dave Gelly has noted that

from early 1942, a tidal wave of American military might engulfed the British Isles in the long build-up to D-Day, it came with a cultural undertow of irresistible proportions. The presence, towards the end of the war, of American service bands, most famously Major Glenn Miller's Band of the Allied Expeditionary Force (AEF), but also Sam Donohue's US [sic] Navy Band and others, [was pervasive].⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Dave Gelly, *An Unholy Row: Jazz in Britain and its Audience, 1945–1960* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2014), p. 10.

These American service swing bands descended on Soho and the Nuthouse Niterie, rendering the club a space where transatlantic creative exchange dominated the dancefloor. *Melody Maker* asserted that the trendsetting ‘Nuthouse [has] become a tradition of late, as the one place in the West End where musicians [can] “have a bash,” and members of both Glenn Miller’s and Sam Donahue’s bands regularly [sit] in ... during their sojourn to London’.⁸⁹ The influence of United States military personnel on British swing, not just in Soho but also nationwide, was profound. Gelly tells us that ‘by the end of the war musical tastes, particularly among servicemen, had shifted markedly in the direction of the swingy American style’.⁹⁰

The popularisation of swing was due not only to the live scene, but perhaps equally, if not more importantly, to the radio. Gelly notes that during ‘the two months leading up to VE day, there were thirty-six separate programmes that fell broadly within the jazz/swing category... The sheer amount of jazz and near-jazz to be heard on British radio, most of it contemporary in style and not aimed specifically at dedicated jazz fans, shows that this music had become genuinely popular.’⁹¹

With regard to Dixieland, on the other hand, the trajectory of the New Orleans revival is said to have begun beyond Soho in the outskirts of London. In 1943, ‘George Webb’s Dixielanders [could be found playing] “revivalist” jazz in the unlikely surroundings of the downstairs bar at the Red Barn in Barnehurst, Kent, a stretch of inter-war suburb between Bexleyheath and Dartford’.⁹² The band consisted of eight male musicians, all of whom were white. They are noted to have emulated ‘the dense texture and powerful drive of the pioneer New Orleans bands, in particular King

⁸⁹ Unknown, *Melody Maker*, 4 August 1945, p. 1.

⁹⁰ Gelly, p. 10.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Gelly, p. 20.

Oliver's creole Jazz Band of 1922–23.⁹³ By 1948, aristocrat and ex-student of the Camberwell School of Art Humphrey Lyttleton had joined the band. Lyttleton was a major figure in the trad jazz boom of the late 1940s and early 1950s. The New Orleans, or trad jazz, revival of the 1950s is explored further in chapter five.

The racial demarcation of mainly white players on the British New Orleans-style scene continued throughout the 1940s and the ensuing decade, when the style became popular. Jazz scholar George McKay notes that

The whiteness of the traditional jazz boom in Britain in the late 1950s has been touched upon by jazz critics. For instance, Iain Chambers writes that white trad – at the time of bebop and the beginnings of free jazz in the United States – could “conveniently overlook” the “new, black militant musical consciousness” of the times by “nostalgically evoking a mythical New Orleans of around 1900.”⁹⁴

There were more black musicians in swing bands than in those playing Dixieland jazz. In January 1945, a gig entitled *Tribute to Swing*, promoted by the Feldman Club and held at the Stoll Theatre, Kingsway, London, consisted of black and white players. Under the headline ‘Barriteau For Feldman Concert’, *Melody Maker* stated that ‘Another big attraction has been booked to swell the terrific list of stars at the super Feldman “Tribute to Swing” concert at the Stoll Theatre, Kingsway, London, on Sunday afternoon, April 8th. This is none other than clarinet ace Carl Barriteau.’⁹⁵ In addition to Barriteau, who was born in Trinidad in 1914 and raised in Venezuela before he moved to London, other black players included in the show were ‘Leslie “Jiver” Hutchinson and his band [and] Cab Quaye’.⁹⁶ Quaye, born in Camden in 1921, was of

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ George McKay, *Circular Breathing: The Cultural Politics of Jazz in Britain* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 113. Leslie ‘Jiver’ Hutchinson, Lauderick Caton and Ken ‘Snakehips’ Johnson were among a contingent of West Indian migrant musicians that reached stardom during the 1930s and early 1940s. Johnson, however, was tragically killed whilst playing when a bomb flattened the Café de Paris in Leicester Square in 1941.

⁹⁵ ‘Barriteau for Feldman Concert’, *Melody Maker*, 27 January, 1945, p. 4.

⁹⁶ ‘Swing-Concerts: Feldman’, *Melody Maker*, 3 February, 1945, p. 2.

Ghanaian descent, a country in western Africa which was at that time part of the British Empire. The racially integrated bands that played swing during the war were centred in Soho, as opposed to the mainly white New Orleans revival that was growing in the London suburbs.

Summing up

This chapter has demonstrated how, from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, Soho became the cosmopolitan centre of London. It has shown how the area's unique forms of entertainment and transgressive social and cultural consumption came into being and were contained spatially through the construction of the Victorian imperial thoroughfares that surrounded the area. The chapter has established how Soho was configured in the popular imagination through novels, plays, films, and newspaper reports as a Rabelaisian space of what Bakhtin termed the carnivalesque, a space in which dominant social and political orders are upended. These representations, furthermore, led to the area's popularisation as a place where people, regardless of race, class, gender, or sexuality, would gravitate in order to relax and feel a sense of equality.

The chapter has also shown how these elements, along with the physical and historical geography of Soho, led to large numbers of jazz clubs playing Black Atlantic sounds springing up and closing down from the period of the aftermath of the Great War to the point at which American swing music and Dixieland jazz became popular during World War Two. All of these elements together diversified Soho's culture industry.

The following chapter explores how bebop migrated from New York City, where the music was pioneered by African American male musicians in Harlem clubs, to London, where it was rearticulated by black and white musicians in gritty Soho basements.

Chapter Two

Bebop Music and the Soho Clubs



*From left to right: Pete Pitterson, Johnny Rogers and Nat Gonella at Club Eleven, Soho, London, 1948.
Source: www.henrybebop.com*

Introduction

Around late 1945 and early 1946, bebop, also known as re-bop and modern jazz, migrated across the Atlantic from New York City to Soho, London, where it began to be played in underground spaces by a group of racially diverse, largely male, musicians. The music represented a cultural and aesthetic shift from previous forms of dance music (swing and Dixieland jazz) and received a mixed reception from audiences and the press, the latter including both music journalists and the mainstream media. Blending a wide range of primary sources such as oral history accounts, hitherto unexplored reports gleaned from the music press and rare autobiographies, as well as secondary social and cultural histories of jazz in the United States and Britain, this chapter documents and analyses the temporal development of bebop in Britain in the period between late 1945 and 1950. The chapter demonstrates that the birth of the bebop scene in Britain can be traced to a specific historic place and time: that is, gritty underground spaces in Soho, before it spread throughout the West End and then to suburban dance halls, where the music was at first banned.

The chapter first historicises bebop, situating the music in its original geographical context of Harlem, New York. I then attempt to define the term bebop, and reveal how the style was contested from the very beginning by two of its main innovators, Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker, who disagreed on the technical elements that constituted the music. Thirdly, the chapter shows how the music was racialised and politicised by musicians and critics alike. Following that, I demonstrate how, given its Western classical and African influences, bebop can be considered a music of the ‘Black Atlantic’ – a term coined by Paul Gilroy to show how black cultural production is shaped by its social, political and economic relations, along with transatlantic

movement between Africa, North America, the Caribbean and Europe.¹ Finally, I argue that the Soho bebop pioneers created a local expression of the music based on the transcultural and transatlantic nature of the early bands. Unlike their New York counterparts, in Soho the bands were a mixture of black and white musicians producing music in predominately black spaces. This social, cultural and aesthetic process, in fact, was one aspect of the scene that led to a moral panic and saw the bebop clubs in Soho raided by police.

Bebop's roots in New York City



Thelonious Monk, by William Gottlieb at Minton's, New York City, 1941
Source: Getty

In his award-winning book *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History* (1999), Scott DeVeaux asserts that the bebop idiom was a self-conscious and aesthetically subversive musical style from the start. DeVeaux observes that 'The fast tempos and deliberately convoluted harmonic progressions, obstacles thrown up to disorient the

¹ See Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1994).

“no-talent guys”, the pursuit of virtuosity for its own sake; the shift of focus away from the mass audience to the personal struggle of musicians to master the art of improvisation: all fed directly into the emergent bebop style.’²

Bebop grew out of jam sessions that involved small combos and big bands. Although a number of well-known artists of the swing era such as Coleman Hawkins, Lester Young, Roy Eldridge, Art Tatum, Duke Ellington, Jimmy Blanton and Walter Page had previously explored aspects of this language in the 1930s, it was not until the remarkable work of Charlie Parker, John Birks “Dizzy” Gillespie and Thelonious Monk [amongst others] brought these various facets of the language together that what came to be known as bebop crystallised. In an attempt to express themselves creatively, these musicians ‘gradually rejected the elements in the established styles of jazz that they viewed as simplistic and cliché-ridden’, thereby pushing the boundaries of convention and becoming ‘skilled at improvising in a more chromatic and rhythmically more complex idiom’.³

Various cultural historians of bebop have argued that these sessions began during 1938 at two specific clubs located on 118th Street in Harlem, New York City. There was Minton’s Playhouse, started by Henry Minton, ‘a tenor saxophonist and the first black delegate to Local 802 of the Musicians’ Union’, perfectly positioned next to the Hotel Cecil, a lodge that was popular with musicians passing through New York.⁴ The other club was Monroe’s Uptown House. Both of these clubs are said to have been instrumental in serving the artists that were inventing this new style, and were the nucleus of the after-hours jam sessions that magnetised these musicians, who came from

² Scott Knowles DeVaux, *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History* (California: University of California Press, 1999), p. 217.

³ Ibid.; Thomas Owens, ‘Review’, *Ethnomusicology*, 21:3, 1977, pp. 511–517.

⁴ DeVaux, p. 219.

every corner of the country. According to Thomas Owens, regular contributors to these sessions included

Dizzy Gillespie, trumpeters Roy Eldridge, Joe Guy (who was in the house band at Minton's), John Carisi, and Hot Lips Page, alto saxophonist Charlie Parker, tenor saxophonist Don Byas, pianists Kenny Kersey, Thelonious Monk (the house pianist at Minton's), Al Tinney (the house pianist at Monroe's), and Mary Lou Williams, guitarist Charlie Christian (who kept an extra amplifier at Minton's to use whenever he arrived in town), bassist Nick Fenton (the house bassist at Minton's), and drummer Kenny Clarke (the house drummer at Minton's).⁵

Received cultural narratives, however, are somewhat in collision with the views of certain musicians concerning bebop's place of origin. There are also tensions regarding the actual style being played during the earliest jam sessions at Minton's and Monroe's.

In his book *Bebop: The Music and its Players* (1996), Thomas Owens writes as follows:

according to contemporary reports by those present, the music at these sessions was small-group swing at first, but gradually changed to something else. Jazz fan Jerry Newman made some recordings on his portable disc recorder in 1941 that provide an imperfect glimpse back into those proceedings. Years later some of these informal recordings were issued commercially. Their fidelity is poor... But they are all we have, for none of these ad hoc groups made any studio recordings. The music in these Minton's recordings are swing, not bebop. Yet Gillespie's solos reveal a player searching for a new way to express himself.⁶

Although Owens states that the jam sessions recorded were in the swing style,

DeVeaux, in contrast, offers an opposing perspective with regard to those same early recordings. He specifically tells us that the musical recordings on the tapes belonging to Newman were, in fact, early examples of bebop:

acetate recordings from Minton's made on a portable machine by jazz enthusiast Jerry Newman in 1941... include one of the most remarkable documents of early bebop – the electrifying interaction of [Kenny] Clarke and guitarist Charlie Christian on the tune "Topsy" (later retitled "Swing to Bop" when issued on LP).⁷

⁵ Thomas Owens, *Bebop: The Music and its Players* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 8.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ DeVeaux, p. 220.

Whether or not these early recordings can be considered bebop, the musical style's roots are noted by one of the originators, Thelonious Monk, who affirmed the timeline of the radical style as starting in early 1941. Monk traced bebop to one specific location in Harlem, rather than two, as described by the historians above. On 14 November 1947, Bill Gottlieb of the acclaimed *Downbeat Magazine* travelled uptown to Harlem with Monk in order to conduct an interview with the musician at Minton's. The journalist claims that during the taxi ride he asked the innovator a series of questions concerning the time and place of bebop's historical origins, and whether or not he was the sole architect of bebop. Gottlieb suggests that Monk was humble and measured in his responses, that he 'wouldn't go on record as insisting HE started bebop; but, as the story books have long since related, he admitted he was at least one of the originators. Yes, he continued, verifying the oft-told tale, it all began up at Minton's in early 1941.'⁸ Monk continued to speak about the way in which the style evolved. In so doing he expressed the idea that bebop was not developed intentionally: 'For my part', explained Monk, 'I'll say it was just the style of music I happened to play. We all contributed ideas, the men you know plus a fellow called Vic Couslen, who had been with [Charlie] Parker and Al Hibbler in the McShann band. Vic had a lot to do with our way of phrasing.'⁹ These portrayals of bebop's musical roots demonstrate that whilst a group of African American male musicians were jamming together at Harlem clubs during the early 1940s, a brand-new musical aesthetic that was different in tone and texture to any other type of jazz was born.

⁸ Bill Gottlieb, in F. Alkyer and E. Enright (eds), *Downbeat: The Great Jazz Interviews* (New York: Hal Leonard Books, 2009), p. 28.

⁹ Thelonious Monk, 'Thelonious Monk – Genius of Bop', in *ibid.*, p. 29.

Contested notions of bebop: Bird verses Diz'



Charlie Parker, by William Gottlieb 1940.

Source: Getty

There are tensions involving two of the innovators, Gillespie and Parker, which indicate that bebop was a contested notion from the beginning. In a string of interviews that took more than a fortnight to conduct with Michael Levin and John S. Wilson for *Downbeat*, 'The creator of bop... Charlie Parker' claimed that 'Bop is no love-child of Jazz'.¹⁰ Parker explained to them that 'bop is something entirely separate and apart from the older tradition, [and] that it drew little from jazz, has no roots in it'.¹¹ Parker's controversial statement was challenged by the music journalists. They asked him to define bop, and 'after several evenings of arguing' they noted that Parker was

still not precise in his definition. "It's just music," he said. "It's trying to play clean and looking for the pretty notes." Pushed further, he said that a distinctive feature of bop is its strong feeling for beat. "The beat in a bop band is with the music, against it, behind it," Charlie said. "It pushes it. It helps it. Help is the big

¹⁰ Michael Levin and John S. Wilson in *ibid.*, p. 32.

¹¹ Charlie Parker, 'No Bop Roots in Jazz' in *ibid.*, p. 32.

thing. It has no continuity of beat, no steady chug-chug. Jazz has, and that's why bop is more flexible."¹²

Levin and Wilson continue to paint a picture of bebop's birth, explaining that during a cold night in December 1939, at a house on Seventh Avenue in Harlem,

Charlie's horn first came alive [whilst] jamming there with a guitarist named Biddy Fleet. At the time, Charlie says, he was bored with the stereotyped changes being used then. "I kept thinking there's bound to be something else," he recalls. "I could hear it sometimes, but I couldn't play it." Working over "Cherokee" with Fleet, Charlie suddenly found that by using higher intervals of a chord as a melody line and backing them with appropriately related changes, he could play this thing he had been "hearing." Fleet picked it up behind him and bop was born.¹³

Parker was persistent concerning the terminology used to describe his sound. In another interview with *Metronome* in 1947, Parker said:

Let's not call it bebop. Let's call it music. People get so used to hearing jazz for so many years, finally somebody said "Let's have something different" and some new ideas began to evolve. Then people brand it "bebop" and try to crush it. If it should become completely accepted, people should remember it's in the same position jazz was. It's just another style.¹⁴

Across the Atlantic, in Britain, certain writers in the music press attached themselves to the words of Charlie Parker. Leaping on the anti-bop bandwagon, Brian Rust, writing in the periodical *Jazz Journal* in November 1948, roared:

I am suggesting that the background of jazz is not allied to the background of re-bop, let alone the outward and audible signs, I fail to comprehend how anyone can connect the two. The music of King Oliver, Louis Armstrong, Kid Ory is jazz, whether with the Creole Jazz Band, the Savannah Syncopators or the Savoy Ballroom Five, and the sound produced by Gillespie and Co. is not. It is not an off-shoot of jazz. It is a waste-product, if you like, but it requires none of the artistry that jazz does so that it might be produced. What it does need is a technique capable of abuse to strive after even higher notes, at breathless speed.¹⁵

¹² Levin and Wilson; Parker, both in *ibid*.

¹³ Levin and Wilson in *ibid*.

¹⁴ Charlie Parker, *Metronome*, August 1947, p. 7.

¹⁵ Brian Rust, 'Resolutions', *Jazz Journal*, November 1948, p. 10.

The disparaging language used to describe bebop – waste and abuse – was, as will be demonstrated further on, typical of the ways in which many music critics and traditional New Orleans fans depicted bebop once it arrived in Britain.

Parker's narrative and the media attention surrounding it, however, are in collision with Dizzy Gillespie's version of what constitutes bebop. In an interview conducted with John S. Wilson on 7 October 1949, published in *Downbeat* beneath the strapline 'Bird Wrong; Bop Must Get a Beat', Gillespie responded to Parker's 1947 comments:

Bop is an interpretation of jazz... it's all part of the same thing... Bop is part of jazz... And jazz music is to dance to. The trouble with bop as it's played now is that people can't dance to it. They don't hear those four beats. We'll never get bop across to a wide audience until they can dance to it. They're not particular about whether you're playing a flatted fifth or a ruptured 129th as long as they can dance.¹⁶

Wilson notes that Gillespie's intention was to make bebop danceable in order to entice back a proportion of the audience that had begun to slip away. As a big band 'his group could not support itself (or even fit into) small nightclubs, so they could not depend on a loyal cadre of bop fans to consistently fill these halls. Thus they were dependent upon a larger, dancing audience.'¹⁷ However, Gillespie's assertion that the audience *cannot dance to bebop as it is currently played* appears to have been different within the context of bebop clubs in Soho: further on, this chapter will present oral history accounts by musicians and reports in the British music press that claim dancing was an integral part of the audience behaviour in the Soho clubs. It would thus appear that the fans in bebop clubs in Soho *received* the music differently. Moreover, this perhaps shows that the Soho bebop bands may have been playing something slightly different to their New York counterparts.

¹⁶ Dizzy Gillespie, 'Bird Wrong; Bop Must Get a Beat', *Downbeat: The Great Jazz Interviews*, p. 36.

¹⁷ John S. Wilson, in *Downbeat*, p. 37.

In relation to Gillespie and Parker's disagreements over bebop's rootedness in jazz, historian Eric Porter notes that in 1949 Billy Taylor, a pianist and later a jazz educator, published a small musical education volume entitled *Basic Be-Bop Instruction for Piano*. In defence of Gillespie's perspective, Taylor connected the idiom to a specific 'creative context, arguing that its emergence was the result of experimentation by young musicians who were not content to play in the "stereotyped" styles of the 1930s'.¹⁸ Taylor highlighted how this cohort of innovators opened up a broader space for jazz, and he identified a central facet of the inventiveness of bebop in 'the alteration of existing compositions to the extent that new compositions were created by performance'.¹⁹ Thus, he argued that the 'music's complexity... did not remove it from the jazz tradition', and located bebop 'firmly within a jazz canon', emphasising that it was 'merely the most recent and most revolutionary development'.²⁰

In its broader American historical context, bebop was not only the focus of much blistering discourse concerning jazz tradition, the idiom was also ascribed with overtly racial meanings by music critics, musicians and social commentators alike. Bebop was rooted in a local space, Harlem, and the musicians we have been discussing – Gillespie, Parker, Monk, Clarke, Christian and the others that were involved in the early jam sessions at Minton's and Monroe's – were all African American men, expressing themselves artistically in black clubs in a predominantly black neighbourhood in New York. It is not surprising, then, that many narratives regarding the social and racial nature of the music were spread in the music press and by the musicians themselves. As well as this, there exists much writing that ties bebop in New York to a black visionary politics of freedom, creativity and social transformation. However, it is important to

¹⁸ Eric Porter, "'Dizzy Atmosphere": The Challenge of Bebop', *American Music*, 17:4, 1999, pp. 422–446 (p. 438).

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

note that the creators of bebop were interested in synthesising European and African musics and fusing them together to create something new.

Music of the Black Atlantic

Although Gillespie and Parker disagreed about bebop's rootedness in jazz, they both shared cultural aspirations and musical tastes that spanned the breadth and depth of the Black Atlantic. It is well documented that these sonic trailblazers were interested in Afro-Cuban rhythmic concepts and European classical styles – though while there is 'evidence to suggest that Afro-Cuban musicians were involved in the development of bebop from an early stage', some historians note that it was not until the late 1940s that the beboppers began collaborating with Afro-Cuban and African musicians.²¹ The influences of trumpeter Mario Bauza, vocalist and conguero Chano Pozo, and bandleader Machito, for example, can be heard 'in Gillespie's 1947 Afro-Cuban-influenced big band hit, "Mantecada," his other recordings with Chano Pozo, and in Parker's 1948 and 1949 recordings with Machito's Afro-Cuban group'.²² In 1948 Gillespie co-wrote "Cubano Be, Cubano Bop" with pianist and composer George Russell, who 'built upon the theme that Gillespie had sketched out for the first part, adding a modal introduction. Russell wrote the second part himself and added a section where Pozo improvised passages on percussion and vocals. There were a variety of influences in the piece, but the main goal was to synthesise elements of Afro-Cuban and "traditional" jazz rhythms.'²³

In terms of the European influence, Parker's interest in contemporary classical music was 'well-known', and also 'emblematic of many of the beboppers' aversion to musical

²¹ Jesse Stewart, 'No Boundary Line to Art: "Bebop" as Afro-Modernist Discourse', *American Music*, 29:3, 2011, pp. 332-352 (p. 341).

²² Porter, p. 434

²³ Ibid.

boundaries. Parker quoted classical motifs in his solos, [and] discussed the work of Stravinsky and other composers in interviews', namely Paul Hindemith.²⁴ He also 'hoped to take lessons in composition from Edgard Varèse'.²⁵

The bebop pioneers also explored African music and culture. Gillespie recalled that his concerts for the African Academy of Arts and Research in New York in 1945, with both African and Cuban drummers, influenced his sound. He recollected that they also 'played for a dancer they had, named Asadata Dafora... Those concerts... turned out to be tremendous. Through that experience, Charlie Parker and I found the connections between Afro-Cuban and African music and discovered the identity of our music with theirs.' ²⁶

Explorations of drumming and thinking were also conducted by Art Blakey, who took an interest in Islamic philosophy and religion whilst spending a year on the African continent in 1948. Although the artist claimed that his trip to the motherland was concerned with philosophical and spiritual enlightenment rather than to study music, it has been noted that Blakey's 1953 recording 'Messages from Kenya' and 'later African-themed albums [along with] his intricate cross-rhythms, use of space, and manipulation of pitch suggest he was profoundly influenced by African drummers'.²⁷

African cultural production and its influence on American bebop musicians, therefore, was not the only source of inspiration for creativity migrating from that continent: spiritual and political forces also shaped the artists' consciousness. Besides Blakey, who is said to have started his quest for spirituality after he was 'almost beaten to death by a white policeman in Louisiana for failing to address him as sir', Gillespie

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid..

²⁶ Stewart, p. 342.

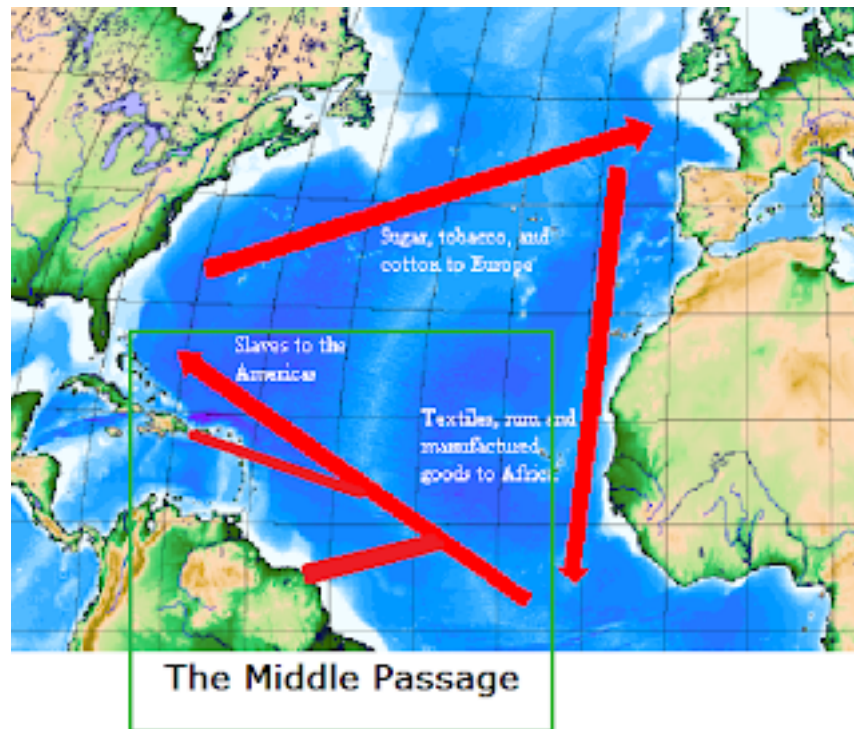
²⁷ Porter, p. 437.

claimed in 1948 that many African American bebop artists turned to Islam in response to the unfathomable ways in which society treated them.²⁸

Despite the racial and cultural politics surrounding the music, though, there appears to be a consensus that the basic origins of what came to be known as bebop were rooted in jam sessions in Harlem clubs in 1941 and developed by a handful of musicians, three of whom were John Birks ‘Dizzy’ Gillespie, Thelonious Monk and Charlie ‘Bird’ Parker. More significant, though, is the notion that bebop, as an idiom, centres around improvisation and the fusion of American jazz, European classical music and African aesthetic styles. And as demonstrated in the case of Art Blakey and others, New York bebop was also shaped by spiritual and political ideas imported into America from Africa and the Middle East. It can therefore be argued that bebop is a hybrid cultural form shaped by movement and cross-fertilisation that draws from a myriad cultural origins and is inflected by multiple styles. Bebop blurs the lines between racial, cultural and national absolutism and can indeed be considered a music of the Black Atlantic.²⁹

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ See Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, for a discussion of the dangers of racial and cultural absolutism, and the notion that black popular cultures are historically shaped by the social, political and cultural exchange between Africa, the Caribbean, Europe and the Americas.



Map of the Middle Passage: The triangular transatlantic slave trade. Source: whoiskuntakinte.blogspot.com

Building on Paul Gilroy's seminal work *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), postcolonial scholar Rachel Gillet produced a critical reading of the music of the Black Atlantic. Her analysis sheds light on the social, political and cultural forces that historically helped mould bebop. Gillet asserts that

we can literally hear how movement around the Atlantic Ocean has shaped history when we listen to popular music. Music shows us how land-based national histories can never really reflect human experience. [We] can never really understand jazz... if [we] don't understand how transnational exchanges shapes the music. The sounds, the harmonies, the beats trace back to various African regions, but they wouldn't exist without the cross-fertilisation of European folk tunes imported by the new world, imported to the new world, in ships.³⁰

Although bebop's basic origins were embedded in a specific locality – that is, Harlem – influences and ideas that helped shape the New York beboppers' sound transcended nation states and geographical space. These, as we have seen, originated in Africa and

³⁰ Rachel Gillett, 'What is the Black Atlantic? University of Utrecht, *UUHistory*, youtube.com [last accessed 28 August 2020].

Europe, and they were initially imported to the Americas and the Caribbean on ships through the transatlantic slave trade.

Once the music migrated to London and Soho, it was further transformed. While at first the London-based pioneers emulated records by Parker and Gillespie, bebop was reshaped by the transnational, transcultural and transracial live performances in its new geographical setting in dark and dingy Soho basement clubs. Similar to what had happened in Harlem, bebop became a local expression of a transatlantic, transnational music. However, unlike in America, where bebop was initiated solely by African American men, in Soho the music was played by black and white musicians from across the continents of Europe, Africa, North America and the Caribbean. This is detailed further on, as is the notion that all of these features together came to symbolise a threat to the establishment due to the unique social relations in which the music was produced.

Before looking at the musicians, bands and clubs in Soho, however, it is important to ask specific questions concerning bebop's arrival and reception in Britain. When did the music make the crossing from New York to London? How did it get there? And how was it received by the music press once there?

Bebop's reception by the music press in Britain



Dizzy Gillespie by William Gottlieb, 1 January 1940

Getty Images

On 31 August 1946, *Melody Maker* journalist Seymour Wise wrote a piece entitled 'What is Bebop?'.³¹ The strapline positioned Wise as 'Britain's foremost disciple of the "New Music" [and an aficionado] who has studied the movement since its birth in the states 5 years ago'.³² The article was amongst the first to feature any discourse about bebop in any media source in Britain.³³

In a detailed commentary, Wise stated that

Many people are asking: what is Be-bop? Is it something new, something apart from what we understand as jazz; or is it merely a new name for something that has been going on for years? The answer to the latter is that it is new in the sense

³¹ Seymour Wise, 'What is Bebop?', *Melody Maker*, 31 August 1946, p. 5.

³² Ibid.

³³ An article about bebop appeared in the music press a few months before this piece. The piece, entitled 'Dixieland is Dated: Hail Be-Bop!', was printed in *Melody Maker*, May 11, 1946, p.7. and was also written by Seymour Wise.

of being widely recognised only in the last few years, but it has, nevertheless, been in the process of development for the past five years.³⁴

Wise declares that the music ‘is an entirely new jazz medium, a style based on augmented chords, elaborate phrases apparently unconnected to each other, departing from the traditional use of chord progressions, assimilating fabulous technique and drive, while disregarding conventional jazz accentuation’.³⁵ Wise’s article not only goes on to demonstrate that bebop marks a distinct aesthetic shift in structure and form away from previous genres of jazz, but also identifies bebop as culturally subversive, a conception noted earlier in this thesis.

Wise’s feature in *Melody Maker* paved the way for an avalanche of heated discourse in the music press that placed bebop at the heart of debates concerning *taste*. Letters published by discerning New Orleans-style fans railed against the revolutionary sound. Bebop enthusiasts and journalists attempted to define the music and defended the style, while traditional New Orleans fans demonised this new, avant-garde phenomenon.

The monthly periodical *Jazz Journal*, edited by Sinclair Trail, first went to press in April 1948, and was the only other magazine in England at that time to represent jazz, alongside *Melody Maker*. Many of its writers, however, were pro-Dixieland aficionados and pushed a protectionist narrative. The pages of *Jazz Journal* were smattered with pro-New Orleans viewpoints that denigrated bebop. In the letters pages, for instance, fans of traditional jazz bellowed comments such as:

And so to bop. Just because every musician in the country raves about bop, it does not prove that bop is good music. It might as well be stated that because almost every drummer raves about Hampton’s *Chasing with Chase*, the record is wonderful music. No – I think musicians of the modern school are too concerned with the admiration of technique and fancy chords... and ignore the important qualities in jazz such as sincerity, enthusiasm, and authenticity.³⁶

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Letters page, *Jazz Journal*, April 1949, p. 6.

The distinction between feeling, perceived to be an authentic characteristic of traditional jazz, and intellect, noted to be a defining feature of the modern jazz, was the focus of much animated discussion in the music press. Some readers expressed opinions that not only disparaged bebop but also verbally assaulted the cultural styles and fashion associated with the genre [the styles that defined the bebop identity, and the ways in which the music press and the popular press demonised those styles, are explored in greater depth in the next chapter]. For instance, *Jazz Journal* published letters from Dixieland fans that saw the ‘advanced modernist [as] an unfortunate character who only really likes the music of the future and... needs to rely on his imagination to a great extent. This tends to bring on a form of neurosis which manifests itself in a special sort of haircut that can only be likened to the back end of a cat.’³⁷

Some writers in *Jazz Journal*, however, leapt to the defence of bebop. Steve Race protected this form of musical expression, and wrote about the complex nature and intricacies not only of bebop as a concept, but of jazz more generally. In a piece that echoed the American discourse concerning bebop, Race stated that

the business of terminology has been the curse of bop. The very word has been picked up by the lay, unbelievably very lay, press and tossed back and forth between contributors in the belief that it will sell a paper almost as well as the equally magical and far more delectable word sex. You have to determine just what a thing is before you can satisfactorily bestow upon it your undying hatred – a point which is often lost sight of by the anti-bop brigade. If at this period in time you have decided just what bop is, then you are a better man than Gunga Din, or even Brian Halliwell. So far as I am concerned, the nearest anyone has yet come to a definition is Leonard Feather in his book “Inside Bebop.” He writes: You can only say that certain characteristics, when all found in the same performance, very often constitute bop. Probably each of these characteristics can be found in earlier forms of jazz, though you will rarely find them all together except in bebop. For example, the flattened fifth is nothing new in music, nor is the customary four in a bar rhythm section pattern. The use of grace notes is not peculiar to bop, nor is the accenting of up beats, or the use of

³⁷ Letters page, *Jazz Journal*, April 1949, p. 6. Lionel Hampton (1908–2002) was an American jazz musician. During the early 1940s he began playing in the bebop idiom with (amongst others) Charlie Parker and Charles Mingus.

passing chords, but if these elements are all incorporated in a certain jazz solo, the chances are the result will be bop.³⁸

Jazz historian Dave Gelly alludes to the ideological perspectives of both the revivalists of New Orleans jazz and the brand-new bebop music in his book *An Unholy Row: Jazz in Britain and its Audience: 1945–1960* (2014). Gelly mentions the cultural opposition between bebop and trad jazz in the immediate post-war years. He writes that ‘the distinction between real jazz and dance music... settled down into a clear ideology... Among revivalists, the reasoning went something like this: “Jazz is music of sincerity, self-expression and the free spirit. It is not entertainment for sale, and does not pander to fashion and popular taste.”’³⁹ Modernists, on the other hand, ‘had a different anti-commercial rationale... The ideology was entirely self-generated. There was no trace of anything remotely like it among the pioneers whose work the revivalists were emulating – quite the reverse, in fact.’⁴⁰

Wise, Race, Trail and other articles by critics in the music press raise important questions concerning definitions of the term bebop, and the routes and flows of the music across the Atlantic into Britain. How exactly, for example, did bebop make its transatlantic voyage? Who was importing the music into Britain? Why did bebop cause such a stir in the music press and antagonise the keepers of traditional jazz? The next section maps the birth of the bebop scene in Soho, and traces its development throughout London’s West End. I uncover the hidden history of bebop in Britain by demonstrating that, contrary to received cultural narratives about bebop being pioneered by all-white East End men at Club Eleven in 1948, the music was in fact initiated in Soho by a racially and ethnically diverse bunch of artists at least two years earlier.

³⁸ Steve Race, ‘The Other Side of the Picture’, *Jazz Journal*, May 1949, p. 6.

³⁹ Gelly, p. 23.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

The birth of bebop in Britain: The Fullado Club, Soho, 1945–1947



Bacon's Map of Soho, 1948.

Source: British Library

The Fullado Club, located at 6 New Compton Street, Soho, was ‘the first place where English bebop musicians got together as groups and played’.⁴¹ This assertion is supported by numerous musicians, including saxophonist Don Rendell. Rendell challenged received cultural narratives about Club Eleven [also in Soho] as the first bebop club in Britain, in a piece written for *Jazz Professional* (1967), some twenty-one years after the birth of the bebop scene in Britain:

Let me say, first of all, that what follows is a personal record, rather than a comprehensive account. It will relate to the development in Britain of what is generally termed “modern jazz” – although this music has been developing for well over 20 years now. Also I shall be dealing, mainly, with small-group jazz – the area which I have been operating in most of the time. The fountainhead of the “modern” movement in this country is usually said to have been the Club Eleven, which existed in the late ’forties. Actually, though, things started happening a little earlier at a club in [New] Compton Street, known then as the Fullado Club, where jazz was played non-stop from 3 p.m. until midnight. Most of the musicians who were associated with the Club Eleven used to play there. The difference being that, at the Fullado, we played only for kicks – not for cash!⁴²

⁴¹ Laurie Morgan, *Smoky Dives*, BBC4, 2001, youtube.com [last accessed on 02/08/2020].

⁴² Don Rendell, *Jazz Professional* [1967], jazzprofessional.com, 2011 [last accessed 24 February 2020].

The club's precise chronology is largely obscure, but it was unquestionably functioning as the Fullado between late 1945 and late 1947, when it was raided by police and permanently closed down. No photographs exist of the Fullado Club.⁴³ In terms of the musicians, however, the British Library's National Sound Archive project *Oral Histories of Jazz in Britain* conducted interviews with various actors that were amongst the early pioneers of bebop in Britain, and a number of these players evoked the racial and economic ownership of the club.

Lennie Bush, for example, remembers that the club was small, independent and black-owned, surviving on the money made from the sale of alcohol. Bush recalls that he 'used to play in the Fullado Club, the little coloured club [where] the predominant smell was rum and [peppermint] ... [T]hey sold enough drink [in there] to keep the club going.'⁴⁴ Jimmy Skidmore claims that the Fullado Club was 'owned by an African fella called Alex, and he had a partner called Arthur who was a drummer'.⁴⁵ Jack Chilkes adds to this portrait, recollecting that he 'started deputising for a West Indian there and got the job'.⁴⁶

Musician Eddie Harvey, not one of the players credited with pioneering bebop in Soho but one who converted to the idiom a few years later, recalled the excitement in dark, dreary, bomb-battered London after World War Two. He claims that artists would make their way from the other side of town to the Fullado, brimming with hope and optimism despite the demoralising conditions. Harvey says that immediately after the

⁴³ During the course of my research, I have not found any existing photographs of the Fullado Club. There are, however, photos of the *venue* from early 1945 when it was the Bouillabaisse Club. See Felix Mann's photo essay 'Inside London's Coloured Clubs', *Picture Post*, July 17, 1943.

⁴⁴ Lennie Bush, *Oral History of Jazz in Britain*, The National Sound Archive, British Library, interviewed by Pete Vacher, 1992.

⁴⁵ Jimmy Skidmore, *Oral History of Jazz in Britain*, The National Sound Archive, British Library, interviewed by Digby Fairweather, 1991.

⁴⁶ Jack Chilkes, *Oral History of Jazz in Britain*, The National Sound Archive, British Library, interviewed by Andrew Simons, 1994.

war, ‘in other less fortunate areas, the East End in particular, the temper of the people was noticeably sadder and angrier, envious even. And there are stories, true to this day, of musicians climbing through the East End debris and rubble and walking all the way into Soho to play at... the Fullado Club.’⁴⁷

In terms of the club’s interior, the Fullado was a small dingy room, ‘not much of a place... just a basement bar with a few tables and chairs and a serviceable upright piano’.⁴⁸ Lennie Bush further describes the social, cultural and ethnically diverse nature of the musicians and audience that frequented the club:

It was a musicians’ hangout, but they also mixed with the clientele who used to drink and smoke down there; they were mainly black... The clientele was mainly West Indians, Africans and some black American Servicemen, but mainly local blacks... At the Fullado there were black musicians. Bertie King, Carl Barriteau, a saxophone player called George Tyndale. There were quite a lot of black players about in those days. A trumpet player called Pete Pitterson... The Fullado was where you learned tunes. The first time I heard Charlie Parker was in the Fullado, it was Groovin’ High.⁴⁹

Contrary to conventional wisdom that posits the first wave of bebop pioneers in Britain as mainly white Londoners, such as Godbolt (1986), and McKay (2005), Bush’s account demonstrates that they first played with black musicians in a black-owned Soho club.⁵⁰ This previously unexplored oral history reveals that early bebop bands in Soho crossed racial boundaries. Not only that, but it allows us to speculate – due to the notion that black American servicemen, black musicians from the colonies and local black musicians exchanged ideas, improvised and jammed together with white musicians

⁴⁷ Eddie Harvey, quoted in Paulo Hewitt, *Soul Stylists: Six Decades of Modernism – From Mods to Casuals* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing Company, 2000), p. 29.

⁴⁸ Gelly, p. 38.

⁴⁹ Bush, 1992. There appears to be some conflict regarding this record. Both Parker and Gillespie recorded the tune, although the credit for the writing is Gillespie’s. In the oral history account quoted above, Lennie Bush says it was Charlie’s Parker’s ‘Groovin’ High’ he first heard at the Fullado, not Gillespie’s.

⁵⁰ Godbolt and McKay both claim that British bebop was pioneered by ‘mainly’ white London based musicians. Moreover, McKay situates Club Eleven (1948) as the starting point of bebop in Britain, and then discusses black beboppers in the 1950s. And Godbolt, while also acknowledging there were a few black players in British bebop, discusses their contributions to the music after 1948 and during the 1950s.

from the East End – that the multi-layered, avant-garde bebop style being created and performed at the Fullado Club was not only transatlantic, transnational and collectively transracial, but also hybrid and transcultural, an idea that will be explored further on. These transcultural and interracial musical exchanges between white East Enders and black Jamaican, Trinidadian and West African musicians were taking place and were presented to the public two years before the first wave of post-war migrants from the colonies arrived in Britain on the SS *Windrush* in 1948.

Bush also alludes to a highly significant historical moment: the first time he heard Charlie Parker's music, one of the architects of the bebop idiom, was at the Fullado, and he goes on to describe the mind-altering effect that the song bestowed on him.

'Groovin' High', he says,

was [the type of music] I'd been looking for all my life. Rhythmically it was more sophisticated [than other forms of jazz] and harmonically it was [too]. People like Charlie Parker and Dexter Gordon, and Dizzy of course, and Roy Eldridge – who was a precursor to Dizzy, but they are all kind of based on Louis [Armstrong]. So, it was a logical progression with the music, but everyone kind of went mad on it.⁵¹

Significantly, Bush's assertion is contrary to the claims of Parker and some of the music press that bebop was detached from the jazz tradition. This English bebopper says that the music was in fact based on Louis Armstrong – one of the major jazz icons of the early to mid- twentieth century.

With regard to the record, 'Groovin' High', there is an important question concerning its circulation. How did it come to be distributed amongst the English bebop pioneers? According to Dave Gelly,

we do not know when the first example of [bebop] itself was imported. Various London musicians have claimed that the first bebop record they heard was... Groovin' High, at the Fullado... The disc itself was the property of the

⁵¹ Bush, 1992.

cloakroom attendant, Horace, who played it repeatedly to anyone who would listen. The date is presumed to be late 1945 or early 46.⁵²

Not only is the actual date that the record circulated obscure, nothing more is known about the cloakroom attendant Horace. Considering that African American servicemen frequented the Fullado, however, it is possible that one of them brought the record into the club.

Further evidence that the Fullado Club's improvised jam sessions were transatlantic and transracial is demonstrated in another anecdote from Lennie Bush. Bush goes on to describe how the Fullado was where he first met some of the musicians that would later become credited with pioneering bebop in Britain:

I met Jack Fallon down there, he used to go and jam down at the Fullado. He used to stay in the Fullado all day until they chucked him out at ten thirty or eleven or whatever it was. There was Tony Crombie, Denny Wright, who was the house pianist at the Fullado, Arthur Amy had a kit of drums down there and Arthur Watts or me on bass. I met Crombie, Ronnie [Scott] and Denis Rose down there. They had been about a bit longer than me, they were two or three years older than me.⁵³

All of the musicians that Bush describes, except for Jack Fallon who was Canadian, are white English males, many of whom came from the East End of London, and many of them also went on to start the Club Eleven in 1948.

Tony Crombie and Ronnie Scott, the latter the co-founder of iconic Soho club Ronnie Scott's with Pete King in 1959, were according to Bush also joined by Denis Rose at the Fullado. A significant character on the bebop scene in post-war London, Rose, Don Rendell recalls, was

undoubtedly... the most progressive-thinking of all the jazz musicians that I met in those years... [a] frequent sitter-in on trumpet... I would unhesitatingly name [Rose] as the guv'nor during that period [around 1945-'47, that is]. He was always around, along with Ronnie Scott, Tommy Whittle, Johnny Dank-worth, Hank Shaw, Terry Brown, Dave Goldberg, Tommy Pollard, Lennie Bush, Laurie Morgan, Tony Crombie and many others.⁵⁴

⁵² Gelly, p. 36.

⁵³ Bush, 1992.

⁵⁴ Rendell, 1967.

Jack Parnell endorses Rendell's claim, asserting that 'Denis Rose was a huge influence. He seemed to get hold of bebop before anybody else'.⁵⁵ Incidentally, Rose was also related by marriage to a notorious criminal whose activities permeated the night-time economy of post-war Soho. As Lennie Bush recalled,

Jack Spot and [Albert Dimes] had a knife fight once on the corner of Frith Street and that was the demise of Jack Spot. Just before that time, whenever you went to Oxford Street you would see Jack Spot walking up the road with a couple of minders... Denis Rose actually married Jack Spot's daughter.⁵⁶

These oral history anecdotes illuminate the socially, culturally and racially diverse backgrounds of some of the first musicians in Britain to obtain bebop records, and who came together to play the music at the first bebop club, the Fullado.

Harlem in Soho

As bebop pioneers Lennie Bush and Don Rendell make clear, there were other musicians that also performed in groups and jammed together at the Fullado Club. This is vibrantly captured by *Melody Maker* writer Pat Brand. On 23 September 1946 the paper published an article by Brand, who earlier that week had ventured excitedly into Soho in pursuit of the underground music scene that was flourishing at the Fullado. Brand vividly describes the scene in Soho as he made his way there, observing the spectacle outside the club:

Between the stage door of the Saville Theatre and that point in Charing Cross where Tin Pan Alley gives place to Bookworm's Bazaar runs a street which we know as little Harlem, but which is more prosaically labelled New Compton Street. It is here that the coloured boys – musicians, film extras, dancers – gather each day to discuss work and play and the gossip of their calling, and perhaps to exchange, in their many dialects, news from homes in a sunnier and more

⁵⁵ Jack Parnell, *Oral History of Jazz in Britain*, The National Sound Archive, British Library, interviewed by Peter Vacher, 1955.

⁵⁶ Bush, 1992; Albert Dimes was a Scottish gangster born to Italian immigrant parents, who grew up in the Italian neighbourhood of Clerkenwell, London. In 1955, he and Jewish gangster Jack Spot had a knife-fight in a struggle for control of Soho nightclubs.

leisurely world. There is an atmosphere... of the original music which Tin Pan Alley has adopted as its own and now throws out month by month to the dancing youth of this country. I was strolling here early this week. The quick, strange talk of the coloured men was in my ears. The sun picked out white, laughing teeth and the flash of patent-leather toes dancing a few steps in momentary exuberance. The warm pavement itself seemed to throb to an African rhythm. I stood still and listened. It was there beneath my feet: that queer, insistent, monotonous yet compelling rhythm. I pushed open a door that opened to swiftly descending stairs, and the rhythm came up to me. I went down to meet it and was in the Fullado Club with Xanadu's African drummers beating out— on file-and-sawtooth and many-sized drums — the rhythms of their race.⁵⁷

Brand's evocative account not only portrays romantic and exotic notions of blackness at a time, significantly, two years before the post-war *Windrush* generation of Caribbean people migrated to Britain; the writer's description also captures the exciting and hip but alien scene developing in Soho at the Fullado Club. His mention of African drummers demonstrates that a syncretic mixture of improvised sounds was influencing the bebop being worked out and expressed at the Fullado.

As the artists themselves claimed, we know that the Fullado was frequented by black British people, as well as West Indians, West Africans and African American servicemen. As established in the previous chapter, these various ethnicities and black identities brought with them into the creative process their own unique cultural expressions.

As noted earlier, these various folk traditions were characterised by cross-fertilisation and movement across the Atlantic Ocean as the result of the transatlantic slave trade, and form the basis of jazz. In other words, these musics, which moved from Africa to the Americas, the Caribbean and Europe through forced migration, were characterised by their transatlantic journey and reshaped by the various diasporas

⁵⁷ Pat Brand, 'Brand's Essence', *Melody Maker*, 23 September 1946, p6. For a detailed description of black people living in Britain prior to the arrival of the *Windrush*, see Kenneth Little's seminal sociological account *Negroes in Britain: A Study of Racial Relations in English Society* (London: Routledge, 1972). Little's book provides statistics for the amount of black people living in London in 1946.

created by their relocation to numerous corners of the Black Atlantic world. However, these musics would not have existed without the Western ideas that were imported into the new world alongside them by imperialists. Similarly, in Soho, these diverse Black Atlantic musics were brought to London through colonialism, and their various musical expressions merged together and were articulated in their own unique way. Due to the fact that many of these musicians of African descent crossed over from playing various forms of swing, dance and folk music to bebop, we can speculate that their musical backgrounds would have affected the bebop jam sessions taking place at the Fullado.

And to reiterate, unlike in America, where bebop was created solely by African American musicians, in Soho these sounds and textures were created and performed together with white musicians from London – some of whom, such as John Dankworth, were formally educated at the Royal Academy of Music, a point that will be discussed more further on. It seems plausible to suggest that English, African and American ideas together helped shape early British bebop.

The way in which Brand suggests that the ‘queer, insistent, monotonous’ sound was right beneath his feet also conjures up a sense of this foreign music coming up from below – from hell. His image of the pavement outside the Fullado Club throbbing to an African rhythm implies that the geographical space of Soho had become engulfed by alien cultural forces. This is not to say that Brand intentionally represents Soho and the Fullado Club in this way. The journalist is clearly awestruck by the exciting, strange new scene evolving there, but when looking at the social, political and historical conditions in which the article was written – the time of the Empire and British colonialism – this racialised portrayal of Soho would have possibly seemed threatening to some of the readers.

The notion that both black and white musicians played subversive bebop together in this transgressive space can be seen in the rest of the article. Brand continues:

From the piano on the rostrum came a bar or two from Tommy Pollard. Now and then the guitars of Alan Ferguson and Pete Chilvers swung in to swell the rhythm, and the beat of Pat Reilly's bass added a new sub-tone. On drums, "Flash" Winstone aided his African colleagues... I saw Max Jones at a table and sat down with him studying the design for the stage setting of "Congo Cavalcade" – Duncan Whyte's new stage project for which all this was a rehearsal. Already, after only a fortnight's work, bookers are interested in what, to judge from the music I heard when Duncan came back from conferring with compere Ainsley Stewart and sat down with his trumpet to lead them into "Caldonia," ought to prove not only a first-rate jazz presentation for the layman, but also a most informative live spectacle for the jazz student as well, since the programme ranges from the unembellished origins of jazz as exemplified by the African drummers, to the finished performance of a "Slipped Disc" and de Falla's "Fire Dance" by accordion champion Lorna Martin.⁵⁸

What Brand witnessed at the Fullado Club appears to be highly intricate, multi-dimensional, transcultural exchange between black and white musicians. His account reveals the various strands of music being fused together by the transracial band. As already established, Tommy Pollard and Pete Chilvers were known as being among the original bebop pioneers in Britain. Cecil 'Flash' Winstone was also there at the start, and in this moment was aiding his African colleagues in the production of the sound on drums.

The report explains that Duncan Whyte, a musician that Don Rendell performed with in his Astoria Ballroom Band, leads the ensemble into 'Caldonia'. This is a significant insight, as that record started life as straightforward swing, but was reproduced in the bebop idiom. In *The Birth of Bebop*, Scott DeVeaux explains that

Caldonia was yet another Louis Jordan tune, transformed in [Woody] Herman's reading from a sly, unpretentious blues burlesque to a hard-edged virtuoso piece... Jordan later remembered [that] "He did it up real fast. Mine was medium tempo – bump-be-dump-be, bump-be-dump-be-doo-do-doo." Jordan's astonishing falsetto yodel on the chorus ("Cadon-ia! Caldon-ia!"), rocketing more than an octave to land unerringly on the upper tonic, is gone, displaced by

⁵⁸ Ibid, Brand, p. 6.

discordant, almost jeering shouts from the band. The focus shifts instead to the instrumental commentary – improvised solos and riffs, culminating in the famous full-chorus unison trumpet passage that cemented Herman as a Harbinger of bop. The immediate source for this passage was Neal Hefti, who had worked it out as a solo routine on another blues, “Woodchopper’s Ball,” before folding it into the head arrangement on “Caldonia.” But its obvious inspiration, as Hefti freely admitted, was Dizzy Gillespie.⁵⁹

As the Fullado Club was the first space in Britain where bebop musicians got together as groups and played, it is almost certain that Ainsley Stewart’s trumpet section on ‘Caldonia’ was copied from Hefti’s version – and the latter confirms that his source of inspiration for the passage was one of the architects of bebop, Dizzy Gillespie. As Don Rendell pointed out, ‘at the Fullado Club... We did things like the Gillespie arrangements of “That’s Earl, Brother” and “Cubano Be, Cubano Bop.” ... Denis [Rose] had a very thorough understanding of Dizzy’s kind of music.’⁶⁰ Although referring to a different occasion, Rendell’s assertion is significant. His claim that the British beboppers were learning the idiom from American records and arrangements at the club suggests that the passage on ‘Caldonia’ being played by the band was also in the bebop idiom.

Furthermore, Xanadu’s African Drummers, said by Brand to be exemplifying the ‘unembellished origins of jazz’, jamming together with Winstone, Reilly and Pete Chilvers [three of the white bebop pioneers from London], again perhaps indicates that a localised expression of a transatlantic cultural form, bebop, was being created in this moment. Inflections of bebop phrasing, for example, the basic forms that originated in the clubs of Harlem, were being fused together in a Soho basement by black musicians from the colonies playing pure African rhythms – which, as demonstrated earlier, had formed the basis and provided the raw material for jazz – accompanied by another

⁵⁹ DeVeaux, p. 359.

⁶⁰ Rendell, p. 3.

drummer who was a white Londoner and English guitarists, also from London. In this way, bebop was starting to become localised in Soho, on however small a scale, due to the transracial and transcultural jamming at the Fullado Club.

Anthropologist Fernando Ortiz developed the notion of *transculturation* to analyse the transformation that a society's native culture undergoes when it merges with a migrant or imperial colonising culture. Transculturation was coined by Ortiz as 'a critical category developed to grasp the complex transformation of cultures brought together in the crucible of colonial and imperial histories.'⁶¹ He describes it as an idea that

better expressed the different phases of the process of transition from one culture to another because this does not consist merely in acquiring another culture, which is what the English word *acculturation* really implies, but the process also necessarily involves the loss or uprooting of a previous culture, which could be defined as a deculturation. In addition it carries the idea of the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena, which could be called neoculturation. In the end... the result of every union of cultures is similar to that of the reproductive process between individuals: the offspring always has something of both parents but is always different from each of them.⁶²

Diana Taylor emphasises that 'transculturation affects the entire culture; it involves the shifting of... aesthetic borders; it modifies collective and individual identity'.⁶³

Transculturation helps us understand the complex social, cultural and aesthetic processes that affected bebop within the Soho bebop clubs following its migration there from New York. Although the style was formulated in Harlem [though as we have seen it can be considered a music of the Black Atlantic, shaped by movement and cross-fertilisation], once it migrated across the Atlantic to Soho it did not merely carry on as it was in its New York context. Bebop had begun to be reshaped and localised due to its

⁶¹ Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 102.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Diana Taylor, 'Transculturating Transculturation', *Performing Arts Journal*, 13:2, 1991, pp. 90–104 (p. 90).

new geographical setting and the convergence of musicians with various cultural backgrounds playing the music at the Fullado. Again, we can speculate that West African musicians from the colonies living in London, black American servicemen, West Indians [also subjects of the British Empire] and white male musicians born and raised in London – one or two of whom were schooled in formal Western music at English institutions – all of whom collectively shared the creative space at the Fullado Club, would have inflected the live performances, however subtly, with their various social, cultural and musical backgrounds.

The transatlantic migration of bebop records to Britain, 1947

The following year, the transatlantic flow of bebop records from America into Soho began to increase. According to various sources, from 1947 some of the English pioneers who had started to play bebop at the Fullado Club began travelling to New York City. Dave Gelly notes that Laurie Morgan, ‘who sold his drums to raise the fare’, and Ronnie Scott and Tony Crombie, ‘who scraped together just enough to buy one-way tickets on Icelandic Airways’, all took voyages to the US by sea or air that transformed their lives. While in New York, the travellers heard the orchestrators of bebop play live, and it is said that these ‘adventurers returned full of zeal, bearing records which were played endlessly among the initiated’.⁶⁴

Subsequently, these musicians found work on board the *Queen Mary*, playing in Geraldo’s band, where they continued to make regular crossings across the Atlantic to and from New York. Writing in the *Jazz Journal*, Maurice Burman stated that:

there is a new way of finding out what goes on in America and it is a way that never happened in the old days. It is this, that musicians are now going to America to hear the latest and best in bop. While it was unthinkable in the 20 and 30’s, now it is something that our best musicians do as a kind of education.

⁶⁴ Gelly, p. 39.

Which brings us to the present day, Ronnie Scott is the latest one to return here after taking a trip working as a musician on the Queen Mary.⁶⁵

Not only were these musicians gaining a vital education through hearing bebop being performed live by its originators in New York's clubs, the records they returned with circulated amongst the other London beboppers. These were listened to attentively at musicians' flats and then performed live at the Fullado Club. According to Jack Chilkes,

people would come and sit in [at the Fullado]. Ronnie Scott came in quite regularly... we're talking about late 47. Carlo Krahmer's place was down the road and some of the boys would come in and say, "look what I got from Carlo." And we would hear it. The people that came in and played mostly liked the things we liked.⁶⁶

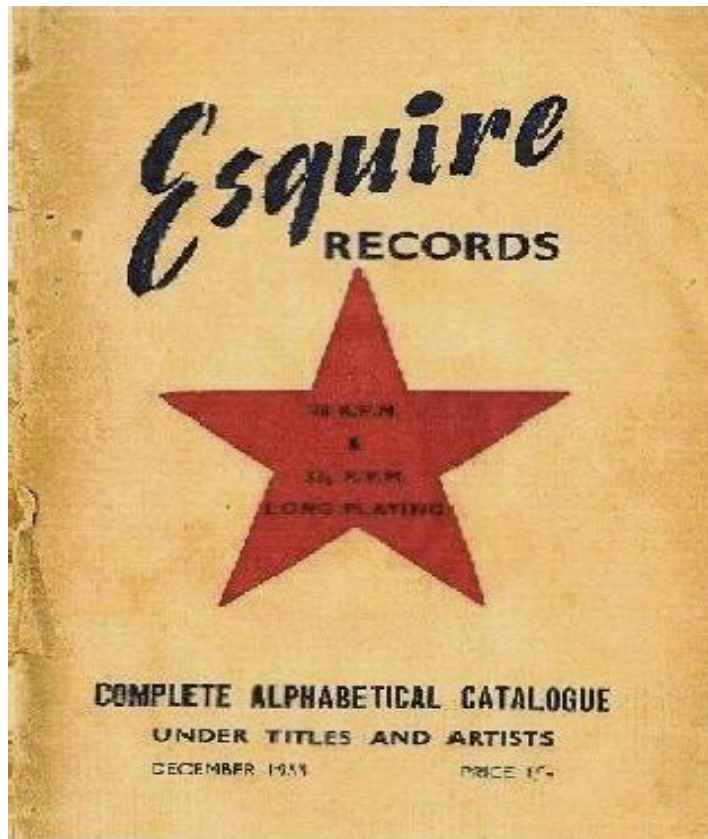
Carlo Krahmer was an instrumental figure in the network through which black American cultural production flowed into Britain during that period, and was responsible for reproducing and then distributing the music that Scott, Crombie, Morgan and, later, John Dankworth returned with following their trips to New York. In an oral history account, Lennie Bush recalls that Krahmer 'used to get people that worked on the ships to bring records back, then he would make acetates of them and sell them. We would go around someone's pad and play records and smoke dope all night.'⁶⁷ The role of drug consumption in Soho's bebop clubs is explored in chapter four. Here the key fact is that, through obtaining and distributing the early records brought back to Britain, Krahmer and co-founder Peter Newbrook set up the country's first bebop label, Esquire Records, in 1947.

⁶⁵ Maurice Burman, 'Bop', *Jazz Journal*, September, 1948, p. 14

⁶⁶ Chilkes, 1994.

⁶⁷ Bush, 1992.

Recording and distribution



Early Esquire Records catalogue cover, December 1953

Source: henrybebop.com

Krahmer and Newbrook started the label from Krahmer's apartment in Bedford Court Mansions, not far from Denmark Street, the home of Tin Pan Alley in Soho. In his autobiography, *Basslines: A Life in Jazz* (2002), musician Coleridge Goode recalls those early days:

Carlo lived, as he had for years, in... central London in a big flat in Bedford Court Mansions with his wife Greta and he had his recording studio there in the basement. There were endless rows of records around the walls, the recording equipment was all at one end of the room and he had a big Voigt speaker, which at the time was the best you could get. Carlo's flat was a popular meeting place for musicians. I already knew the place because I used to go there occasionally since the time he and I had first known each other working with Johnny Claes.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Coleridge Goode, *Basslines: A Life in Jazz* (London: Northway Publications, 2002), p. 64.

Krahmer and Newbrook began to issue 'Charlie Parker records on their Esquire label from 1948'.⁶⁹ They 'undertook leasing deals with American record companies and modern jazz predominated' in their output.⁷⁰

Newbrook and Krahmer are noted to have supported the British beboppers from the very beginning, and their catalogue largely consisted of British musicians and bands.

Esquire was also known as a

boon to collectors. From the very earliest days they printed the recording dates and personnels on the labels or later the sleeves of the records. Besides Ronnie Scott, other British beboppers were recorded early in their careers: Johnny Dankworth, Denis Rose, Tommy Pollard, Victor Feldman, Eddie Thompson (all from 1948) – Jimmy Deuchar (1951) – Kenny Graham (1952), being just a few, later came Tommy Whittle, Harry Klein, Joe Harriott, and Vic Lewis.⁷¹

Deuchar, Graham and the Jamaican alto-saxophonist Joe Harriott are all detailed in chapter five, where I sketch the bebop scene in Soho in the early 1950s. The important point to make here is that these oral histories by musicians and archival accounts in the music press all shed light on a brand-new underground music scene which had started to reshape Soho's social, cultural and musical landscape. These numerous portraits demonstrate that multiple influences – crossing not only racial, ethnic and cultural lines but also physical and national borders – ushered bebop into existence in Britain. In an incredibly short space of time, the nascent bebop scene in Soho had developed from the point at which the musicians at the Fullado Club first heard 'Groovin' High' and a few other records such as the bebop rendition of 'Caldonia' in late 1945 and early 1946, presumably brought into the country by African American servicemen, to records being brought back from New York by Morgan, Scott and Crombie in 1947 and to Carlo Krahmer and Peter Newbrook setting up the first bebop label, Esquire Records, in the same year.

⁶⁹ Jim Godbolt, *A History of jazz in Britain, 1919–1950*, p. 214.

⁷⁰ 'Carlo Krahmer and Esquire', henrybebop.co.uk [last accessed 31 January 2019].

⁷¹ Ibid.

As *Melody Maker* writer Pat Brand's illuminating portrait of the musical process at the Fullado Club shows, a local approach to bebop was beginning to take shape.

Localising bebop in Soho

Tito Burns is one of the early British beboppers who affirms that the music was being localised in Soho, and was thereby slightly different to its American counterpart. In an article for *Melody Maker*, Burns sheds light on the aesthetic lines that distinguished the Soho drummers from the New York originators:

Listen to any record of Charlie Parker, Dizzy, Fats Navarro, and many other bop styles. The drummer does not drown everything else. Sure, he plays in the bop idiom, bass-drum accent here, an occasional side-drum fill in there, but is in sympathy with the front-line soloist. That is the main difference, I think, between English drummers and American. The English drummer plays a thirty-two-bar chorus all on his own— never mind what the soloist is doing — whereas the American drummer realises he is there, first, to provide that much-needed “beat” (for the want of a better word), and secondly the occasional fill-in I have already mentioned.⁷²

Although this article was published some time after Pat Brand's description of the musical process at the Fullado Club, it is demonstrative of the type of youthful, rebellious playing that was seemingly the norm for the British bebop musicians that were affiliated with the Fullado. Drumming, however, was not the only musical component being worked out locally by the Soho pioneers. In his book *Trad Dads, Dirty Boppers and Free Fusioneers: British Jazz, 1960–1975* (2012), Duncan Heining alludes to the idea that bebop in Soho was starting to be reshaped during this historical moment. Discussing the saxophone playing of the musicians in 1940s Soho, Heining insists that ‘The importance of this tranche of British modern jazz musicians cannot be underestimated. They were picking up on a musical style from America still in its infancy. If one dates the birth of bebop in the USA to 1941/2, Ronnie Scott, Dankworth

⁷² Tito Burns, ‘Bebop in dance tempo – it can be done’, *Melody Maker*, 28 August 1948, p. 5.

and others were beginning to fashion their own take on the new form just five or six years later.⁷³ Heining notes that the 1991 four-volume compilation set *Bebop in Britain*, released on Charley Records,

provides a valuable insight into the attempts of the groups of Dankworth, Scott... Tito Burns and Vic Lewis to grasp the new vernacular. One can already hear a number of musicians beginning to develop a style of their own and perhaps one or two writers just beginning to find their compositional voice. The earliest tunes on the record – “Lady be Good”, “What Is This Thing Called Love?”, “Boppin’ at Esquire” and “Idabop”... were recorded in January 1948.⁷⁴

Furthermore, Heining asserts that: ‘These early British modernists need to be judged... on the progress they were making, both as emulators and in developing a local approach to the music’, indicating that bebop in Soho was indeed starting to become slightly reshaped in its Soho setting in the late 1940s.⁷⁵

Although there are no black bebop players recorded on these tracks, we know that Pete Pitterson – a Jamaican and a regular player at the Fullado Club – had also ‘in the late 1940s... toured with Vic Lewis and broadcast with Jack Fallon’s band’.⁷⁶ Both Lewis and Fallon were recorded for Charley Records’ *Bebop in Britain*. Therefore, although his contributions were not laid down on vinyl, it is evident that Pitterson – one of many black musicians at the Fullado, together with George Tyndale and Xanadu’s African Drummers – jammed in transracial bands and performed bebop live, helping to develop this local approach to the music in late 1940s Soho.

Evidence, then, suggests that the bebop scene in Soho had begun to flourish at the Fullado Club, and that it consisted of black and white artists, who had not merely emulated Parker and Gillespie but who had also started to localise the music, even if only vaguely, and this can be heard on some of the early British recordings.

⁷³ Duncan Heining, *Trad Dads, Dirty Boppers and Free Fusioneers: British Jazz, 1960–1975* (Sheffield: Equinox Publishing Limited, 2012), p. 64.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ ‘Other Brass and Saxes, Pete Pitterson’, henrybebop.com [last accessed 14 December 2019].

In terms of the live scene, Jack Chilkes supports this claim, insisting ‘that [the Fullado] club was quite something because we started to experiment there, and afterwards they formed Club Eleven’.⁷⁷ In late 1947, however, Chilkes tells us, ‘the Fullado Club... was eventually raided. In fact, I was involved the night it was raided... the club was closed and that was the end of that.’⁷⁸ The police raid on the Fullado Club is explored in depth in chapter four.

The Tito Burns Sextet, Ray Ellington Quartet and commercial bebop



Ray Ellington Quartet, London, 1948. Source: Getty

Following the police raid, individual white musicians such as Pete Chilver, Jack Fallon, Ronnie Scott, Lennie Bush and Tommy Pollard – all of whom had jammed at the Fullado, learned how to play bebop from the records circulated there, and, vitally, collaborated with African, West Indian, African American and local black musicians

⁷⁷ Chilkes, 1994.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

from London – began to play in various other bands. Many of these outfits were not purely bebop oriented, but the musicians, now full of vigour for the avant-garde style, inflected the sessions with bebop phrases and solos. These musicians began to collectively present elements of bebop to more upmarket audiences at clubs outside of Soho in the prestigious Mayfair area.

In *A History of Jazz in Britain: 1919–1950*, former jazz promoter and band manager Jim Godbolt provides an anecdotal snapshot of the contrast between the pre-war social and musical conditions in jazz clubs, and the modern, rebellious nature of Soho’s bebop pioneers. He recalls that the older trumpeter Jack Johnson led a band at Churchill’s, an upmarket venue in swanky New Bond Street, and employed Laurie Morgan and Ronnie Scott. He describes an occasion on which Jackson was apparently sitting at a table socialising with a customer, a common feature of the way in which band members and patrons mixed in clubs prior to the war. Godbolt notes that Jackson suddenly ‘became uncomfortably aware that perplexed dancers had stopped tripping, in the way that the Savoy clientele twenty years before were halted in their tracks by Elizalde’s band suddenly changing tempo in one of their fancy arrangements’.⁷⁹ Their astonishment was due to the mesmerising effect of ‘aggressive bebop drummer Laurie Morgan “dropping bombs” in characteristically explosive fashion and Ronnie Scott on his eighth or ninth steaming chorus’.⁸⁰

It is important to note that, as discussed earlier, Godbolt was strongly affiliated with traditional New Orleans jazz, the Dixieland style [he was the manager of George Webb and his Dixielanders during this time], and was therefore indifferent to bebop. He continues:

⁷⁹ Jim Godbolt, *A History of Jazz in Britain, 1919–1950*, p. 220.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

A disturbed Jackson strode up to the bandstand to remonstrate with him. Scott, totally absorbed, was utterly oblivious to his employer's anguished entreaties. Barely able to make himself heard above the clatter of Morgan's cymbals, Jackson testily enquired of Pete Chilver: "What the hell's going on?" "Shhh," Chilver is alleged to have replied, "Ronnie's got the message!" "Give him one from me!" retorted the outraged Jackson, "tell him he's got the bloody sack!"⁸¹

Although the historical record concerning the actual dates and times of these events is somewhat patchy, we do know that between 8 February and 17 April 1948 a new club, Downbeat, was formulated at the Bag O' Nails, 9 Kingley Street, Soho. The club was started by the 'bop specialising Tito Burns' and his sextet, and consisted of players such as Pete Chilvers and Tommy Pollard, the original Fullado Club beboppers.⁸² *Melody*

Maker stated that:

The new "Downbeat" Club (premises just off Regent Street, at the "Bag o' Nails" niterie, 9, Kingley Street, W.1) had an extremely successful opening last Sunday (8th). Packed to the doors and brimful of "atmosphere," the Club featured a really terrific session by Tito Burns and his Sextet, who are at their best in intimate surroundings. The sponsors of the "Downbeat" Club – bassist Len Harrison and tenorist Harry Robbins – are arranging another bumper session this Sunday (15th), with the Tito Burns Sextet again, plus guest stars Cab Kaye (vocals) and vibraphone ace Tommy Pollard.⁸³

Tito Burns' band was started in 1946 and enjoyed a measure of success, and by the summer of 1947 the members of his sextet included Denis Rose, Ronnie Scott and Pete Chilver. When Chilver left in March 1948, 'Scott suggested he replaced the guitar with an alto saxophone, and produced young Johnny Dankworth'.⁸⁴ Dave Gelly claims that the 'popular broadcasting singer Terry Devon joined them soon afterwards', providing Burns with 'all the ingredients for creating a popular band with a carefully modulated bebop slant'.⁸⁵ Having soon become 'a ballroom attraction', they modelled themselves on an American band 'led by saxophonist Charlie Ventura, which advertised itself with

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Tony Hall, 'Nice Work if You Can Get It', from *The Decca Book of Jazz* [1959], henrybebop.com [last accessed 10 January 2020].

⁸³ *Melody Maker*, 17 April 1948, p. 2.

⁸⁴ Gelly, p. 42.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

the motto, “Bop for the People!”⁸⁶ This commercially-minded venture, or, to quote Jim Godbolt, ‘watered-down bop policy [that enjoyed] commercial success’, caused Scott, Chilver and the other hardcore bebop devotees to leave the band.⁸⁷

On 8 May 1948, *Melody Maker* published an article demonstrating that Tito Burns had disbanded his sextet. The article stated that:

vocalist Cab Kaye is taking over leadership of several of the present Burns boys, with some new additions, under the title of “Cab Kaye and his Sextet”... The boys discussed the matter with Tito in a very amicable spirit... The present Burns members who are going with [Kaye] comprise Ronnie Scott (tenor sax); Johnny Dankworth (alto); Tony Crombie (drs.); and Joe Mudele (bass). In addition, Cab informs us that trumpeter Denis Rose, an original member of the Burns Sextet, will be coming back, and negotiations are in progress for Tommy Pollard (at present shining on vibes with the Rebop All-Stars) to join on piano.⁸⁸

Significantly, Cab Kaye, although born in London in 1921, was of Ghanaian heritage.

The fact that Kaye led this new band further exemplifies the notion that syncretic, transcultural and transracial formations consisting of both black and white musicians marked the bebop scene in Soho. Whether in the poky, transgressive basement that was transformed into the Fullado Club at New Compton Street, or presenting bebop-inflected music in bands that were more commercial, as demonstrated throughout this chapter, the white musicians listed above, some of whom were from East End Jewish roots, from late 1945 and early 1946 had played in bands and jam sessions with black musicians living in London. It is unclear how long the Cab Kaye Sextet lasted, specifically with the musicians stated above, but we do know that Kaye led the band after what ‘was one of the first public bebop concerts in London recorded live by the Esquire record company’, titled *Jazz at the Town Hall Ensemble*, on 30 March 1948.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Godbolt, p. 223

⁸⁸ ‘Tito Burns Sextet Sensation’, *Melody Maker*, 8 May 1948, p. 1.

⁸⁹ This is taken from henrybebop.com. There seems to be some conflict concerning the dates. *Melody Maker* says that Kaye’s band was formed in May 1948, whereas this page says that the band had already played together at the Town Hall on 30 March 1948.

Due to the presentation of bebop to various audiences around the Soho area and beyond, the publication of articles in the music press, and the more commercial style the music was developing in places (as exemplified by Tito Burns and Cab Kaye's recorded events), bebop was garnering greater attention. The white musicians that had first began to play the music with black artists at the Fullado Club, and who had gone on to play in various bands, including Kaye's and Burns' outfits, harboured the desire of opening a *pure* underground bebop club that would be less commercially minded (in terms of the music, that is).⁹⁰

Metropolitan Bopera House

Not long before the opening of Club Eleven, another two spaces had been instrumental in presenting bebop live to audiences around the Soho area: the Metropolitan Bopera House and the Feldman Club. Denis Rose and Harry Morris (Morris would later become the Club Eleven manager) opened the Metropolitan Bopera House in 1948. According to various eyewitnesses (clubgoers and musicians), this was a hedonistic underground space, gritty and minimal in its interior. Kevin Le Gendre recalled that

the Club Eleven guys revolutionised the whole music scene... Some of it was in off-shoot clubs; I remember one of them – it was called the Metropolitan Bopera House. It was down some very rickety stairs [and inside the club there were] broken chairs... Ronnie Scott would [play with Denis] Rose, [Tommy] Pollard, [Tony] Crombie, [and Lenny] Bush... it was all really primitive but the music was so exciting.⁹¹

Lennie Bush remembered that the club 'was a weekly affair, every Sunday in Lisle Street, behind Leicester Square... [it was held in] a primarily black club called the Anderlees – it was a drinking club that functioned in the week. But on Sundays you could hire it... me, Ronnie, John Dankworth and Tommy Pollard were involved with

⁹⁰ Less commercially minded in terms of the music, but not in terms of economics.

⁹¹ Kevin Le Gendre, *Jazzed Up: How Jazz changed Britain*, BBC Radio 4, bbc.co.uk, 28 February 2017 (last accessed on 9/09/2020)

it.⁹² While it is not clear if any of the black musicians contributed to these sessions, as Bush points out, the club night was held in a black-owned venue.

The Feldman Club



*Feldman Club, 100 Oxford Street, circa 1948–1949.
Source: henrybebop.com*

Prior to the opening of the iconic Club Eleven, the Feldman Club played an important role in presenting bebop to audiences around the Soho area. However, like the venues where Tito Burns and Ray Ellington's bands played (Bag o' Nails, for example), the club was not strictly a bebop venue. These venues, like Feldman's, hosted multiple styles of jazz on different nights, for different audiences.

Various cultural historians have noted that, one evening during 1942, Robert Feldman walked past 100 Oxford Street 'and wandered down into the basement, where

⁹² Bush, 1992.

he found Mack's Restaurant and immediately planned setting up a jazz club on the premises'.⁹³ Soon after, Robert approached his father, Joseph, for financial backing. At first, Joseph Feldman 'was sceptical about the project but, perhaps seeing it as a chance to showcase the talents of child prodigy Victor, he stepped in and added some financial backing'.⁹⁴

Beginning initially with Sunday nights, the Feldman Club hosted an array of swing and traditional New Orleans-style jazz bands, one of the more established being George Webb's Dixielanders. In terms of swing, Feldman's was

patronised by American Servicemen and visiting American musicians who would head straight for the club that was advertised as the "The Mecca of Swing" when they were in London. Glenn Miller and members of his band visited for a night of big band music and besides every English jazz musician of note there were Americans of the calibre of Benny Goodman, Art Pepper and Spike Robinson.⁹⁵

The club became a huge success, and by 1948 Joseph Feldman had modified his programme and 'introduced sessions of bebop on Sundays, changing the name from the Feldman Swing Club to the more generic London Jazz Club'.⁹⁶ In his autobiography *Viper: Confessions of a Drug Addict* (1959), eyewitness to the bebop scene in 1940s Soho Raymond Thorpe recollected his initial encounter with the Feldman Club in the early post-war years. Thorpe evokes the transracial audience and vivacious atmosphere in the club:

Feldmans Jazz Club was in Oxford Street, not far from Tottenham Court Road underground station. That was where I met Pete the following Sunday evening... I stood by a newspaper seller staring curiously, and wistfully, at the oddly dressed teenagers who came out of the station in obvious high spirits... many of the kids wore brightly coloured clothes... Nobody took any notice... of the coloured civilian boys and dusky G.I. soldiers. Feldmans, I was to discover was always like that. Everyone was accepted without questions. Everyone was

⁹³ Dave Haslam, *Life After Dark: A History of British Nightclubs & Music Venues* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2015), p. 62.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ 'The Feldman Swing Club', *Henrybebop.com* [last accessed 31 July 2019].

⁹⁶ Williams, 'Post-World War II Jazz in Britain', p. 121.

happy. There was no rowdiness, no arguments, no unpleasantness of any kind... and no questions.⁹⁷

Thorpe's evocative portrait of the clothing that the youths who frequented the Feldman Club were wearing is explored in the following chapter, where I examine in depth the fashion that the bebop musicians and audiences cobbled together, a defining feature (together with the music) that signalled their identity. The picture here of the racially mixed audience making their way to the Sunday night bebop session at Feldman's is also a reflection of the transcultural and transracial make-up of the bands that pioneered the bebop sound in Soho. Moreover, the racially integrated Soho beboppers were conspicuously different to the social groups that frequented trad jazz clubs, who were mainly white.

In terms of the club's interior, Roger Horton, who owned the club much later, recalled that when he 'took over the club in 1964 it hadn't changed much'.⁹⁸ During an oral history interview conducted in the 1990s, the club's new proprietor remembered that he had 'seen one or two film shots which were taken just after the war of American servicemen dancing on that dancefloor', which he claimed 'is still laid to this day'.⁹⁹

During the late 1940s the Feldman Club played an important role in presenting bebop live, before the arrival of Club Eleven. Maurice Burman, writing in *Jazz Journal*, stated that: 'A good bop man could play at the Feldman Club or the Club 11, get paid for it, and do so at a more congenial time. All this is excellent for the jazz fan, because these establishments are for him in the first place and he can hear and see his favourite players in the flesh.'¹⁰⁰ Many of the players that Burman is alluding to are the musicians that went on to found Club Eleven.

⁹⁷ Raymond Thorpe, *Viper: Confessions of a Drug Addict* (London: Robert Hale Limited, 1956), p. 28.

⁹⁸ Roger Horton, *100 Club: Stories* (London: Ditto Publishing Limited, 2016), p. 20.

⁹⁹ Roger Horton, *Oral History of Jazz in Britain*, National Sound Archive, British Library, interviewed by Campbell Burnap, 1992.

¹⁰⁰ Maurice Burman, 'BOP', *Jazz Journal*, November, 1949, p. 14.

Club Eleven



*Bop at Club 11, 1949, Esquire.
Source: henrybebop.com*

In December 1948, eleven musicians, most of whom have been mentioned already in this chapter, came together to form the Club Eleven. The club – the name of which reflected the number of musicians that started it – was opened and run as a cooperative. Initially, it was directly across the street from the iconic Windmill Theatre, and was at first situated in the basement of Macs Rehearsal Room, 41 Great Windmill Street in Soho. However, due to a quickly swelling membership the club moved shortly after ‘to what was formerly the “Blue Lagoon” Club, [at 50] Carnaby Street (off Regent Street)’, also in Soho.’¹⁰¹

Many of the founding members of Club Eleven have appeared throughout this chapter, and have been documented as having played a role in the beginning of bebop in Britain at the Fullado Club back in 1946. The eleven members were: Ronnie Scott, Hank Shaw, Lennie Bush, Joe Muddell, Bernie Fenton, Tommy Pollard, Tony Crombie,

¹⁰¹ ‘New West End Club for Musicians’, *Melody Maker*, 23 March 1950, p. 3.

Laurie Morgan, John Dankworth, and managers Johnny Rogers and Harry Morris.

Denis Rose, as has been shown throughout this chapter, was a significant character on the bebop scene in Soho, and was also involved in the club behind the scenes. Many of the aforementioned musicians ‘came from the East-End Jewish community, from families of craftsmen, small businessmen and, quite often, entertainers’.¹⁰² In contrast to the New Orleans and traditional jazz revivalists in London, Dave Gelly tells us that ‘there was the inferiority of [bebop’s] connections. It had no adherents among the conventionally educated classes.’¹⁰³ However, at least one of the eleven members, John Dankworth, studied music at the Royal Academy. The notion of social class amongst the bebop musicians and fans in the Soho clubs is explored in chapters three and four, when we look at the social processes around fashion, race and gender within the bebop clubs in Soho.

In contrast to the first bebop club, the Fullado, where, as Don Rendell suggested, ‘they played for kicks – not for cash’, Club Eleven was the first bebop-only club to be run along economic lines, where manager ‘Harry Morris, a non-musician, took care of the financial side’.¹⁰⁴ The club is imagined in the collective cultural memory by various eyewitnesses, musicians and critics as a bohemian underground space that raised the profile of live bebop in Britain for a multitude of reasons, some of which will be explored in the later chapters of this thesis. Music critic Brian Davis recalled that the Club was accessed through

a narrow doorway at 41 Great Windmill Street, opposite the Windmill Theatre “which never closed”. Immediately to the left of the entrance was a steep bare wooden stairway painted a dull red around its well, descending to basement level. An upturned box served as a cash desk and behind stood Harry Morris who collected 3/6d admission fee in between other duties. The stairs led to a bare room and I do mean bare! The floor; the walls; naked electric lights enhancing the starkness of the décor. Immediately to the right of the entrance

¹⁰² Gelly, p. 47.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Haslam, p. 98.

was a small stand with an upright (just about) piano. There were a few hard chairs in front of the stand with space for dancing either side of the room. However, there was a touch of luxury – two or three off-grey, moth-eaten Victorian sofas alongside the stand and down the side of the wall. These sofas could tell a few tales of the famous who have sat on them, and of all the shapely posteriors of the girls who used to frequent the club, all looking cool and attractive and performing an unhurried type of jive with dirndl skirts a-swirling: so much more sophisticated than the frantic antics of the trad club and dance-hall jitterbuggers.¹⁰⁵

Davis' evocative portrayal of Club Eleven is an important snapshot of the hip and hedonistic atmosphere inside the club, against a backdrop of severe post-war economic austerity. The writer's references to the women that frequented the clubs and their sartorial style are explored in the next chapter, and the specific and markedly different dancing at modern jazz clubs compared to the ways in which the audiences at mainstream and trad jazz clubs jitterbugged are explored further on. With regard to the dilapidated interior of the club, Don Rendell echoed Davis' account and recalled that Club Eleven 'was a rough place – a kind of ramshackle sort of bare room with lightbulbs... There was no effort to beautify the place, none. The interest in [modern] jazz was growing, but the point was, it was the in-place. It was the hip place.'¹⁰⁶ Rendell continued:

A lot of [bebop] jazz activity was consolidated by the formation of the Club Eleven – which was quite a milestone. It was the first regular paid modern jazz gig for London musicians, who ran it themselves. They used Mac's Rehearsal Rooms in Great Windmill Street. Two groups were featured. One was fronted by Johnny Dankworth, with Leon Calvert on trumpet, Bernie Fenton on piano, Joe Muddell on bass and Laurie Morgan on drums; the other was led by Ronnie Scott, with Hank Shaw on trumpet and the rhythm of Tommy Pollard, Lennie Bush and Tony Crombie. The eleventh man was a non-musician... Harry Morris, who, being a good businessman, took care of the financial side. When Ronnie Scott left to go to the States, I was asked to fill the vacancy in the Eleven.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Brian Davis quoted in Jim Godbolt, *Jazz in Britain, 1919–1950*, pp. 215–216.

¹⁰⁶ Rendell, p. 1.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

Rendell specifically makes the point about Club Eleven being the first *paid* bebop gig in London, rather than the first bebop club in the city. As demonstrated earlier, Rendell, amongst a host of other eyewitnesses in oral history testimonies and reports in the music press, recalled that the Fullado Club was the first club in Britain where bebop musicians got together as groups and played.

In terms of the musicians, as Rendell says, the Club Eleven members were divided into two small bands of five, which was different to the swing and big bands of the pre-war period (although, as demonstrated further on, there was one bebop big band on the Soho circuit). There is, however, rare evidence to suggest that there was also at least one other band, led by Jamaican trumpeter Pete Pitterson, detailed below. Importantly, all of the key players involved, aside from Denis Rose, were in their early twenties.

Davis recalls:

Sometimes, if he felt like it, “teacher Denis Rose would have a blow.” Denis was a bit older than the others and didn’t view things with the same youthful fanaticism... the others... all seemed to concentrate intently on what the other fellow was putting down and [were] obviously playing for themselves, giving scant attention to the audience (who were equally serious about the proceedings) packing the place every time I went there.¹⁰⁸

Raymond Thorpe painted a picture of Club Eleven and recalled the personally transformative effect that the atmosphere and bebop musical style bestowed on him in that gritty, vibrant basement club:

We found the club behind some theatrical rehearsal rooms. They charged us five shillings membership and three shillings and sixpence to go in. The name of the club came from the fact that it was started by eleven musicians. They used to gather there to play the kind of music they liked for themselves and their friends. But its popularity and reputation grew so rapidly that very soon they took a manager into partnership to run it along commercial lines... I drank in the basement atmosphere, the narrow passages and subdued lighting. I was at once at home with the relaxed feeling and “gone” on the hot music. The musicians played what they liked as they liked – but it was mostly bebop and a lot more frantic than at Feldmans. There were no requests and there was no programme. If the music failed to please... well, you didn’t have to stay. But there were

¹⁰⁸ Brian Davis quoted in Godbolt, *Jazz in Britain, 1918–1950*, p. 216.

hundreds like myself who liked the music. So we stayed while some left. And the more we stayed the more the Club Eleven crept into the marrow of our bones.¹⁰⁹

This self-indulgent style of playing by the Club Eleven musicians – playing for themselves first and foremost – was characteristic of the bebop tradition; as discussed earlier in this chapter, the alienating elements of the way in which the inventors, Gillespie, Monk and Parker, played in New York has been noted by various music critics and cultural historians of bebop. However, as Thorpe suggests, these stylistic aspects of the playing at Club Eleven seemingly had the reverse effect on many of the fans that frequented the club: the modern, cool nonchalance exhibited by the bands there established the club as a hipster's haven. Thorpe's rare eyewitness account of the bebop scene in post-war Soho is a snapshot of an emergent subculture – the first in post-war Britain – as I will argue throughout subsequent chapters. His evocative portrait demonstrates that hundreds of youths found identification, unity and a sense of belonging at Club Eleven in an austerity-driven London ravaged by the Blitz. These ideas are explored further on, as is the notion that the scene attracted a fanbase that cut across race, gender and social class.

Although by now the first wave of bebop musicians had settled down into coherent bands – whereas at the Fullado Club they were mainly playing in jam sessions, a free-for-all where anyone who had the desire to play the music was welcome – reports of the Club Eleven sessions vary in terms of inclusion/exclusion and exclusivity. The Club Eleven sessions seem to have been somewhat cliquey. Some players outside of the eleven founders were given a chance to play, but these were few and far between. Don Rendell, for example, claimed that 'it was quite a closed circle that we had at the Club Eleven. I have the feeling that not everyone was very popular if they got up and tried to

¹⁰⁹ Thorpe, p. 30.

join in. Just those whose gig it was did the playing – with very few exceptions.’¹¹⁰ One of those exceptions was Jack Chilkes, who recalled that ‘I wasn’t a member of the original Club Eleven, but when they had it at Windmill Street I used to sit in there’.¹¹¹

While the precise number of black players that contributed to the Club Eleven sessions is unclear, evidence suggests that there were a considerable number of black artists that jammed with the eleven founding members there. Fullado Club pioneer Pete Pitterson, for instance, led his own band at the club. On 6 May 1950 an article appeared in *Jazz Illustrated* claiming that:

Pete Pitterson the well-known coloured Trumpeter [*sic*], [who] featured with .. the Leon Roy Bop Orchestra has now formed his own Quintet which made its debut at the Club 11 in Carnaby Street (called by the Wags, “Cubana-Be”) on Monday, April 10th. Pete has written the entire book for the band and terms his music as “Tempo music with a Negroid [*sic*] expression.”¹¹²

This insight is significant for a number of reasons. First, this previously unexplored press report demonstrates that, contrary to received histories about Club Eleven, the Dankworth and Scott groups were not the only two bands to perform at the club. Second, the article specifically states that Pitterson called his style ‘Tempo music with a Negroid expression’. We know that bebop is renowned for its high tempo, but Pitterson – originally from Jamaica and one of the first players to perform bebop at the Fullado Club in 1946 – explicitly promotes his music as black in essence. This sheds new light on histories of Club Eleven that have erased the black contribution to the club’s sessions, while at the same time typifying the Black Atlantic nature of bebop in Soho: that is, black and white musicians from across Europe, Africa, the Caribbean and the Americas jamming together in transcultural, transracial bands in basement clubs in Soho. Thirdly, the article claims that Pitterson wrote the ‘entire book’ for the band.

¹¹⁰ Rendell, p. 1.

¹¹¹ Chilkes, 1994.

¹¹² ‘Club Crawling with Les Perrin,’ *Jazz Illustrated*, 6 May 1950, p. 4.

While it is vague in regard to who assisted him in his quintet, this would again suggest that a local expression of bebop was beginning to be worked out amongst the Soho pioneers.

In terms of other black players, ‘Frank Holder, born in Bridgetown, Guyana, was an integral part of the Johnny Dankworth Seven when it formed in 1950 [and] was featured on bongos and conga drum in the Latin American numbers, adding a flamboyance to the group’s presentation as well as being the band vocalist... at... Club XI’.¹¹³ Holder’s input at the club is again indicative of the ways in which bebop in post-war Soho was characterised by Black Atlantic textures in transracial bands. The notion that Holder ‘was well into bebop when his chance came with Johnny Dankworth and [that he] liked to improvise using his voice as an instrument’ perhaps again reveals that transracial bands at Club Eleven were developing their own unique take on the music.¹¹⁴

The Black Atlantic drumming that emanated from Soho’s underground bebop clubs also created a stir amongst the wider jazz public. In September 1949, *Melody Maker* published a letter from a jazz fan who had stumbled into a bebop club in the area. Ostensibly shocked at what he witnessed there, the writer reported as follows:

I Recently visited a London bop club. First impression of the people there: An unpleasant crowd... the sort of people I would rather not know... the women might have come from Piccadilly... Now a word about the music: First thing I heard was the drummer. I couldn’t help it: he was making so much noise. Assisting him and making the loud rhythm into a continuous bombardment were two chappies playing Afro-Cuban war drums.¹¹⁵

Although the witness to these events does not state the name of the club, we can speculate that it was the Club Eleven owing to the time the letter was published: in 1949, the bebop scene was still relatively small, underground and centred around a handful of clubs in the Soho area. The writer’s portrayal of the women at the club,

¹¹³ ‘The Drummers, Frank Holder’, henrybebop.com [last accessed 30 December 2019].

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Letter, *Melody Maker*, 3 September 1949, p. 6.

likened to females from Piccadilly, perhaps suggests that they are working girls. Female beboppers are discussed in more depth in the following chapter when I analyse bebop identities that were constructed through fashion, and in chapter four where I explore the role and representation of gender in Soho's bebop clubs, but the significant point to make here concerns the description of the style of drumming. It not only represents the multi-layered influences articulated in early British bebop, but again it suggests that bebop in Soho was characterised by transracial and transcultural exchange. As Tito Burns suggested, the drummers in Britain played different to those in America.

In terms of the drummers at the club on the night that the letter writer attended, there are two potential stories regarding these players. Firstly, we know that Frank Holder played bongos and conga during Latin American numbers in Dankworth's band at Club Eleven. Therefore, the portrait of the 'noise' being created by musicians playing Afro-Cuban 'war drums' perhaps alludes to Holder and another band member. The witness's account of the drummer creating irrepressible noise is indicative of the way in which bebop was perceived as subversive, and consequently as a threat to the status quo. Similar to the picture drawn of the scene at the Fullado Club in 1946, where 'the pavement outside throbbed to an African rhythm', the 'bombardment' by 'chappies on Afro-Cuban war drums' in the article above again conjures up a sense of Soho under attack from alien races and cultures.

The other possible narrative regarding the drummers that the letter writer experienced during his jaunt to Club Eleven can be found in an oral history account. Original bebopper Laurie Morgan shed light on the musical process shaping the scene at the club:

At Club Eleven ... these African guys used to come in. [People] like Ginger Johnson, who became very well-known later on, and his African players with their drums would come and sit in alongside us and play with us... because at

that time we were listening to people like Machito and the Latin influence was starting to grow.¹¹⁶

This insight demonstrates the continuity of the transcultural, transatlantic and transracial fusion of musical exchanges that characterised the bebop scene in Soho from the beginning. Another important point to make is about the authenticity of the playing. For instance, this is not so much about whether any groundbreaking technical innovations in British bebop were being developed in this moment [although, as seen earlier, Duncan Heining believes that slight inventions *were* made during this period, and Tito Burns drew the distinction between the British style of drumming and the American style, while Pete Pitterson wrote all the songs for his quintet at Club Eleven], but more notably that the music being created at the club was what this chapter has consistently referred to as music of the ‘Black Atlantic’ – that is, music that consists of transnational cross-fertilisation between peoples of Africa, the Americas, the Caribbean and Europe.

As discussed earlier, the original architects of bebop in New York – Parker, Monk, Gillespie, Clarke and the others – were inspired by Machito and other Latin American musicians. In Soho, the notion that the drummers, both British and African, were sitting in and adding musical sounds and textures alongside the white East End boppers, arguably points towards a uniquely British version of this Black Atlantic music. Again, what made this music different in Soho was the distinctive social relations in which the music was produced: black and white musicians jamming together, as opposed to the solely African American musicians that created bebop in Harlem.

These characteristics perhaps added to the subversive nature of the music. In fact, Laurie Morgan spoke about the way in which the music, and the racially and ethnically

¹¹⁶ Laurie Morgan, *Oral History of Jazz in Britain*, National Sound Archive, British Library, interviewed by Victor Schonfield, 1994.

diverse nature of the bands that performed it, were perceived as a threat to the status quo. Reflecting on Club Eleven, Morgan stated that:

The establishment looked upon us as a bunch of pretty dubious characters. There we were, from all different parts of ... society; from the East End through to the suburbs, there were blacks, there were Jews. As far as the establishment were concerned – which was very conservative – we weren't exactly the Humphrey Lyttleton types of people. [They] were embraced by the establishment. They were the ones who got all the air-time. We hardly got any air-time.¹¹⁷

Morgan's assertion that bebop was marginalised by the BBC will be detailed further on, but his insight into the bands that pioneered bebop in Britain is further evidence of the transracial nature of the musicians performing the music. Not only that, his declaration that bebop was seen as a threat to the establishment is reflected through the social make-up of these groups as well as the aesthetically subversive nature of the music itself. The artist's distinction between beboppers and Humphrey Lyttleton – a trad jazz musician educated at Eton – demonstrates that bebop's lack of ties to the establishment not only appealed more to the socially disadvantaged categories of young people in post-war London, but also perhaps insinuates that the music was perceived as anarchic due to the mixture of people producing it – and therefore that it needed to be suppressed.

This is not to say that the bebop scene was purely demarcated along the lines of race, ethnicity and social class. We shall see in the following chapters that Club Eleven specifically was attended by women from the middle classes as well as lower-class black and white male youths, and this blurring of racial and gender lines posed an even greater threat to the conservative ideologies of the nation.

¹¹⁷ Morgan, 1994.



Unknown photographer, Club Eleven, Soho, 1948. Source: henrybebop.com

In terms of black players, though, a large amount of archival evidence in this chapter, much of which has remained unexplored until now, demonstrates that the African diaspora made contributions to the development of bebop in post-war London. George Tyndale, originally from Jamaica, Pitterson, also from Jamaica, Carl Barriteau and Bertie King, both hailing from Trinidad, ‘local’ black Londoners, African American servicemen, Frank Holder from Guyana, and Xanadu’s African Drummers at the Fullado Club, together with white musicians from London, all at one time or other played bebop in post-war Soho.

Club Eleven, however, was raided by police and closed down on 15 April 1950. This is documented and analysed in depth in chapter four. The Paramount Dance Hall, also busted by police in the wake of the Club Eleven raid, was another venue which hosted bebop nights in the late 1940s, and collaborations between black and white musicians were also taking place there.

The Paramount Dance Hall



*London's Harlem, Paramount Dance Hall, circa 1950.
Source: Jazz Illustrated, National Jazz Archive, United Kingdom*

The Paramount Dance Hall was located on Tottenham Court Road, and was the only non-independently-owned venue in the Soho area to host bebop nights in the late 1940s. During 1950, the venue was home to Leon Roy's bebop big band – said to be the only big band to play bebop on the Soho scene.

Jazz Illustrated ran a story regarding Roy's outfit that depicted the underground nature of the music that was captivating the audiences at the Paramount. Setting the scene, the music paper claimed that 'Leon Roy and his bop band... play in a Palais, but they are as "uncommercial" as any jazz club ... group... and the atmosphere they help to create is probably unique among British dance halls'.¹¹⁸ The writer refers to the Paramount's distinctive atmosphere for the precise reasons that have been discussed at length throughout this chapter – that the bebop scene in Soho, unlike the trad jazz of that period, was characterised by transracial bands that created social and aesthetic

¹¹⁸ *Jazz Illustrated*, 1:5, 1950, p. 10.

exchange: black and white musicians from across the ‘Black Atlantic’ who converged and played bebop music within these spaces.

According to Ron Simmonds, ‘Leon Roy had a regular weekly gig in a place known as “the jungle” along Tottenham Court Road’.¹¹⁹ Simmonds is here referring to the Paramount; he continued, ‘every great West Indian player that ever hit London was in that band, including the trumpeter Pete Pitterson, with Sammy Walker and George Tyndale on saxes... The place was dimly lit, packed out, and unbelievably hot.’¹²⁰ Although it is said that the band were ‘not original in style or arrangement’, but rather that their music was ‘patterned largely on Dizzy Gillespie’s big band’, the transracial band were characterised by unique transatlantic interactions.¹²¹ Laurie Morgan recalled one particularly memorable night at the Paramount, painting an illuminating picture of the racially mixed and transnational band:

The Paramount in Tottenham Court Road... was where the Leon Roy big band eventually played. I played drums in that. Kenny Clarke came over and played in that. That was the first chance we ever got of playing the... Dizzy Gillespie arrangements... Leon got them. Leon Roy was marvellous, he was a real dynamo. He played drums. And Lenny Metcalfe, his mate, they formed this big band. And in it went all of the players in London. Pete Pitterson the trumpet player, Bushy Thompson, another West Indian player.¹²²

Lenny Metcalfe was a white youth, eighteen years old at the time, and had ‘in the late 1940s gigged with Ronnie Scott, Dizzy Reece, Denis Rose [and] Jimmy Skidmore’.¹²³ The Jamaican Pete Pitterson, as explored throughout the chapter, was involved in Soho bebop from its inception and led his own band for which he wrote his own compositions at Club Eleven. The Jamaican-born Dizzy Reece and Bushy Thompson arrived in

¹¹⁹ Ron Simmonds, ‘Leon Roy’, henrybebop.com [last accessed 19 December 2019].

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Morgan, 1994.

¹²³ ‘Lenny Metcalfe’, henrybebop.com [last accessed 5 January 2020].

Britain later, circa 1948, with the *Windrush* generation (Reece is discussed in chapter five).

The other player that Morgan mentions, Kenny Clarke, contributed to the sessions at the Paramount at least once. Clarke, as seen earlier in the chapter, was one of the original New York pioneers who began to engineer the bebop sound in Harlem circa 1941. As revealed by cultural historians of New York bebop, Clarke was the ‘key drummer in [the] early years of experimentation [and] played with Gillespie in Teddy Hill’s big band and then served as house drummer at Minton’s’.¹²⁴ Clarke’s presence in the transnational and transatlantic setting of Soho, jamming together with white East End, Jamaican and English-born black musicians, is demonstrative of the musical cross-fertilisation and exchange in Soho during this historical moment.

Morgan continues, ‘Whoever could get there for the gig would have a look at the charts for the first time and just bash through them’.¹²⁵ Although it appears that Leon Roy’s band were akin to a cover band, and therefore may not have made any original technical advancements, we have seen throughout this chapter that slight technical innovations that indicate musical hybridity in other bands during live performances and on certain records were being made in Soho bebop from its early days.

¹²⁴ Owens, *The Music and its Players*, p. 9.

¹²⁵ Morgan, *Oral History of Jazz in Britain*, 1994.



*Leon Roy (left), and unknown bongo player, Paramount Dance Hall, 1950.
Source: Jazz Illustrated, National Jazz Archive, UK*

At the Paramount Dance Hall, Leon Roy's band were not only transracial, they also catered to an audience that crossed racial borders. In an article that provides an illuminating glimpse into the Paramount, *Jazz Illustrated* proclaimed that 'A strident, Bop-charged band with a fierce beat [and] changing lights... makes "London's Harlem," formally known as the Paramount Ballroom, Tottenham Court Road, in London's West End'.¹²⁶ The journalist continues to describe the audience, and how the band leader 'struts from one side of the stage to the other, throwing his arms into the air, and hollering to the dancers and listeners grouped around the bandstand. They are mostly coloured and respond in an equally uninhibited manner, shouting [and] clapping their hands in time to the beat.'¹²⁷ Laurie Morgan adds to this exciting portrait of black and white beboppers in the audience, asserting that 'bebop dancing was different. It was statuesque... the girls were marvellous. But the West Indian guys used to come and do

¹²⁶ 'London's Harlem', *Jazz Illustrated*, Vol. 1, No. 5, April, 1950, p. 11.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

all this... real stretched out dancing. There was always a group in the middle of the floor with a huge crowd around them with this big band pounding away in the background. It was great'.¹²⁸

As this shows, the audience at the Paramount Dance Hall, the Fullado Club and Club Eleven crossed racial boundaries, and the ways in which they improvised a collective identity will be explored in depth in subsequent chapters. It is also important to note that not only bebop musicians but also their fans were a significant contributory factor to the moral panic that grew around bebop. One apparent reason for this was the spread of bebop to the London suburbs.

Bebop banned at Wimbledon Palais and on the BBC

Two months before Club Eleven was raided and five months before the bust on the Paramount, bebop was banned in at least one dance hall beyond the boundaries of Soho. Having flowed outwards into the respectable London suburbs, the music was as a result seen to symbolise an even greater threat. In an interview for *Melody Maker*, 'Impresario Archie Shenburn, proprietor of Wimbledon Palais de Danse' told the paper that he had 'issued a directive that no band in his employ is to play bop, or anything remotely resembling bop'.¹²⁹ Detailing his reasons for banning bebop, Shenburn proclaimed:

I am taking this step because it seems to me that bebop music attracts only young irresponsible people whose main interest is in the energetic, undignified and sometimes positively dangerous, "jive" dancing. Do not imagine, however, that I am interested solely in the barring of this jive, even though I regard it as a nuisance in the ballroom. My action is prompted more by the fact that the young jive dancing enthusiast seems to attract "camp followers" of quite the wrong type who bring an un-desirable element into the dance hall, which I am determined to stamp out.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Morgan, 1994.

¹²⁹ 'Bop Banned at Wimbledon Palais', *Melody Maker*, 18 February 1950, p. 1.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

Shenburn's response to bebop in the Wimbledon Palais is characteristic of the views, presented earlier from the music press and oral histories, that worked to marginalise the music. We can derive various other meanings from the article too. First, that the irreverence encoded in bebop's avant-garde improvisation represented a threat to the establishment, as its rhythm, melody and irregularity marked a shift from any type of conventional, 'respectable' dance-hall swing or traditional jazz music that preceded it. Bebop was perceived as lawless, unchained from the structure of orthodoxy, and was seen to roam uncontained. This notion can be observed in the fact that it rebelliously flowed out from Soho to the suburban dance halls where it caused a moral panic.

In addition to this, Shenburn's articulation of bebop dancing as dangerous, and suggestion that bebop jiving is undignified, perhaps indicates an underlying view that bebop dancing was uncivilised, and therefore a threat to society. Shenburn also alludes to a proportion of the youths attracted to bebop as 'camp followers'. This term was used to describe the families of soldiers that followed armies around; it was also used to designate the people that sold illicit products to soldiers that they themselves could not get, such as alcohol and sex. Therefore, Shenburn seems to be implying that bebop music attracts prostitutes and racketeers amongst other unsavoury social types.¹³¹

The Wimbledon Palais proprietor also named certain bebop musicians in his picture of irreverence. Shenburn claimed that 'Catering for the other sort does not pay. I should know. I have been featuring both Vic Lewis and Tito Burns – the most progressive leaders in the country. But that is all over now.'¹³² As we have seen, Burns was the bandleader of the Tito Burns Sextet, a group that was sometimes termed as playing

¹³¹ For more on camp followers, see Holly A. Mayer, *Belonging to the Army: Camp Followers and Community During the American Revolution* (Columbia: South Carolina Press, 1996); B. Hacker and M. Vining (eds), *A Companion to Women's Military History* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); M. Maurer, 'The Court-martialing of Camp Followers, World War 1', *The American Journal of Legal History*, 9:3, 1965, pp. 203–215.

¹³² Archie Shenburn, 'Bop Banned at Wimbledon Palais', *Melody Maker*, 18 February 1950, p. 3.

‘commercial’ bebop, and which hybridised the music by mixing bop techniques with other mainstream swing melodies and dance forms. This insight demonstrates that any music with a bebop slant was seen to attract an audience of rebellious social types that were, in Shenburn’s words, undesirable. In this way, bebop became a cultural signifier of resistance, a metonym for anti-establishmentarianism. These ideas are detailed in subsequent chapters.

Bebop banned by the BBC

A few months later bebop was banned from being broadcast on air by the BBC. *Melody Maker* broke the news on 12 October 1950, proclaiming: ‘On Saturday, October 21, John Foreman takes over production of the BBC “Jazz Club” programme, and from that date the one weekly air-spot devoted to jazz fans will be devoid of all bop and “progressive” music.’¹³³ In presenting his reasons for excluding bebop from the programme, Foreman gave a lofty excuse that echoed previous discourse that denigrated bebop an inferior type of jazz. Foreman howled: ‘The music I know as jazz comes from the heart... not from the mind. I intend “Jazz Club” to present the real thing, music with a real beat. There will be no bop.’¹³⁴ Foreman went on to self-righteously say that, when ‘asked if the jazz purveyed would all be period music [on the show], he said emphatically it would not’.¹³⁵ He suggested that ‘the real thing appeared to end around 1939 and 1940, but if there is any logical progression past that we hope to find it’.¹³⁶ Although the perspective that bebop was cerebral and sub-standard compared to trad jazz was nothing new in this historical moment, the banning of the music on air, particularly a few months after its having been banned from being played by Archie

¹³³ ‘There Will Be No Modernists in “Jazz Club”- John Foreman’, *Melody Maker*, 12 August, 1950, p. 1.

¹³⁴ John Foreman, *Melody Maker*, 12 August 1950, p. 1.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

Shenburn at the Wimbledon Palais, and then subsequently the police raids on Club Eleven and the Paramount Dance Hall in the Soho area, suggests that bebop was seen as threatening to the establishment. Not only were the clubs raided, but following this, structural institutions were at work to try and stamp out bebop music from being played live or disseminated on air across Britain.

This perceived threat was not only articulated in regard to bebop and dancing, but also in terms of the fashion associated with the music. Bebop musician Ralph Sharon, for instance, was asked by *Melody Maker* what he thought about the ban. Sharon angrily replied: ‘this is the greatest set-back yet. I think we can survive the alleged drug-addiction, dark glasses... and “bop ties” stigma, but when the representative of an organisation like the BBC decides on a thing like this it’s a death-blow.’¹³⁷ Sharon’s allusion to bebop ties and sartorial style are explored in depth in the next chapter, where I analyse the visual signifiers – the clothing – that formed a part of the bebop collective. His reference to drug-addiction is explored in chapter four.

Summing up

Contrary to received cultural narratives that mainly privilege all-white bands and Club Eleven (1948–1950) as the first bebop club in Britain, the wide range of primary sources utilised in this chapter have demonstrated that the first wave of bebop pioneers in Britain were a hybrid formation of black and white male musicians playing in loosely structured transracial bands and jam sessions that started at the black-owned Fullado Club in Soho, circa late 1945 and early 1946. Following the police raid on that club, various musicians went into established, mainstream bands, some fronted by black musicians and others by white players, and they continued to develop the idiom by

¹³⁷ Ralph Sharon, *Melody Maker*, 12 August 1950, p. 3.

playing solos and bebop phrasing in those outfits. Due to the influences of bebop on the musical styles in those subsequent bands, a more commercial, diluted, accessible version of the music was presented to the public. Most of the members who were first a part of the Fullado sessions, however, broke away in order to concentrate on the more underground aspects of bebop, starting Club Eleven – the first *bebop only* club in Britain.

In considering the transracial and transcultural formation of these bands, this chapter has utilised Paul Gilroy's notion of the Black Atlantic, along with Fernando Ortiz's concept of transculturation, as lenses through which to explore and understand how these syncretic cultures work. This has been exemplified through the fact that although bebop initially began in Harlem and the original innovation was by African American musicians, the ideas imported into bebop transcended geographical space, drawing from African, American, and European musics. The chapter has demonstrated how in Soho the music was played by black and white musicians from various cultural backgrounds, which thereby created a slightly different expression, in London, of this transatlantic music. In other words, early bebop in post-war Soho was inflected by a culture of 'movement, transformation, and relocation'.¹³⁸

In addition to this, the chapter has demonstrated that due to the blurring of racial and national boundaries – black and white musicians from across the British Empire and America – in the way the music was played, when this music migrated to the suburbs it posed an even greater threat to the establishment. This led to bebop being banned in the suburban London dance hall, Wimbledon Palais, and subsequently by the BBC.

The next chapter looks at how beboppers constructed identity through the clothing that they cobbled together into a visual sartorial style, and how this blurred their

¹³⁸ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, p. xi.

national identity and was another strand in the story that they posed a threat to the conservative ideologies of the establishment.

Chapter Three

Men's and Women's Sartorial Style in the Soho Clubs:

The Bebop Look



*Youths wearing 'the bebop look', The Feldman Club, 100 Oxford Street, circa 1948.
Source: Getty*

Introduction

As seen in the previous chapter, the bebop musicians and band formations crossed racial, national and cultural boundaries. Similarly, the audiences that constituted the bebop club scene in Soho consisted of men, women and youths from various social, cultural and racial stratifications, and included black men and women, ‘spivs’ and suburbanites, and many of them formed a collective hybrid identity through improvising an original and unique sartorial style. In the face of austerity and rationing in late 1940s London, a number of male fans and musicians defined themselves through a version of the zoot suit: an ostentatious, unconventional outfit that communicated resistance at a specific historical moment, in which clothes shortages and regulation were the norm. Likewise, female beboppers signalled their affiliation with the scene through the style that they weaved together, which was influenced by Dior’s ‘New Look’ – a sleek, modern style that involved dark sunglasses, dirndl skirts and tight trousers, mostly black in colour. This chapter demonstrates how both men and women’s bebop style was distinctly different to the clothes worn by trad jazz fans and society more generally.

First, the chapter briefly historicises the men’s formal suit, what it was originally designed for and what it represented, before contrasting that with the bebop version, which drew from the zoot suit, gangster films and suits worn by spivs [or, at least, spiv suits as portrayed in the media]. In terms of women’s style, the chapter shows how female beboppers constructed their style and how this was interpreted in the post-war moment. Combining previously unexplored archival and historical primary research drawn from the music press, oral histories of jazz in Britain gleaned from the National Sound Archive, and oral histories of fashion, both of the latter stored at the British Library, as well as rare photographs of the original bebop style, interviews conducted by myself, and theories around fashion and classic notions of subculture, the chapter

analyses the social composition and the unique identities that the male and female beboppers constructed in Soho's clubs.

The chapter also argues that beboppers, although at first made up of a mixture of some older black and white males, musicians, women and spivs, influenced suburban youths who came into the clubs, who encountered the style and then emulated it in the London suburbs. Finally, the chapter demonstrates that the conspicuous hybridised style was, like the music, another aspect of bebop culture that was seen as posing a threat to the conservative values of post-war society.

A very brief history of the traditional suit

From its inception in 1666, the three-piece suit represented the British establishment. Mediator of power and authority and shaper of sociocultural values, the suit was ideological in nature. It was developed during the Restoration period; according to social historian David Kuchta, the conditions during that epoch played a pivotal role in the birth of modern men's fashion. He notes that the three-piece suit has its roots

in the political, economic, religious, and social crises that shook seventeenth-century England, as Charles II attempted to restore the Stuart crown to its role as arbiter of taste in the face of criticism of its arbitrary rule... the crown's role as arbiter of taste would be defined in terms of inculcating new yet purportedly timeless virtues: thrift, modesty, economy, mixed with gentility, nobility, and politeness.¹

These social and cultural values, however, were not enduringly embodied through the three-piece suit until the 'Glorious Revolution of 1688... [which] permanently install[ed] modesty as a marker of elite masculinity'.² This was an effort by the ruling classes both to introduce a 'new masculine image of virtuous consumption and to

¹ David Kuchta, *The Three-Piece Suit and Modern Masculinity: England, 1550–1850* (California: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 77–90.

² *Ibid.*, p. 79.

reaffirm a monarchical political culture based on aristocratic cultural hegemony'.³

Kuchta further notes that through initiating the three-piece suit, Charles II 'attempted to appropriate an iconoclastic, oppositional ideology and use it to redefine court culture, thereby restoring the crown's moral authority and political legitimacy' after having faced radical criticism over the court's supposed effeminacy.⁴ Innately related to the political state of the nation, the new sartorial style ultimately redefined masculinity and validated male domination over women and elite domination over the lower classes.

These social and cultural values persistently manifested through the three-piece suit throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Incorporated into the suit, they were reflected in the form and then disseminated from the top of society down the social hierarchy. Christopher Breward has noted that in Europe, especially in London, tailors and their clients together sought to establish a suitable outfit that would connect a sense of respectability and responsibility with the new occupations created by industry, commerce and empire. From the 1860s, 'a combination of black morning and frock coats reaching to the knee and worn with straight wool trousers striped in black and grey and a silk top hat was the favoured business costume of both houses of parliament, city bankers and stockbrokers, judges, barristers, and medical doctors. The fashion continued well into the twentieth century.'⁵

Meanwhile, the lounge suit provided an alternative pattern of dress for professional and social occasions. Consisting of short jacket, high waistcoat and tapered trousers, 'all in one textile pattern and worn with a bowler hat... the lounge [suit] found both a wider market and a more varied set of social connotations than morning dress'.⁶ Clerks,

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Christopher Breward, *The Suit: Form, Function and Style* (London: Reaktion Books, 2016), pp. 49–52.

⁶ Ibid.

tradesmen, teachers and journalists wore the lounge suit, ‘bequeathing subsequent generations the ubiquitous business suit of today’.⁷

During the 1920s and 1930s, one of the major retailers of men’s suits in Britain, who is said to have changed the face of British tailoring ‘by providing a tailored suit for the man in the street at a price he could afford’, was Montague Burton.⁸ Burton was known as the purveyor of orthodox masculine ideologies that were articulated through the suit. Founding his retail company, Burton, in 1903, the entrepreneur is said to have ‘produced a consensual understanding of the suit as the defining badge of healthy and respectable masculinity – a *sine qua non* of the conventional – that survived almost intact from the 1930s to the 1960s’.⁹ His suits symbolised a soothing ‘image of collective cultural conformity – of a shared masculine culture fixed by retailing’.¹⁰ Cultural historian Frank Mort has noted that the Burton’s male ‘acquired status by being absolutely normal. Neither spectacular nor bizarre... Burton’s... manly ideal was summed up in the company’s famous memorandum to staff. All excess was to be avoided through restraint and quiet dignity.’¹¹

In the wake of the Second World War, Burton was a major outlet, providing the suits which were supplied to demobilised soldiers. Although some men complained about the ‘conspicuous universality’ of the demob suit, ‘all garments were non-Utility and made from the best quality materials that were still available’ and by October 1945, 75,000 demob suits ‘were being produced every week, with many items of clothing

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Gavin Waddell, *How Fashion Works: Couture, Ready-to-Wear and Mass Production* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 77.

⁹ Breward, p. 61.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Frank Mort, *Cultures of Consumption: Masculinities and Social Space in Late Twentieth Century Britain* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 135.

manufactured by the likes of the Fifty Shillings tailors and Burton's', the latter proving about a quarter of all demobilisation suits.¹²

All of these styles and variations of the suit, from its inception in the seventeenth century through to the second half of the twentieth century, shared a common denominator: apart from the embodiment of shared social, political and cultural values rooted in the nation, fashioned at first by the monarchy and diffused down the social ladder, the suit was a signifier of social order and social control. Whether in the military or in the middle and lower classes, where the suit was worn by demobbed soldiers or men in office jobs, the men's suit was a central cultural emblem which helped shape the national identity and maintain the status quo.

The zoot suit



Young African American men in zoot suits, Savoy Ballroom, Harlem, 1930s.

Source: Getty

¹² Paul Jobling, *Advertising Menswear: Masculinity and Fashion in the British Media since 1945* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 24.

The zoot suit was one of the first sartorial outfits to subvert these notions of power and deviate from conventional modes of dress. Originating in North America, the zoot suit reversed the way in which fashion and the suit historically flowed from the top of society downwards, instead bubbling up from the ground and adding antithetical social and cultural meanings to those signified by the clothing that cascaded from the power structure.

In terms of etymology, the word zoot, ‘as a verb, means something done or worn in an exaggerated style, but as a noun it is the ultimate in clothes.’¹³ It was mainly young African American and Hispanic American working-class boys aged between sixteen and twenty who wore this unconventional suit. Noted to have been a symbol of ‘cultural resistance’ within the traditions of both groups, the style was conspicuous particularly in lower-class neighbourhoods spanning the breadth and depth of the United States, from New York and East Los Angeles to Detroit, Chicago and Atlanta.¹⁴

The zoot suit’s irreverence was marked by ‘outrageously padded shoulders and trousers that were fiercely tapered at the ankles.’¹⁵ It was amongst the first outfits to be developed by the economically deprived, and essentially reversed the top-down convention of fashion diffusion.¹⁶ This explanation of the zoot suit as a cultural form that reversed the effect of fashion distribution is popular amongst fashion writers such as Diana Crane, Joanne Entwistle and Katherine Appleford; Appleford notes that ‘the bubble-up model suggests that widely accepted fashions can be generated out of lower socioeconomic groups.’¹⁷

¹³ Holly Alford, ‘The Zoot Suit: Its History and Influence’, *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture*, 8, 2004, pp. 225–236 (p. 226).

¹⁴ Stuart Cosgrove, ‘The Zoot Suit and Style Warfare’, *History Workshop Journal*, 18, 1984, pp. 77–91 (p. 78); Alford, p. 226.

¹⁵ Cosgrove, p. 78.

¹⁶ Steve Chibnall, ‘Whistle and Zoot: The Changing Meaning of a Suit of Clothes’, *History Workshop Journal*, 20, 1, 10, 85, pp. 57–81. (p. 61); Cosgrove, p. 78.

¹⁷ Katherine Appleford, ‘Fashion and Class Evaluations’ in Sandy Black (ed.), *The Handbook of Fashion Studies* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 105.

The top-down model of fashion was analysed by George Simmel in his classic text *Fashion* (1901), in which he explored the idea of emulation. Simmel asserted that ‘fashion is the innovation or pursuit of the upper class and is subject to emulation by the middle class in a bid for social status... Models of the few are imitated by the many.’¹⁸ Although Simmel’s notion is now out-dated, contemporary writers acknowledge the value in his theory that clothes construct identity, signifying ‘union’ within one social group and ‘isolation’ from others. Clothes maintain exclusivity within a given group and thereby allow wearers to distinguish themselves as unique. While Simmel was referring to specific social classes, namely the upper classes, I argue that zoot suit-wearing youths were creating the same effect, isolating themselves from other groups and creating union within their own circles.

The precise roots of the zoot suit are unknown, although a number of myths exist about where it originated. Ray Ferris and Julian Lord attempt to pin the zoot suit’s origins to a specific time and place. They claim that ‘zoot suits originated in Harlem, New York, and were associated with black thirties jazz culture’.¹⁹ It is acceptable to note that the zoot suit was firmly rooted in jazz culture, as we shall see, but to assume as factual that the suit originated in a concretely specific place and time seems somewhat risky. Many narratives allude to the obscurity of the zoot suit’s origins. For example, some believe ‘it began with a Georgia busboy by the name of Clyde Duncan who ordered the exaggerated style suit in 1940. Others believe it originated in a Filipino colony in Los Angeles, who then discarded it, to later have the African Americans and Mexicans pick it up.’²⁰ Additional writings say that ‘Young African Americans in Chicago claimed that Harold C. Fox, jazz band-leader and clothier, first popularized it

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ray Ferris and Julian Lord, *Teddy Boys: A Concise History* (Preston: Milo Books, 2012), p. 11.

²⁰ Alford, p. 227.

as “the end to all ends” (thus the Z), with its “reat pleat, reave sleeve, ripe stripe, and drape shape.”²¹ It is also noted that Fox admitted to being ‘inspired’ by the ‘fashions of slum-dwelling teenagers’.²² Other sources, however, ‘credit two famous white men for the zoot suit: Clark Gable, who wore a version of it in *Gone with the Wind*, and Edward VIII who, in his youth, wore an exaggerated style suit that resembled the zoot suit’.²³

Whatever the zoot suit’s real origins, whether it was first worn by black men or by white men, ‘there are two things for certain: first, mainly Mexican-Americans wore the suit in the western part of the United States and mainly African Americans in the eastern part of the United States; second, most of these young men were socially and culturally disadvantaged, trying to let people know who they were through their clothing’.²⁴ Kathy Peiss validates this claim, asserting that the ‘style varied from man to man and place to place, but however it was worn, it broadcast a self-conscious sense of difference from the conventional mode of respectable male appearance’.²⁵

In addition to this, the suit was racialised and sexualised, not only by the dominant media, but also by ‘the police and governmental authorities’, who shaped the ‘political meaning of the zoot suit’ after the infamous so-called Zoot Suit Riots in Los Angeles in June 1943.²⁶ Following these riots, the suit was ascribed with adverse sexual connotations, after United States military personnel began to attack people of Mexican heritage dressed in the outfit. Press reports claimed that people wearing the style ‘were stripped and assaulted on the premise that attacks had been carried out on Anglo-American women, and the chaos escalated with counterattacks from both sides.’²⁷

²¹ Breward, p. 134.

²² Alford, p. 227.

²³ Ibid., p. 228.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Kathy Peiss, *Zoot Suit: The Enigmatic Career of an Extreme Style* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), p. 17.

²⁶ Peiss, p. 13.

²⁷ Breward, p. 134.

Thus, the zoot suit was not only a symbol of racial and ethnic identity amongst disenfranchised youths, but was also constructed by the dominant media as an emblem of deviance; and those who wore it, mainly but not only black and Hispanic people, were ascribed with the attributes of a socially divergent group.²⁸



Sailors in the armed forces patrol the streets with clubs, ready to fight anybody they see in a zoot suit, Los Angeles, 1943

Source: allthatsinteresting.com

²⁸ See Howard S. Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), for a fuller discussion on the sociology of deviance.

Jazz and the zoot suit



Zoot suiter and partner dancing, US, unknown, circa early 1940s

Source: Historydaily.com

It is widely documented that the zoot suit had strong affiliations with jazz. Cab Calloway, for instance, ‘one of the most famous musicians to wear the suit... spared no expense on his zoot suits’, and ‘by the late 1930s [the suit was] in common circulation within urban jazz culture’ in North America.²⁹ It was, however, just one component of a wider ensemble which included accessories, such as long chains, sometimes with a gold watch attached, hanging from trouser pockets, and wide brimmed hats, occasionally worn with a feather in the side.³⁰ The complete look, when fused with other cultural products and processes such as jazz, dance and argot, constituted the subcultural force known as the *hipster*, or *hepcat*, and was a part of wider ideologies adopted by

²⁹ Cosgrove, p. 4.

³⁰ Luiz Alvarez, *The Power of the Zoot: Youth Culture and Resistance during World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press), p. 2.

predominately black youths who defined themselves against mainstream society

through these forms and practises.³¹ Steve Chibnall has noted that ‘For the hipster,

Sophistication and lightning speed on the uptake were everything – whoever needed the faintest explanation of even the most cryptic gesture or statement was by definition a square. Jive talk was the verbal equivalent of jazz music – a running set of variations on themes and rhythms, its masters, the black hipsters, stood in direct opposition to the passive stereotype of the stuttering, tongue-tied sambo and were therefore threatening figures to white bourgeois society. They would call each other “man” in direct inversion of the patronising white form of address to the black, ‘boy.’”³²

The hipster reaped subcultural capital within his circle through his image, reflected not only in his style of dress but also his divergent behaviour. In his inner-city habitat, ‘he enjoyed an elite status living on his wits, hustling dimes and dollars, working the number rackets and making enough from marijuana dealing to Lindyhop until he was “beat to the socks.” In the early 1940s the draped and pegged zoot suit was the badge of status in his community.’³³

By the late 1940s in America, the life span of the zoot suit as a subcultural force had been drained of its subversive potency, and, more ironic still, although the style had been vilified and associated with predatory sexual violence in the Zoot Suit Riots of 1943, it had been modified, absorbed into the mainstream and marketed to the US public. Referring to a historical article in the *Tailor and Cutter*, Steve Chibnall notes that in 1948 ‘the president of the international Association of Clothing Designers could declare in a speech in Montreal that the new look in men’s wear was to feature squarer shouldered, longer, draped jackets with fuller chests to give an aggressive look to the American male’.³⁴ Through this procedure of consumer capitalism, the suit’s racial

³¹ Cab Calloway published seven annual volumes of *The Cab Calloway Hepster’s Dictionary* during the 1930s and 1940s, in which he defined key words of jive talk.

³² Chibnall, p. 58

³³ Ibid, p. 59.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 61.

connotations were dissolved and its dissident undertones were deflated, and the hipsters and Chicano groups started to discard their invention.

The British version of the men's zoot suit as a prominent feature of the bebop clubs in Soho



Club Eleven, Soho, London, 1948. Source: henrybebop.com

Across the Atlantic, in Britain, a version of the zoot suit was worn in Soho's bebop clubs beginning circa 1946 and retained the racial, sexual and criminal connotations that the style had in America. But unlike in the US where the suit was linked with black and Chicano gangs up until the point it was absorbed by mainstream consumer culture, in Soho's bebop clubs the style was expressed by both black and white men and youths. This section explores the social groups, a mixture of musicians, black hipsters, so-called spivs and white suburban youths, that adopted a modified version of the zoot suit. Through a synthesis of unexplored reports in the music press gleaned from the archives at the British Library, Oral Histories of Jazz in Britain, rare autobiographical accounts and photographs, and historical reports in the local and the national newspapers, this section demonstrates that the beboppers in Soho created a distinct hybrid identity

through a blend of clothing and music which collectively bound them together and distinguished them from others. Furthermore, this rebellious style articulated a threat to the establishment in post-war Britain and signalled resistance to the political conditions of austerity and rationing.

According to various musicians, a proportion of the audience and artists, sometimes simultaneously one and the same, that attended and played at bebop clubs, which began in Soho at the Fullado in 1946 and reached a sizable audience by the time Club Eleven opened in 1948, expressed themselves through a distinct way of dressing. Joe Mudele recalls that the modern jazz, or bebop, style was

Zoot suits. Club Eleven... I remember the suits they wore. They had big shoulders, trousers wide at the top and tapered at the bottom. They were made from a light blue gabardine. Red ties, white shirts with long collars, and blue shirts as well. And the guys that used to be on the Queen Mary used to bring these flash ties back from America; they were very wide.³⁵

Although Mudele specifies that the trousers were tapered at the bottom, no photographic evidence of Soho *musicians* exists that appears to suggest this, although there are one or two extremely rare photos of bebop *fans* wearing trousers like Mudele describes (shown below). It is therefore possible that what Mudele calls a zoot suit is something else, maybe a modified British version of the zoot suit that, as will be explored further on, spivs and black hipsters wore, a style that was termed by the press and musicians a gangster or spiv suit. Club Eleven member Laurie Morgan, for example, also remembers that the beboppers shaped their own unique identity around the clothes they wore. He states that ‘We the beboppers were dressed in slick, sharp zoot suits. We would go in Cecil Gee’s and buy almost gangster–like clothes.’³⁶

³⁵ Joe Mudele, *Oral History of Jazz in Britain*, The National Sound Archive, British Library, interviewed by Dave Gelly, 1994.

³⁶ Morgan and Morgan, *Smoky Dives*. 2001.

Morgan states two significant points here. First, like fellow musician Joe Mudele, Morgan specifically calls the outfit a zoot suit. However, as mentioned before, the limited photographic evidence that exists, already presented, of bebop musicians and fans at clubs such as the Feldman Club and Club Eleven does not show tapering at the ankles [like the American version of the zoot suit]. The images of the outfits being worn by youths in those clubs does show a drape shape similar to the zoot suit, but the trousers are wider at the bottom. The photograph above also shows the musicians in the picture wearing trousers that are significantly wider at the top and narrower at the ankles, but they are not as fiercely tapered as those worn by the black and Chicano males in America. Therefore, it is possible that Morgan is alluding to a customised British version of the zoot suit that East End tailor Cecil Gee, amongst others, began to create in his Charing Cross Road store around 1946. As Morgan says, the suit was almost gangster-like. Cecil Gee's clothing creations are explored further on, as is Morgan's allusion to gangster chic, when the chapter analyses the look being expressed by the various social groups operating within bebop culture in Soho.

Ronnie Scott's biographer, John Fordham, also offers a historical glimpse inside Club Eleven. His snapshot details the clothing style that the bebop fans and musicians defined themselves through during that moment:

at night, life in the club was the perfect definition of bop style and exclusivity. Much of the dress was American derived, for those who could afford it. There were the drape... jackets with aggressive shoulders, pegged cuffs, Billy Eckstine shirts, lurid ties with a big knot. Cecil Gee's was the outfitter that specialised in the genre. Detractors of the lifestyle – and that was almost everybody not intimately involved with it, in particular the adherents of the new cult of traditional New Orleans jazz (Trad Jazz) that was gathering steam in South London and Kent – spoke disparagingly of it all, sardonically dismissing the hipsters and their fruit “salad ties”. There were... variations... prismatic sweaters were popular [as were] waistcoats.³⁷

³⁷ John Fordham, *Jazzman: The Amazing Story of Ronnie Scott and his Club* (London: Kyle Cathie Limited, 1995), p. 36.

The way in which bebop fans and musicians signalled their identity was not only different compared to the majority of people in post-war London, but, as Fordham says, their clothes also differentiated them from the traditional New Orleans-style jazz fans. According to Steve Fletcher, the New Orleans style was shabby: the ‘trad look’, says Fletcher, ‘I suppose you’d call it eclectic in a sense that they all wore bits and pieces from several sources, ex-government mainly. The duffle coat was almost mandatory, the ones that was [*sic*] like a carpet, it could stand up on its own. It was thick, camel coloured with a hood and big wooden toggles on it.’³⁸ Fletcher’s evocation of the trad look reflects the notion that the drape-style zoot suit was a unique and modern style at a time when clothes rationing and austerity were the driving political forces.

Although Joe Mudele and John Fordham’s descriptions of the zoot suit and drape shape-wearing beboppers was at Club Eleven – which, as we saw in the previous chapter, opened in 1948 and was closed by police in 1950 – evidence suggests that a version of the zoot suit was being worn by bebop fans two years earlier, an idea that is plausible, as Cecil Gee opened his shop in 1946. This version, moreover, was worn by black hipsters at the Fullado Club during that year.

³⁸ Morgan and Morgan, *Smoky Dives*, 2001.

Black hipsters



Club Eleven, Soho, 1950. Source: Baer Pictures

In September 1946, Pat Brand, a writer at *Melody Maker*, paid a visit to the Fullado Club in New Compton Street in pursuit of the nascent bebop scene. He excitedly observed the spectacle on the street outside the club, where he witnessed the conspicuous style of the ‘coloured man’.³⁹ In his account, the journalist is struck by the detail of the men’s clothing. He notes that some of them were wearing ‘zoot suit[s]’, while others wore ‘many coloured sweater[s]’.⁴⁰ They also boasted ‘patent leather’ shoes and were talking in their ‘quick, strange’ dialects.⁴¹ As he ‘pushed open a door... the rhythm came up to meet’ him. He ventured down some wobbly stairs and landed ‘in the Fullado Club’.⁴²

Besides Brand’s language and tone, there are two significant points to make about the passage in terms of the expressive nature of the clothes that the black males in the

³⁹ Pat Brand, ‘Brand’s Essence’, *Melody Maker*, September 12, 1946, p. 6

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

portrait are wearing. First, zoot suits, as previously demonstrated, were affiliated with the hipster subculture in America and were amongst the first forms of style to reverse the way in which fashion was historically diffused – the zoot suit bubbled up from the ground as opposed to cascading from the top of society downwards. Similarly, here in Soho at the Fullado the style is being expressed by a mixture of socially and culturally diverse black males, marginalised and racialised others during this historical moment in Britain.

Secondly, the ‘many coloured sweaters’ that Brand refers to – which echoes John Fordham’s description of the ‘prismatic sweaters’ worn at Club Eleven by beboppers two years later in 1948 – and the patent leather shoes, an item of clothing associated with the spivs – a group of white working-class hustlers and youths (discussed in greater detail below) – together with the zoot suit, indicate that a group of black hipsters were converging in Soho in 1946. These hipsters, furthermore, expressed themselves visually through a unique style that was opposed to the tedious ‘blue serge [demob] suits’ that the majority of the population in austerity Britain were wearing at that time.⁴³

The black hipster style that signalled their affiliation with the bebop scene in Soho accords with Hebdige’s definition of a subculture. He argues that ‘subcultures cobble together (or hybridize) styles out of the material culture available to them in an effort to confer on them “relative autonomy” within a social order fractured by class, generational differences, work etc.’⁴⁴ Hebdige’s assertion mirrors the image of the black hipsters outside the Fullado Club. Their assortment of seemingly disparate clothing – shoes that were at that time associated with white spivs, zoot jackets borrowed from African American and Hispanic American culture, and bright coloured sweaters – were

⁴³ Thorpe, p. 28.

⁴⁴ Hebdige, ‘The Function of Subculture’, p. 1.

all acquired and woven together into a coherent style that signified the black hipster association with the bebop scene in post-war Soho. This hybridised style collectively cemented their identity as beboppers.

This previously unexplored *Melody Maker* article thus sheds new light on the history of received cultural narratives about subcultures in post-war London. In his influential book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979), Hebdige overlooked the presence of black hipsters in Britain. He claimed that: ‘The zoot suits... of the [North American] hipster embodied the traditional aspirations (making out and moving up) of the black street corner man... Without a significant presence in Britain’s working-class communities, the equivalent hipster option was simply not available.’⁴⁵ Hebdige is referring to the black hipsters who carved out physical spaces for themselves in urban centres in America and who visually identified themselves through style. His claim that there was not a large enough black community or diaspora in London to embody a similar hipster equivalent until the ‘influx of West Indian immigrants [and] their influence on British... subcultures was felt in the early 60s’ misses the black hipster beboppers in post-war Soho. The image described by *Melody Maker* of the group of black males converging in Soho outside the Fullado, in an area that the writer refers to as ‘Little Harlem’, suggests there was a small contingent of black hipsters present in London long before the 1960s. In fact, the confirmation that a version of the zoot suit was visible in Soho and was worn by black Hipsters in 1946 is testament to a hipster presence in Britain in the immediate post-war years. This evidence gleaned from the music press therefore requires us to rethink Hebdige’s chronological history of post-war subcultures, in which he overlooks their presence in 1940s Britain.

⁴⁵ Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (Oxford: Routledge, 1979), p. 49.

The black hipsters that comprised one element of the Fullado club regulars were, according to musician and eyewitness Lennie Bush, ‘mainly West Indians, Africans, some black American servicemen, but mostly... local blacks’.⁴⁶ Bush’s observation of the black males in the club as ‘mainly local’ is an interesting reflection: this was two years before the beginning of mass migration of West Indians to Britain that began with the SS *Windrush* which docked at Tilbury on 22 June 1948. The picture painted of black hipsters in ‘Little Harlem’ in Soho and Bush’s account of the audience at the Fullado Club raise questions of transculturation along the lines of ethnicity. Bush’s account of the black males at the club, along with the *Melody Maker* writer’s statement that ‘It is here [outside the Fullado] that the coloured boys... gather each day to discuss work and play and the gossip of their calling, and perhaps to exchange, in their many dialects, news from homes in a sunnier and more leisurely world’, point to the complex transatlantic and transcultural network of black identities present at the Fullado.⁴⁷ Due to the multifaceted nature of British colonialism, the black identities in question were shaped by a syncretic fusion of intricate social, cultural and political forces which render them both British and African simultaneously. Although these groups were ethnically different to one another, in this instance they were not only united through their common struggle as a minority in London, but were also culturally and aesthetically bound together through their shared taste in music and fashion.

The difference between the zoot suit and the ‘spiv’ suit

In September 1947 a journalist from the Birmingham *Gazette* wrote a piece about a zoot-suited black hipster that he spotted in London’s West End. He specifically

⁴⁶ Bush, 1992.

⁴⁷ Brand, ‘Brand’s Essence’, p. 6.

mentions Soho in the article, as the place where he observed the young man's sartorial style. He attempts to persuade his readers that:

There is no mistaking the... "zoot suit," which is, or was, America's equivalent to our spiv's exaggerated dress. I saw the first I have noticed this side of the Atlantic in the West End to-day [*sic*], worn by a young Negro. The trousers were... taper[ed]... gripping the ankle to a depth of about two inches, so the effect was neither like that produced by bicycle clips nor a soldier's trousers with gaiters. The jacket was very long – longer than a... spiv's – and tightly waisted.⁴⁸

This points towards a number of significant points concerning the zoot suits and spiv suits that signalled affiliation with the bebop scene in Soho. First, the writer demonstrates that black hipsters were, as *Melody Maker* portrayed the previous year, conspicuous on the streets of Soho and wearing a version of the suit. Secondly, he suggests that the zoot suit's jacket is different and much longer than those worn by spivs. It is therefore highly possible that what the journalist observed, given the transatlantic nature of the zoot suit, was American and had migrated to London with a US serviceman stationed there. In terms of the style of the trousers, as stated earlier, no photographic evidence that exists of bebop *musicians* in Soho shows the British version of the suit with pegged trousers, tapering at the bottom – though there are rare images and illustrations of bebop *fans* wearing trousers like those the writer describes here [these will be shown further on]. Thirdly, it provides further evidence that black hipsters were conspicuous in Soho before the arrival of the *Windrush* in 1948. Finally, it shows that a distinct visual style was, in Hebdige's terms, 'cobbled together' and worn by black hipsters who identified with the bebop scene in Soho, and that it set them apart from the majority of the population in post-war Britain.

There is another potential narrative, though, regarding the origins of the zoot suit that the writer of the article observed in Soho. Iconic stylist and costumier Roger Burton of

⁴⁸ 'The Screen', *Birmingham Gazette*, 11 September 1947, p. 2.

The Contemporary Wardrobe – a cutting-edge vintage clothing company that supplied the outfits for many classic films documenting historical post-war British youth subcultures such as *Quadrophenia* (1979), *Absolute Beginners* (1986), and *Sid and Nancy* (1986) – owns some original extremely rare zoot and drape-shape jackets. When I contacted Mr Burton to conduct some research, he explained to me that ‘someone probably saw somebody wearing one [a zoot suit], one of Cecil Gee’s or an original one brought over by a black GI. Then they would have had a tailor make them one-up.’⁴⁹ Burton’s statement typifies the hybrid, transatlantic and transcultural, as well as improvised, nature of the clothing that collectively bound the beboppers together in Soho.



*English Zoot jacket, 1947, by Kensington. Courtesy of Roger Burton, The Contemporary Wardrobe.
Photo by Ray Kinsella, 2019*

⁴⁹ Roger Burton, interview by Ray Kinsella, 20 June 2019.

The photograph above depicts an original British-style zoot suit, owned by Roger Burton. Created by a London tailor by the name of Kensington in 1947, it can be seen that the jacket is noticeably much longer than a demob suit jacket, and the other suit jackets that were available en masse in the late 1940s. There are two other important points to make about this style. First, the jacket is a similar length to what the journalists cited above saw black hipsters wearing outside the Fullado Club and on the street in Soho. Second, the jacket is strikingly similar in length and detail to those worn by the New Edwardians and Teddy Boys from around 1948 onwards. Again, this jacket was made in 1947 and was a signifier of the bebop scene, and therefore demonstrates that beboppers defined themselves through an ostentatious visual style before the onset of subsequent post-war youth subcultures. In addition to this, the English zoot style is notably different to the English drape-style jacket (below).



*English drape jacket, 1947, by N. Salt. Courtesy of Roger Burton, The Contemporary Wardrobe.
Photo by Ray Kinsella, 2019*

This jacket, also from 1947 and belonging to Mr Burton, made by East End tailor N. Salt, is significantly longer than an ordinary 1940s jacket. Though it may not appear so at first glance, on closer observation the drape shape is much longer than a demob suit jacket, and the shoulders are much wider and much more padded. The sleeves, Burton tells me, were ‘generally finger-tip length’.⁵⁰ According to Burton, ‘the demob jacket is much tighter under the arms, and shorter in length. The idea with the demob suit was that they were trying to save cloth. The drape shape is also much boxier than a regular or demob suit.’⁵¹ As can be seen in these photographs, the English drape-shape jacket is

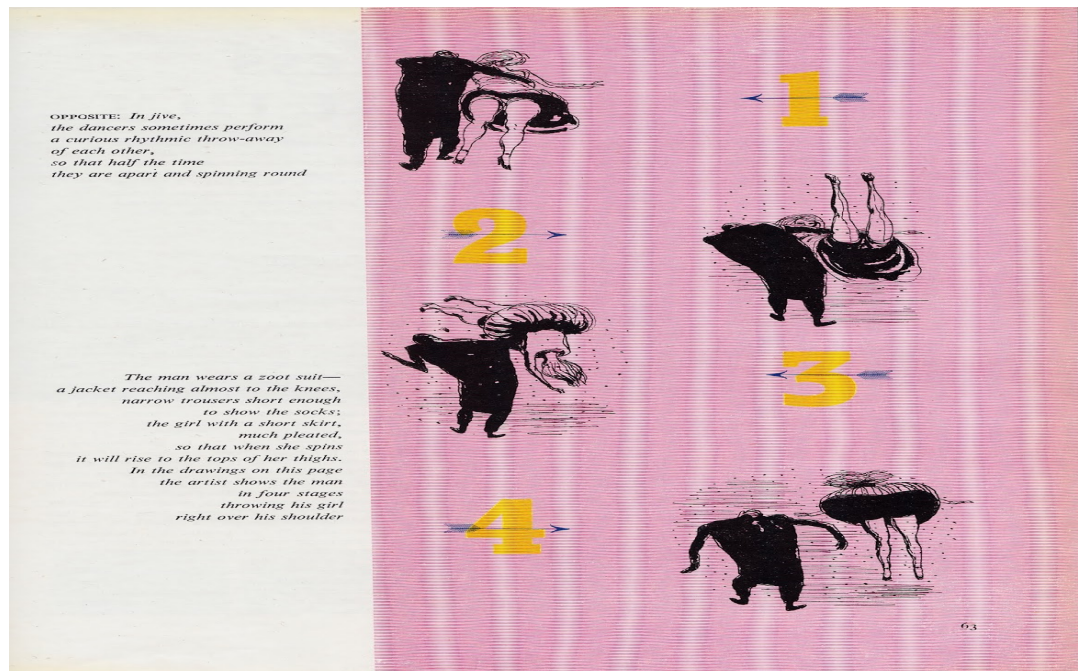
⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

slightly shorter than the English zoot suit jacket. Both styles were cultural signifiers of the bebop scene in Soho, and were conspicuously different to what most ordinary members of the public were wearing at the time. These jackets, their cuts, forms and proportions, would have raised a few eyebrows and turned a few heads. Incidentally, I tried on the drape-shape jacket above; the padded shoulders jutted outwards, giving my upper body much more width, almost like a caricature, and the bottom of the jacket draped down to just above my knees.

The extra cloth used to construct these jackets, and the look that they produced once worn, demonstrate the subversive nature of the bebop style. At a historical moment in which clothes rationing and severe economic austerity were the driving political forces, this sartorial style signalled irreverence and articulated a contempt for social and cultural norms.

Although there is a slight difference between the zoot and the drape jackets, both were worn by bebop fans and musicians in Soho – that is, both black and white hipsters, whom the media termed ‘spivs’ – and the style, moreover, signified union within their group, while at the same time differentiating them from other jazz fans and from society more generally.



The Paramount Dance Hall, depicting a man in a zoot suit, in William Sansom, The 5th Contact Book: A Public for Jive, William Sansom. Illustration by Leonard Rosoman, Source: f0undobjects.blogspot.com

After the *Melody Maker* portrayals of black male beboppers at the Fullado Club in 1946 and the mainstream newspaper accounts of zoot-suited black hipsters on an unnamed street in Soho the following year, another extremely rare story appeared in 1947. The narrative, concerning the Paramount Dance Hall, was also accompanied by illustrations depicting black males wearing the bebop look [above and below]. These drawings, together with an article that captured the zeitgeist of Soho in the late 1940s, shed light on the transracial audiences that constituted the scene and the style that distinguished them as a social category.

In this journalistic account, entitled ‘A Public for Jive, 1947’, writer William Sansom portrayed the scene at the Paramount. Describing the interior of the space, which, as a mainstream dance hall was more upmarket than the other bebop clubs, and was not specifically a bebop venue but hosted bebop nights, Sansom provides a snapshot of the hedonistic atmosphere of the club. Particularly relevant here is that he focuses on the detail of some of the clubbers’ clothing. In addition to conveying a sense of the urgency

of the radical new underground music, Sansom observes the exaggerated sartorial forms in which the hipsters were adorned:

You might observe two of these eccentrics more closely and notice that the young man wears a jacket reaching almost to his knees, narrow trousers... and a watch-chain hanging from his waistcoat to his ankles... A 'solid' driving beat is produced that "sends" the dancers. It seems almost as if an invisible material force is at work, as though the instruments emit successive walls of sound that force the dancers on their way... The force of sudden movement, the unison enthusiasm, is palpable. The hep-cats are at it, the jive is on, they're in a groove... skirts are circling, zoot-tails flying.⁵²

Again, this echoes what Joe Mudele and Laurie Morgan, two of the original Soho bebop pioneers, describe as bebop style. Sansom also tells us that there is 'a strong colony of coloured men' in the club in this moment.⁵³ We know that Enrico A. Stennett, a young Jamaican man who migrated to London in 1947, detailed in the following chapter, was a bebop dancer at the club. This typifies not only the idea that beboppers crossed racial lines – more so than the musicians and audiences affiliated with trad jazz – it also clarifies that black hipsters were one element that comprised the bebop fanbase in the Soho clubs and, as established earlier, expressed themselves through a spectacular visual style. Although the writer does not specifically mention bebop, the 'solid driving beat' of the music echoes the descriptions of bebop drumming established in the previous chapter. Again, this music was inextricably linked with the unconventional fashion that characterised the Soho beboppers.

⁵² William Sansom, *The 5th Contact Book: "The Public's Progress", A Public for Jive*, 1947, found0jects.blogspot.com [last accessed, July 12, 2020]. This essay is taken from Sansom's book, *Pleasures Strange and Simple* (London: Hogarth Press, 1953). In the book, the piece was renamed, 'Jive.'

⁵³ Ibid.



*Original illustration of man in a zoot suit at the Paramount Dance Hall, 1947, from The 5th Contact Book: The Public's Progress, 'A Public for Jive', 1947.
Illustration by Leonard Rosoman, f0undobjects.blogspot.com*

This article appeared sometime in 1947, a year after Pat Brand's portrayal of black hipsters at the Fullado, and was published in the same year that the zoot-suited man was observed in Soho by the *Birmingham Gazette* writer, and in it we can see that the zoot-suited youths were following bebop music. This, evidently, had by now spread beyond the Fullado Club and clearly to the Paramount Dance Hall [amongst other clubs]. The writer also offers a glimpse of the other social groups that identified themselves as beboppers in post-war Soho:

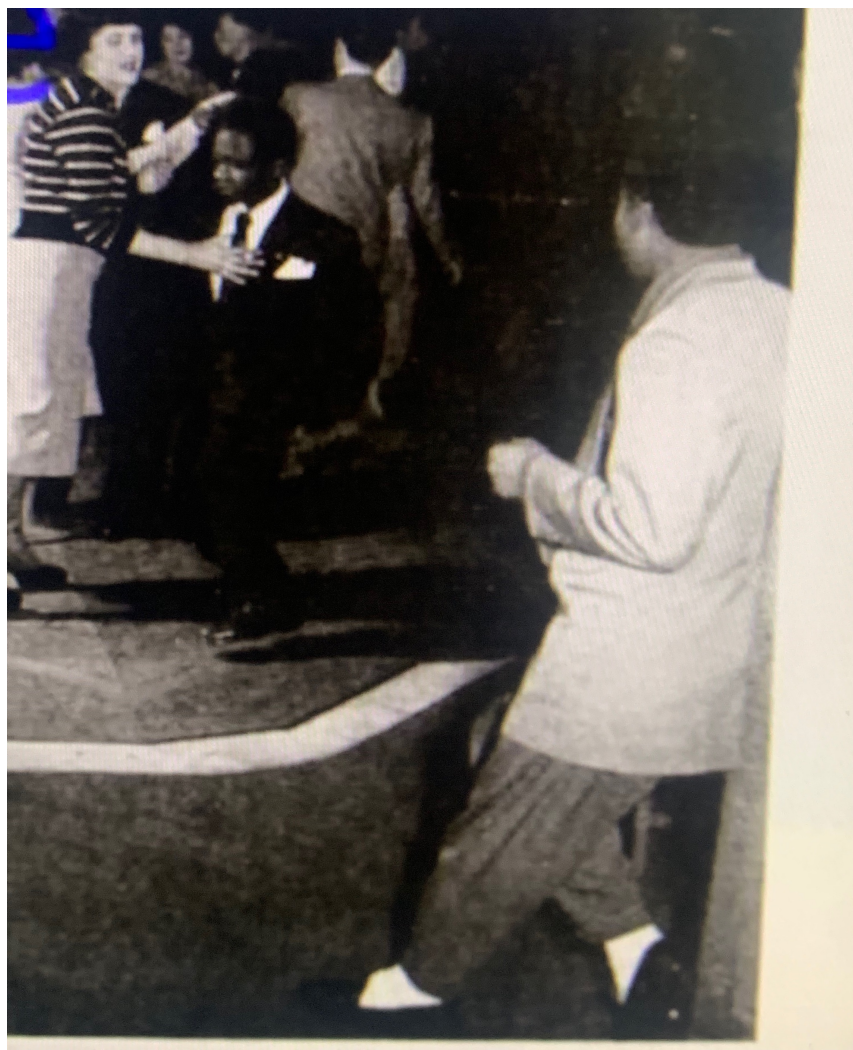
However, not all wear zoot suits... those who do are the *elite*, the most regular regulars who come every day of the week, twice a day at weekends; the absolutely possessed... a spiv with padded shoulders and a flash haircut bumps into a [*sic*] elderly gentleman in a quiet grey suit who might be a tea-taster or a dentist.⁵⁴

The depiction of the youths wearing exaggerated clothing – whether zoot suits or spiv suits – and the fact that they are labelled *elite* and are contrasted with the sombre grey suits of other revellers at the club establishes that a clear visible style – one which was conspicuously different to the standardised clothing that the majority of the population

⁵⁴ Ibid.

were wearing at that time – was a fundamental aesthetic and ideological marker of the bebop scene.

The photo below is an extremely rare glimpse inside the Paramount, or any of Soho's bebop clubs for that matter. Taken by an unknown photographer for the magazine *Jazz Illustrated*, the visual language tells an important story not only about the transatlantic and transcultural nature of bebop fashion, but also demonstrates the differences between the zoot suit and drape-shape suit that were collective shapers of bebop identity.



Zoot-suited youth, woman, and spiv-suited beboppers at the Paramount Club, 1950.
Source: Jazz Illustrated.

The young man on the right, leaning against the wall, is wearing a zoot suit. The presumably cream or white jacket reaches well below the seat of his trousers, which are

much wider at the top and tapered at the bottom. As we have seen in other photos, musicians' trousers, though wider at the top and narrower at the bottom, were not as tapered as the trousers that the man in this photograph is wearing. Therefore, it is highly likely that he had his suit made by the one of the East End tailors such as N. Salt or Kensington – the same tailors that made the zoot suits and drape jackets that Roger Burton of the *Contemporary Wardrobe* owns in his vintage collection. The photograph also shows the youngster wearing a long tie, either loosely knotted or undone, and although we cannot see its colour, it is presumably one of the loud, garish ties (explored below) that were also a signifier of bebop identity.

In contrast, the man on the left, dancing with the woman, is wearing a black drape-shape jacket. Although it is not very clear, the shoulders look wider than the standard jackets of the time, and although he has his knees bent in dancing to the music, his jacket looks to be a bit shorter than the one that the other youngster is wearing. This again demonstrates that there were slight differences in form and proportion between the English-style zoots and English drapes. Nevertheless, both of these styles were different to conventional suits of that historical period, and strikingly dissimilar to other jazz fans' style. Both the drape shape and zoot suit were subcultural signifiers of the 'bottom-up' fashion, to use Hebdige's term, that beboppers in post-war Soho fused together into a hybridised style in order to distinguish themselves from other jazz fans and society more widely.

Customising the zoot suit look



Club Eleven, circa 1948–1950. Source: henrybebop.com

So far, I have discussed and analysed the style constructed by musicians and the black hipster element of the bebop scene in Soho, along with the nuanced differences between the zoot and spiv suits that they wore. Now, using the same combination of methods, this section explores the way in which white hipsters improvised hybrid identities in bebop clubs in Soho through cobbling together a combination of subcultural signifiers – zoot and drape-shape suits (as seen in the photo above), lurid, garish ties, shirts with spear-pointed collars (as seen in the photo above), and patent leather and crepe-soled shoes.

The section first looks at how these identities were despised by other jazz fans, not only because beboppers expressed stylistic differences musically, but in fact even more so due to their sartorial style. Secondly, the section looks at how these identities posed a social and cultural threat to the hegemonic political forces at a time when the British Empire was crumbling: not only was the ostentatious way in which beboppers dressed in post-war Soho opposed to the political forces of clothes rationing and austerity, but

the codes embedded within the clothing also subverted the collective, conformist values of the nation, which had been reflected through the traditional suit throughout Britain's history up until this point. This section also demonstrates how these representations of beboppers were constructed and distorted by both the music press and the dominant media.

Raymond Thorpe, an eyewitness to the 1940s bebop scene in Soho, observed a girl being whirled around the dancefloor of a Soho jazz club:

I'd not seen her before, but I recognised the cat moving her around. He was known simply as Johnny – a Cypriot, like all Cypriots a bit too handsome, and dressed in crepe shoes, dark cream suit, red shirt and a ... tie loosened at the neck. He was a confidence trickster. Maybe not a big one, but smart enough to eat three meals and keep his nails manicured. Johnny smiled at the girl and she jerked herself towards him.⁵⁵

Johnny is wearing 'the brushed-suede shoe or chukka (or desert) boot, an item of footwear with a tough crepe sole originally worn by British soldiers in the deserts of North Africa.'⁵⁶ These shoes were an 'item of clothing that later became almost exclusively associated with the Teddy Boys.'⁵⁷ The Soho beboppers appropriated the crepe soled desert boots, originally an emblem of military power and the establishment, from their original context and placed them in, to use Hebdige's terminology, 'a symbolic ensemble which served to erase or subvert their original straight meaning.'⁵⁸ Not only this, but the beboppers had added the crepe soled chukka boot to their sartorial 'look' before the arrival in Britain of the Teddy Boys in the early 1950s.

Johnny the Cypriot is, in Thorpe's account, portrayed as a sharply dressed wide-boy who is slightly deviant. The ways in which the beboppers and their sartorial style were

⁵⁵ Thorpe, p. 14.

⁵⁶ Ferris and Lord, p. 9.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Hebdige, *Subculture: the meaning of style*, p. 104.

constructed as deviant by both wider society and trad jazz fans can be seen in a series of polemical letters published in *Melody Maker* in 1947. Firstly, one writer complained:

It is with concern that we note the encroachment into London dance music circles of that ostentatious, over dressed and exaggerated behaviour which is dubbed “spivery.” It is the new generation of instrumentalists which is bringing this regrettable quality into our business, and we would ask why these young men think it necessary to dress and behave like “Camden Town” barrow boys. It is well known... that the people... who draw attention to themselves by their garish garb, are all suffering from an inferiority complex.⁵⁹

Although not clearly stated, the author of this letter is expressing his disdain for beboppers. We know this to be the case as the brash, flamboyant clothing and so-called spivish behaviour was not associated with trad jazz or other forms of dance music during this period. Rather, it was the beboppers who defined themselves through these distinct modes of fashion and music. The clothes are also tied to notions of social class – for example the cultural reference to barrow-boys from Camden Town, which suggests that bebop appealed specifically to working-class youths from the London suburbs [as explored further on]. While it is true that bebop attracted a large working-class male audience, social class was not a defining feature of the scene, as I demonstrate in the next chapter. Nevertheless, the demonisation of this contingent of stylish working-class youths that dared to dress differently was arguably underscored by the idea that, up until this point, ‘British working-class youth had no previous tradition of flamboyant dress’, as cultural historian Steve Chibnall has noted.⁶⁰ As fashion had formerly flowed down from the upper classes, working-class youths dressed up in this way were evidently viewed as a threat to the status quo.

The letter writer continues his attack on beboppers, and in so doing affirms the notion that this style-oriented collective is in collision with the social, political and

⁵⁹ ‘Spivs,’ *Melody Maker*, 12 April 1947, p. 4.

⁶⁰ Chibnall, *Whistle and Zoot*, p. 65.

economic values of post-war Britain. He argues that ‘Young people entering this profession and climbing the rungs of the rocky ladder to fame would do well not to ape the “spivvery” of the new musicians, but to look at the acknowledged successful ones of our business’.⁶¹ Referring to a ‘meeting of the Dance Band Directors’ Association’, he claims that ‘the men who have made their mark in dance music’ dress modestly:

Their shoulders are more or less their own and not their tailors’: their hair is cut sedately; and their general attitude is quiet, unobtrusive and dignified. They do not need to talk or look like “spivs.” Nor do you.⁶²

The wide-shouldered, tailored jackets suggest that, as seen earlier, a proportion of bebop fans – the ones that could afford to – were having the drape and zoot suit made for them by tailors in the East End such as N. Salt and Kensington, like those in the photographs of Roger Burton’s collection of vintage jackets from 1947. The bottom-up style was being defined against the conservative ideals embodied in the traditional suit: quiet, dignified, modest and, more importantly, conformist. Fashion historian Diana Crane has pointed out the power of clothing in shaping identity. Crane asserts that: ‘clothes as artefacts “create” behaviour through their capacity to impose social identities... For centuries, [clothes] have been used to impose social identities on more or less willing subjects.’⁶³ Crane’s observation is useful for demonstrating how bebop style subverted the traditional orthodox values embodied in the conventional men’s suit, while at the same time shaping the beboppers’ collective identity. On the one hand, bebop style signalled anti-establishment sentiments and resistance at a historical moment in which clothes rationing and austerity were the social and political norms. On the other hand, it was also an aesthetic symbol of union and shared cultural taste within the group.

⁶¹ ‘Spivs,’ *Melody Maker*, 12 April 1947, p. 4.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Diana Crane, *Fashion and its Social Agendas: Class, Gender, and Identity in Clothing* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 2.

A similar article appeared in *Melody Maker* the following week. This piece elaborated on the previous condescending comments regarding the youths that were inhabiting bebop clubs. Although the report does not clearly state that these clubs are in Soho, bebop was at that time confined to a small underground scene in and around the Soho area. The ‘youngsters’ are portrayed as absent-minded, inauthentic jazz fans lacking respect and courtesy for established social and cultural norms, as embodied in their snappy sartorial style. The writer states:

I have been a jazz lover for some ten years or more, and since the end of the war have watched with increasing uneasiness the young people who are frequenting jazz clubs, such as the one Mr. Shepherd mentioned. These youngsters (or so it seems to me and many other true jazz enthusiasts) are neither interested in the music nor the musicians, and their complete lack of manners and taste (evident in their behaviour and dress) are causing deep concern to all decent-minded persons who visit such clubs to enjoy the music.⁶⁴

A contrasting letter was published in *Melody Maker* on 26 April 1947. Opposed to the previous writers, this contributor leapt to the defence of bebop culture. Alluding to what he perceived to be the positive collective values rooted in bebop culture, the writer asserts:

I cannot allow your recent leader on spivs to pass without comment. The leader overlooked one important fact: that the people who in the last few years have done most to infuse new life into that ailing patient, British jazz; who have raised immeasurably the technical standard of performance and orchestration; who, in short, have enhanced our prestige as musicians in the eyes of the world; these people are the same eccentric young men whom you so sternly criticize. Personally, given a choice between your short-haired, drably dressed businessmen-bandleaders and the guys with the shaggy manes and sharp cravats, I’d take the spivs every time. At least they’re alive and don’t resemble human adding machines.⁶⁵

Again, questions regarding individuality, authenticity and modernity in terms of musical innovation and taste in dress are raised. This is exemplified through the advent of a modernised scene that marks a departure from the swing and other dance styles that had

⁶⁴ ‘Spivs’, *Melody Maker*, 19 April 1947, p. 6.

⁶⁵ ‘Spotlight on Spivs’, *Melody Maker*, 26 April 1947, p. 6.

characterised the pre-war years. This newer cohort of artists have clearly antagonised the previous generation of dance band musicians and fans. But more importantly, the article points towards notions of style and rebelliousness which are epitomised through the writer's reference to a unique fashion and hairstyle that are characteristic of the young Soho beboppers. This representation demonstrates that the modern music, bebop, and the fashion associated with it are inextricably linked. To the author, beboppers are not accountant-type 'squares', as in 'human adding machines', but are in his estimation modern individuals, free-thinking hipsters who collectively championed a brand-new identity through clothes and music in post-war London.

Referring to the sharp cravats, the ties that formed a part of the customised zoot suit hipster aesthetic in post-war Soho are documented in the first letter of this series. The writer not only comments on the padded drape shape and zoot suit jackets, but also paints a picture of the cultural significance of these clothing accessories that signified bebop identity. The reader moaned:

This profession needs dignity. It has its own prestige based on the intrinsic good which it does to public morale, but an entirely wrong slant on our profession is given to the public by the rainbow-tied, over-dressed, super padded, loud-talking... youths who cover their inferiority complex by looking like "spivs".⁶⁶

A definitive feature of bebop fashion, together with the zoot and drape-style jackets that had been the focus of scandal for other jazz fans, were the loud, garish, 'rainbow' ties. The contemporary photographs shown throughout this chapter are in black and white, and therefore do not capture the lurid hues of the ties that the beboppers were wearing. However, I was able to take some photographs of Roger Burton's unique collection of vintage clothing of the drape and zoot style jackets, together with some of the original ties that the 1940s beboppers wore in Soho.

⁶⁶ 'Spivs', *Melody Maker*, 12 April 1947, p. 4.



*English zoot suit jacket with bebop-style tie, both from 1947.
Roger Burton, The Contemporary Wardrobe. Photo by Ray Kinsella, 2019*

In looking at this 1947 tie, the radiant colour disrupts the ideals embedded in standardised menswear accessories during the period. As shown at the beginning of the chapter, Montague Burton [not to be confused with Roger Burton], who supplied much of the conventional male fashion at that time, specifically told his staff to uphold the conservative principles of the nation that were manifested through menswear. The glaring orange tie in the photo above thus clearly collides with the orthodox values of quiet, reserved modesty embodied in the menswear created by one of the biggest retailers of men's fashion in Britain during the 1940s. However, the colour scheme is not the only rebellious trait of the tie: it is also decorated with references to vice and hedonism. Printed onto the tie are playing cards, which signal gambling, semi-naked women conveying a sense of eroticism, and alcohol, symbolising the loss of control.

The convergence of these images painted on top of the loud, orange tie, again articulate contempt for the social and cultural values that were encoded in men's clothing during this period. The ways in which bebop style was assembled and customised by the black and white beboppers– the brash, loosely-knotted ties, the crepe-soled surplus military footwear and patent leather shoes, and the modern drape and zoot suits – again echo Hebdige's notion that 'subcultures cobble together (or hybridize) styles out of the material culture available to them,' and how they also appropriate material objects placing them in 'a symbolic ensemble which serve to erase or subvert their original straight meaning.'⁶⁷

Not only does the subversive way in which the Soho beboppers constructed meaning through style reflect Hebdige's notion of bricolage, but the letters published in *Melody Maker* by the discerning trad jazz fans and other members of its readership also echo Sarah Thornton's idea concerning the media's role in subculture. In her innovative book *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (1995), Thornton argues that

Niche media like the music press construct subcultures as much as they document them. National mass media, such as the tabloids, develop youth movements as much as they distort them... Media and other culture industries are there and effective right from the start. They are central to the process of subcultural formation, integral to the way we create groups with words.⁶⁸

Thornton's analysis of media involvement in subculture formation helps shed light on the way in which beboppers were constructed and transmitted by the press as disruptive. For example, although they self-consciously wove together strands of the limited material culture available to them in order to construct a unique 'look' in post-war Soho, the music press and the dominant press [as explored below], while documenting the beboppers in letters reflecting the thoughts of other jazz fans, communicated images

⁶⁷ Hebdige, *Subculture: the meaning of style*, p. 50, p. 104.

⁶⁸ Thornton, *Club Cultures*, p. 117.

of their sartorial style as at odds with the traditional social codes embodied in menswear that flowed from the power structure. This was arguably a contributing factor in transforming the beboppers into a distinct subculture.

Exploring bebop fashion and the way in which it was communicated through letters and reports in the music press raises important questions regarding not only beboppers' style in the post-war moment and its subsequent proliferation in the media, but also questions concerning the nature and meaning of 'spivs' and 'spivvish behaviour'. What was a spiv, and what exactly was termed as spivvery or spivvish? Why were the musicians and a proportion of male youths that were synonymous with the bebop scene in Soho represented by the media as spivs? Some problematising of the notion of the spiv is required in order to demonstrate that while this social category was one element of the bebop audience in the Soho clubs, not all youths and musicians, as documented and analysed above, were actually spivs.

Gangster chic and the notion of the spiv



'Still' taken from an unknown film, part of 'The 1940s' Spiv Cycle'. Source: british60scinema.net

The term spiv was originally bestowed on racketeers operating during and after the Second World War. These men supplied valuables through 'unauthorised dealing in rationed and restricted goods and services.'⁶⁹ Jerry White has noted that according to certain police officers and people in positions of power, the war produced new types of criminals. These voices declared that 'we moved into the era of the spiv and the smart alec [*sic*], the get rich quick types who have never really left us.'⁷⁰ The spivs are renowned for having propped up the black market. Said to have corroded 'everyday standards of honest, decent life', they were a 'particular type of petty criminal', often a middle man or supplier of stolen goods, 'who, at a time of rationing, were viewed as providing a service to a population that was sick to death of shortages. The spiv was seen as a necessary evil in society.'⁷¹ But the terminology was not only attributed to petty criminals; the term spiv also applied to other street hustlers, those known as 'wide-boys' (men who are 'wide awake' and who live off their wits; the term may also

⁶⁹ Chibnall, p. 65.

⁷⁰ White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, p. 274.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

be linked to a style of wide-brimmed felt hat called a wide-awake hat)'.⁷² Others suggest that 'in racing parlance a spiv was someone with no obvious means of support who made his living on the fringes of London's underworld'.⁷³

The exact origin of the term spiv is unknown. Some believe it 'might be reverse cockney back-slang for VIPs, the letters "VIP" standing for very important person'.⁷⁴ Photographic evidence of spivs is scarce. According to Steve Chibnall, a 'search of the BBC Hulton Picture Library's eight million photographs revealed only one set of pictures which featured someone (other than a professional entertainer) who in anyway looked the part of a spiv', and my own search of the Hulton Archives turned up similar results.⁷⁵ One can only assume that the lack of photographic imagery could be due to the idea that capturing spivs on film whilst they were peddling black market goods would have been a dangerous task for photographers. But how did the notion of the spiv enter the popular imagination during and after the Second World War?

Historian Mark Roodhouse suggests that the author and playwright Bill Naughton 'was responsible for alerting the British public to the spiv's existence'.⁷⁶ Roodhouse states that 'although Peter Cheyney had introduced the public to "Willie the Spiv" and other black marketeers in a series of articles for the *Sunday Dispatch* in June 1944, the crime writer's account of Willie's dealings did not capture the public imagination'.⁷⁷ The notion of the spiv that circulated and was etched into the wider British imagination, Roodhouse suggests, was instead due to an article by Naughton in the *News Chronicle* in September 1945 entitled 'Meet the Spiv':

Londoners... will recognise him, so will many city magistrates – the slick, flashy, nimble-witted tough, talking sharp slang from the corner of his mouth.

⁷² Ferris and Lord, p. 16.

⁷³ Mark Roodhouse, *Black Market Britain: 1939–1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 244.

⁷⁴ Ferris and Lord, p. 16.

⁷⁵ Chibnall, p. 67.

⁷⁶ Roodhouse, *Black Market Britain*, p. 244.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

He is a sinister by-product of big-city civilisation – counterpart to the zoot-suited youths of America.⁷⁸

Although this article may have introduced the spiv to the wider British public, it is also implied that the style iconography in a number of gangster films imported from America and projected onto screens in British cinemas was emulated by so-called spivs, and helped fix the ‘gangster chic’ style, which was similar to the spiv style, in the British public imagination. While there appears to be a general consensus between historians concerning the idea that American films popularised the style, some writers suggest that the films were specifically gangster movies, while others allude to the more jazz-oriented pictures. In terms of gangster films, Roodhouse says that ‘Several canonical films,’ which were British but were inspired by American crime movies, ‘including Carol Reed’s *The Third Man* (1949) and Jules Dassin’s *Night and the City* (1950), were part of the spiv cycle that Robert Murphy rediscovered in 1986’.⁷⁹

In terms of jazz-oriented pictures, Steve Chibnall argues that

although films aimed at a black audience like the jazz shorts may have received little distribution here there was still ethnic colour a-plenty in musicals such as *Hellzapoppin’*, (1941) or *Stormy Weather* (1943). Black and white celluloid may have been unable to convey the vivid hues of the zoot but the drape shape and frantic jitterbug style were there to be marvelled at.⁸⁰

A number of home-grown British films influenced by the American pictures were made, in which the gangster was constructed with a uniquely British style. *The Daily Express* published an article in June 1947 depicting a new movie as follows:

They Made Me a Fugitive is set in Soho, and you know what that means – spivs, black market gangs, ladies of easy virtue, robberies and gun battles... The dialogue is in the flip jargon of the spivs⁸¹

⁷⁸ Bill Naughton, ‘Meet the Spiv’, *News Chronicle*, 13 September 1945, P. 2.

⁷⁹ Mark Roodhouse, ‘In Racket Town: Gangster Town: Gangster Chic in Austerity Britain, 1939–1953’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 3:4, 2011, pp. 523–541, (p. 524).

⁸⁰ Chibnall, p. 64.

⁸¹ *Daily Express*, 27 June 1947, p. 4.

In looking at this press report and the historians' observations above, it is plausible to suggest that the beboppers in Soho's clubs took strands from both looks – black American jazz and white gangsters in films – and blended them together to create their own unique British aesthetic. According to one of the most prominent figures in the history of British fashion, Manny Silverman, who went on to become managing director of Moss Bros, movies were one of few mediums whereby youths could see the various American styles from which they drew to formulate their own unique bebop style. In an oral history account stored at the British Library, Silverman recalls that 'it would have been [film]... I can't think of any magazine that one would have looked at in those days... There would have been an element of the noir stuff, because at that age one was influenced. Who were the great gangsters of that time? There was Cagney, there was Bogart, who really were the key figures.'⁸²

The public consciousness of the gangster chic and spiv style continued to grow through the national press, which had begun not only to demonise the new style phenomenon, but also to ridicule this mode of fashion, in an attempt to destabilise its appeal and marginalise those who wore it. According to the *Daily Mirror*, which published a number of stories about spivs in the late 1940s, in particular spivs located within Soho, the spivs dressed in a style that echoes the *Melody Maker* and *News Chronicle*'s descriptions:

Talk about spivs and double-dyed villains. Most of the boys of the padded-shoulders and pointed-toes brigade are just mischievous little scamps... the little spivs who sell bootleg liquor, stolen trinkets and clothing coupons at two bob a time in Soho.⁸³

Another article paints a picture of spivs in Soho, but unlike the press clipping above, this portrait does not depict the same style as the *Melody Maker* reports that were

⁸² Manny Silverman, *An Oral History of Fashion*, British Library, interviewed by Anna Dyke, November 15, 2005

⁸³ Noel Whitcomb, 'Under the Counter', *The Daily Mirror*, 21 May 1947, p. 4.

explored previously. This piece, while constructing an image of Soho as a Rabelaisian world turned upside down, claims that in the

villainous little village that straggles carelessly North-East of Piccadilly... there are about a score of spivs in the street opposite. Their side whiskers are unkempt, their flash clothes tatty. In groups of three or four they dance agitatedly.⁸⁴

While the *Melody Maker* images of beboppers presented earlier conveyed them as rebellious, they are not distorted to the extent that they are here: the letters published in *Melody Maker* do not portray the ‘spivvy’ youths as tatty or unkempt. On the contrary, although they are presented as subversive, one of the articles depicted the youths in bebop clubs not with shabby clothing but as sharp-suited hipsters.

Another article published in the *Daily Mirror*, this one during 1949, demonstrated that the young men and youths who dressed in this alien fashion were not only demonised, but were also sneered at and described as laughable, presumably in an effort to deflate the subversive undertones of the style. The article stated that:

Personally, we feel that the greatest possible service to peace would be the exporting to the Soviet Union of large quantities of American Drapes (zoot suits) coupled with a stock of those strange ties from Charing Cross-Road. Once a nation could see (as the Western Powers so often do) members of its population trotting about in those ridiculous fashions, the Russians sense of humour would be restored and the soviet would not take itself so seriously.⁸⁵

The politicisation of American drapes and zoot suits were, as explored throughout this chapter, caused by the alien, rebellious connotations that they embodied; they were perceived to transgress the modesty and unobtrusiveness embedded in the formal English suits of the time. Not only were the clothes derived from black and Hispanic culture in America, which were seen as alien and thereby posed a threat to English values, but also there was a broader sense of Anti-American sentiment in Britain after

⁸⁴ Noel Whitcomb, ‘Under the Counter’, *The Daily Mirror*, 21 June 1947, p. 4.

⁸⁵ Cassandra, ‘Clothes and the Man’, *The Daily Mirror*, 15 September 1949, p. 6.

the war. This filtered down from the establishment and through the media, and was as much to do with the crisis of the crumbling British Empire as it was with trying to preserve a conservative image of Englishness.

The reference in this article to Charing Cross Road ‘American Drapes’ and ‘strange ties’ points to the retailers where the spivs and beboppers were shopping. Tailor Cecil Gee is one of the tailor’s that created the British version of the zoot suit, and is noted to have ‘repackaged this street style as the American Look’.⁸⁶

Cultural historians have noted that, due to clothes rationing in Britain between 1 June 1941 and 15 March 1949,

the colourful creations on view at the local Odeon had been an impossible dream for the young British working man but in 1946 the “American look” became obtainable with the help of a shrewd East End Jewish tailor who managed to steer clothing imports through the barriers of Britain’s siege economy. Cecil Gee brought 42nd Street to Charing Cross Road in a cascade of kipper ties and shiny shirts.⁸⁷

As demonstrated earlier through televised documentary and oral history accounts, some of the bebop musicians claim that they acquired their sharp, slick ‘gangster like’ clothes from Cecil Gee in Charing Cross Road. Other beboppers claim that the musicians who ‘worked on the ships’ would bring flashy ties back from their voyages to New York. These accounts typify the complexity of the hybrid, transnational and transatlantic history of the zoot suits, drape jackets, spiv suits, gangster chic and clothing accessories that the Soho beboppers cobbled together into a distinctive style. While the historian’s account above demonstrates that cinema was one medium that influenced the youths that wore this style, Cecil Gee was not the only source, but one of multiple sources supplying the fashion associated with bebop culture in post-war Soho. As shown previously, the travelling beboppers were other sources of the style, as were East-End

⁸⁶ Roodhouse. *In Racket Town*, p. 533.

⁸⁷ Chibnall, p. 68.

tailors such as N. Salt and Kensington whom created the clothes in Roger Burton's collection.

With regard to the spivs, though, the way in which the media used the term interchangeably was problematic: anyone in post-war London that dressed in an 'American Look' suit was labelled a spiv. On 9 January 1948 an article appeared in *The Sydney Morning Herald* written by their London correspondent which shed light on the way in which the term and label, spiv, had become a signifier in post-war Britain for petty crime and anyone that was considered to be outside of the conventional economic production system. The article demonstrated that the 'British Government had set up a scheme'

to compel three classes of people in the community to register for productive work... The three classes named are, respectively, "street traders," persons who have not been either "gainfully employed" for at least 30 hours in each of five weeks since November 17, and employers (who must also register their employees) in gambling, pools, and nightclub business. The orders directing such persons to the national man-power pool appear to be aimed at "spivs" ... but the Government will not admit this. A high official of the Ministry of Labour explaining the orders to a press conference, emphasised that they were not to be thought of as directed at persons with nicknames; whereby he meant "spivs" ... or "eels" and "butterflies" – names which had come into common usage.⁸⁸

This report shows that the term, spiv, had become a common feature of the language used to describe street traders, people in the gambling business, and people involved in the night-time economies. However, as demonstrated throughout this chapter, the media circulated images with connotations of inauthenticity, immorality and un-Englishness, to anyone dressing in this ostentatious, non-conformist style. Also, the scathing letters from jazz fans opposed to bebop fashion in *Melody Maker* conflated the beboppers with black-market hustlers through portraying them as spivs– who were only one source of the style they drew from.

⁸⁸ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 January 1948, p. 2.

This is not to suggest, though, that *real* so-called spivs were not involved with the bebop scene in Soho. Black market racketeers were implicated in some of the clubs at both social and economic levels. They were, however, only one social group within the scene. According to musician Laurie Deniz,

There was a club in Archer Street, I can't remember the name of it, that I worked in for a while. Spivs owned the place, and the whiskey that they got – god knows where they got it from, but they used to tip half of it into another bottle and top it up with methylated spirits. God knows where they were getting all that gear from. There would be people throwing up in the toilets because the meth's didn't agree with them. The fella that was working in the toilets, handing out Alka-Seltzers and towels, used to buy off of the Yanks their watches. He would say, "how much do you want for your watch?" Knowing that they wanted to buy some more drink but didn't have any more money. So, they would sell their watches, and the spivs would sell them in various places. They would give the Yank three or four quid then sell it for a tenner, or more, depending on what it was. The Rolex Oyster was very popular in those days and the Yanks had them. They weren't available anywhere in England at that time. They were servicemen that were selling the watches.⁸⁹

Deniz's portrait provides a snapshot of the harsh social and economic conditions imposed by post-war austerity and rationing; it also helps us understand the complex social make-up of Soho's bebop clubs: black market hustlers, black and white men, youths, and musicians all inhabited these spaces, and although there are no references to the spivs' sartorial style in the oral history account above, we have already seen that the Soho beboppers borrowed strands from their look to create their own unique identity. Despite such murky origins, the bebop look eventually spread outwards from Soho to the London suburbs.

⁸⁹ Laurie Deniz, *Oral History of Jazz in Britain*, The National Sound Archive, British Library, interviewed by Val Wilmer, 1990.

**The bebop ‘look’ influences suburban London youths then spreads all over
England**



*Bopping at the Rose and Crown, Tottenham, Jazz Illustrated, January 1950.
Source: National Jazz Archive, UK*

Evidence that the bebop ‘look’ influenced the suburban youths who came into the clubs, observed the style and then emulated it in the suburbs can be found in a range of historical sources. Firstly, there are two autobiographical accounts that provide us with important glimpses into the way in which the style spread outwards from Soho.

Raymond Thorpe recalls the profound impact that bebop culture bestowed on him:

I no longer bought my clothes from old-established stores, but from the new, gaudily decorated, men’s wear shops springing up almost overnight in the Charing Cross Road district. As far as my meagre wages allowed I bought drape-style suits, *crepe* shoes, bright ties and coloured shirts. I had my hair styled in a crew-cut and started to drink regularly for the first time.⁹⁰

Thorpe’s account is testament to the way in which suburban youths came into the Soho bebop clubs, noticed the fashion sense of the musicians, the so-called spivs and the

⁹⁰ Thorpe, p. 31.

black British and colonial males, and imitated their style. Thorpe was a ‘restless suburban youth shaking off the torpor of [his] office job’, a white youth who, having tasted the bebop scene in Soho and instantly having become hooked during his early visit to Club Eleven, ‘began to dress differently’.⁹¹ Thorpe continues: ‘From my few pounds a week I bought some new ties – as loud and colourful as the trumpets and saxophones that lured me to the club. And I saved for several shirts that might have been out of place in the severe offices of my firm, but which on Sundays served to stamp me as a regular *habitué* of the jazz sessions.’⁹² The youth’s description of his newfound style not only suggests that he purchased his clothing from the likes of Cecil Gee’s and David’s in the West End, but also indicates that the beboppers, as the evidence from musicians and fans alike suggests, collectively identified themselves through their shared taste in music and fashion.

In another autobiography from the late 1940s, Frank Norman, who spent his childhood in the care homes of Barnardo’s, also portrays how the bebop look started in Soho and spread to the London suburbs. Recalling his ventures into the ‘square mile’ from the outer reaches of East London, Norman remembers how he and his friends’ identities were transformed by both Soho and bebop fashion:

The world, we were slowly discovering, was wider than Waltham Cross. From the trolley bus terminal transport could be got to places as far away as... Tottenham Court Road in the heart of London. I greatly enjoyed these trips and was much enamoured by the bright lights of the West End. On one of these trips I paid my first visit to Soho – though I did not know it at the time. Little did I realise that within a year or two it would become my place... Draped suits were just coming into fashion worn with... loudly coloured ties and crepe-soled shoes an inch thick – known as creepers.⁹³

We know that one of the Charing Cross Road stores, Cecil Gee’s or David’s, would have been where Norman and his friends bought their clothes, as in this instance he is

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 29.

⁹² Ibid., p. 29.

⁹³ Frank Norman, *Banana Boy* (London: Martin Secker & Warburg Ltd, 1969), p. 78.

talking about 1947. The footwear both Thorpe and Norman describe are the crepe-soled shoes, known as creepers – as we have seen, these would be associated with the Teddy Boys a few years later. Again, this not only affirms that the bebop look was cobbled together from a range of material objects into a cohesive visual style, but also demonstrates that the look originated in Soho before spreading outwards to the London suburbs.

The look that defined the bebop youth subculture was also, again, elaborated on by eyewitness and fashion kingpin Manny Silverman. Silverman remembers that during his youth, ‘just shortly after the war’ when he was

‘eighteen, nineteen... there were two shops’ that retailed the look that became synonymous with bebop. Referring to the shirts, Silverman claimed that ‘one of the big styles was spear pointed collars. They were collars that came right down... like spear points... first one I got was from David’s in Charing Cross Road... I got cream... and the second one I got from Cecil Gee, also in Charing Cross Road.’⁹⁴

Silverman adds that when one walked through the doors of Cecil Gee’s:

You’d see the range of shirts, you’d see the lovely jazzy ties, the jazzy preppy knitwear, the zoot suits with the wide shoulders. It was great; wide lapels. The silhouette in the mid to late forties was this very jazzy look, it was a very wide silhouette, so you had fairly broad shoulders, double-breasted jackets with wide lapels, large ties to go with wide lapels.⁹⁵

Silverman’s description echoes all of the primary accounts of the look that was collectively chosen by the Soho beboppers. While he does not name the type of jazz associated with the clothes, we know from the overwhelming evidence that this fashion was a marker of bebop identity. His claim that the clothes were ‘jazzy’ not only points towards the link with bebop, but it is also a nod to the garish, flamboyant silhouettes of the suiting and the brash, colourful ties that the beboppers wore.

⁹⁴ Manny Silverman, *An Oral History of Fashion*, 2005.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

Evidence that the bebop look had spread to the London suburbs is also documented by *Jazz Illustrated*. In January 1950, the magazine ran a story about a bebop event in Tottenham, a suburb in North London. The writer, who specifically labels the clothing and music that distinguished the youths, reported:

The sartorial side of “Bop” is a subject in itself. The drapes, wide lapels... yellow socks and shoes, collars that flop over the lapels, and garish ties are the well-known hallmarks of the bop fan, and beloved of the Mouldy Fig satirist whose dress is as conservative as his taste, but one cannot deny that this gear is picturesque and colourful... the boys this evening were in fine drape fettle.⁹⁶

This piece not only affirms the unique style cobbled together by the beboppers, it also reflects the ways in which the bebop look was represented by fans of other jazz styles who have been given a voice in the music press. Although here we have a positive tone and description by *Jazz Illustrated*, it demonstrates how bebop fashion was defined against the conservative values of trad jazz – the Mouldy Fig satirist. However, this piece is more than generous to the trad jazz fans, who are described as simply making fun of the bebopper. This is unlike the depictions of bebop fashion by other jazz fans published in *Melody Maker*, where the clothes are transmitted as an embodiment of social and political codes that were opposed to the conservative ideologies embedded not only in men’s clothing at that time, but also the wider societal principles of conformist, quiet modesty that were rooted in the orthodox image of the nation.

In documenting the bebop look as a coherent visual style, the music press plays an integral role in formulating the beboppers as a unique entity. In Sarah Thornton’s words, ‘niche media like the music press construct subcultures as much as they document them’.⁹⁷ Through codifying the bebop look the magazine actually creates the beboppers as a social category by naming them as such.

⁹⁶ ‘Bopping at the Rose and Crown’, *Jazz Illustrated*, 1:3, 1950, pp. 2–3.

⁹⁷ Thornton, p. 117.



Beboppers, Rose and Crown, Tottenham, Jazz Illustrated, 1950
Source: National Jazz Archive, UK

The article in *Jazz Illustrated* is accompanied by another rare snapshot not only of the transracial social make-up of the London beboppers, but also of their style (above). The photo shows a black youth wearing a long, loose drape-shape jacket, significantly longer than other men's jackets at that time, that has wide, padded shoulders. To his left, the white youth's trousers, while not fiercely tapered at the ankles like the American style, are baggier around the knees and wider at the top, and are significantly tighter at the bottom than standard trousers. Though it is difficult to see the hues of the clothing due to the black and white photography, one of the youths (second from the right) is wearing a garish tie – loosely knotted in the bebop style – which fits with other descriptions of the bebop look that I have explored. When looking carefully at the picture, we can see that the bottom of his jacket is ostentatiously longer than ordinary

jackets of the period. [In regard to the young woman, female beboppers' style is explored in the next section of this chapter]. This photograph contrasts with the rebellious portrayal of beboppers in the Soho clubs in the series of letters published in *Melody Maker* during 1946, in which bebop musicians and fans were demonised and described as inauthentic and unconcerned with music. Contrary to this, this photo evidently shows that beboppers, who are expressing a unique sartorial style, were definitely interested in dancing and music.

The bebop style spreads all over England

By early 1951, the bebop look had spread all over England, and irreverent fashion was by now a key element of a scene that was subject to moral panic and a police clampdown [this is detailed in the next chapter]. In February of that year, *Melody Maker* published an article in which a member of a bebop band – a military serviceman – was sighted in North Yorkshire wearing the style associated with the bebop youth culture. During his day-off, the man was spotted:

Wearing full American drape jacket, half maste [*sic*] drainpipe trousers, spear-pointed collars, and thick-soled crepe shoes. One of the national servicemen who wears the “drape shape”... is a member of the Flattened Fifth Club Boptet[.]⁹⁸

Subsequently, the army released a controversial statement in which the clothing was feminised and marginalised, and following that, military personnel were banned from wearing the bebop style. The article stated that

A regimental order has been posted, signed by the C.O., which says: “Whether a soldier is in civilian clothes or in uniform, he’s always a representative of the regiment... We are going to make men of them... His turn-out must be of the highest order and befitting the dignity of the regiment. It has been noted that some soldiers are wearing civilian clothes of a type which is not suitable, e.g., draped and shoulder-padded coats, with trousers, shirts, shoes and socks in vivid colours.”⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Ernest Borneman, ‘One Night Stand’, *Melody Maker*, 3 February 1951, p. 2.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

Lieutenant Colonel R. J. Stephen, the commanding officer of the 14/20th Hussars in North Yorkshire, is said to have banned any clothing that was not considered to be ‘proper British tailoring’.¹⁰⁰

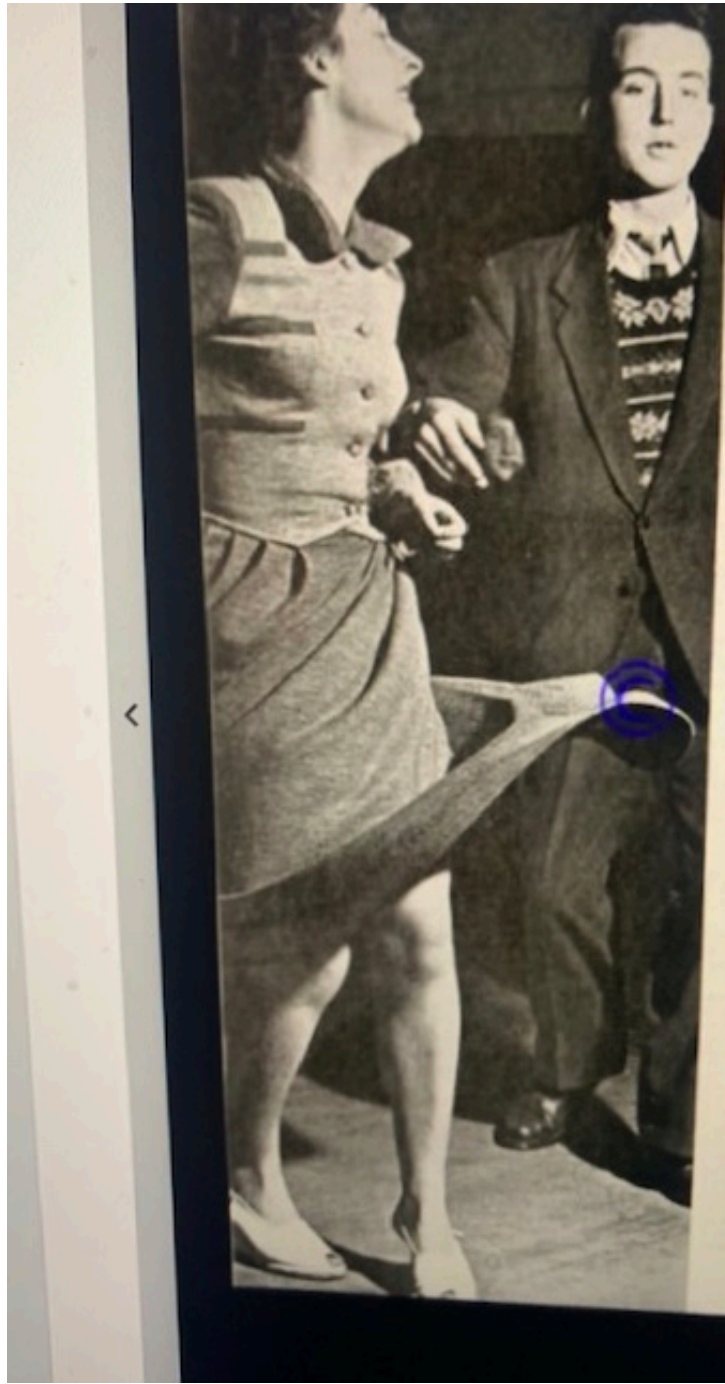
This exemplifies the way in which anti-Americanisation discourses streamed into what the establishment and various media outlets were beginning to term ‘bebop clothes... bebop manners, and other odd nouns strung together with the good old portmanteau... bebop’.¹⁰¹ As Sarah Thornton has argued, the media are ‘central to the process of subcultural formation, integral to the way we create groups with words.’¹⁰² This strange, alien composition of clothing, cobbled together by the racially diverse male beboppers, originating in the underground clubs of Soho circa 1946, had by now become a nationwide signifier of anti-English sentiments; views which were transmitted into the public consciousness through the media.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Thornton, *Club Cultures*, p. 117.

Women's sartorial style in the Soho bebop clubs



*Woman bebopper at The Rose and Crown, Tottenham. Jazz Illustrated, 1950.
Source: National Jazz Archive, UK*

Although there is not as much evidence existing in terms of women's bebop style, there is enough to make an analysis which will demonstrate that female beboppers dressed in a way that was markedly different to female audiences that frequented clubs which

played other genres of jazz in post-war Soho. Before presenting the research concerning women beboppers' style, I will provide a brief history of women's fashion, its forms and functions, beginning with the later part of the nineteenth century. This will involve a short contextualisation of some theoretical perspectives regarding fashion, gender and identity by contemporary fashion writers and historians.

A very brief history of women's fashion in Europe, 1914–1950

According to eminent fashion writer Diana Crane, women's clothing in the late nineteenth century reflected the ways in which social class was structured and articulated. She notes that during that epoch, 'clothing as a form of symbolic communication was enormously important' as it served as a visual, unspoken language about 'the wearer's role, social standing, and personal character'.¹⁰³ Pointing out the ways in which women were subordinated in this patriarchal society, Crane suggests that not only did women of the higher social classes plough huge amounts of time and money into presenting themselves 'appropriately to members of their social milieus', but, importantly, clothes acted as 'nonverbal symbols', allowing women to express themselves.¹⁰⁴ As industrialisation in Europe and America had prevented the majority of upper- and middle-class women from active involvement in the economy, 'aristocratic idleness was considered the suitable activity for middle-and upper-class wives. Effectively denied anything but very limited participation in the public sphere, women were frequently identified according to their clothing.'¹⁰⁵

By contrast, women of the lower classes were confined to styles of dress that were conspicuously different to women of the upper classes. Referring to Simmel's

¹⁰³ Diana Crane, *Fashion and its Social Agendas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 100.

¹⁰⁴ Diana Crane, 'Clothing Behaviour as Non-verbal Resistance: Marginal Women and Alternative Dress in the Nineteenth Century', *Fashion Theory*, 3:2, 1999, pp. 241–268 (p. 242).

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

emulation model, in which, as discussed earlier in this chapter, he theorised that the lower classes imitate the upper classes' style, who then discard it and create a new look in order to reproduce class boundaries and thereby maintain their class identity, Crane notes that it was more challenging for married working-class women to emulate the fashions of the middle and upper classes due to, for one reason, the 'restrictive and ornamental' nature of their clothing: a restrained and decorative style was 'unsuitable for the daily activities of most working-class women'.¹⁰⁶ The extent to which working-class women were able to look fashionable, as required in order to partake in social activities in the community, relied on factors such as marital status and employment: it was easier for single women that were working as they had more disposable income. Working-class women who spent more on clothes signalled their participation in life outside of the household. Married working-class women, according to Crane,

generally spent less money on their own clothing than on the clothing of their husbands, daughters and sons. By contrast, young, single, working-class women, including servants and other types of employees, were able to spend substantial amounts of their incomes on clothing worn outside the workplace as a means of enhancing their social lives and their prospects of upward mobility.¹⁰⁷

During the early part of the twentieth century, particularly the period of the Great War, significant historical transformations in women's dress took place as they adopted uniforms and moved en masse to fill the public roles of men who were away fighting in the war. A more detailed analysis of how women's social and political identities were reshaped through other cultural conditions and processes during that era is provided in the next chapter. The ensuing decades, it is necessary to note here, marked further aesthetic shifts in women's fashion. Fashion writer and historian Patricia Mears has noted that the period between the 1920s and 1939 was 'a "golden age" of fashion', in

¹⁰⁶ Crane, *Fashion and its Social Agendas*, p. 100.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

which prominent artisans ‘appropriated select industrial innovations’.¹⁰⁸ She notes that it was also an epoch in which art and fashion converged and flourished, ‘rarely seen in so many concrete ways either before or since’, and a period when ‘the synthesis of technology and craft, as well as the integration of art into fashion, led to the creation of a truly modern aesthetic in dress that was a marked break from the Edwardian period that preceded it’.¹⁰⁹

Although it was a decade of severe economic hardship and soaring political instability, the 1930s saw the birth of ‘modern’ women’s fashion. The distinctive long and winding silhouette of the period marked an exit from historic styles, ‘as it gracefully accentuated the contours of the body without restricting them. Ironically [however], the look of the 1930s, specifically the early part of that decade, dominated fashion for only a few short years.’¹¹⁰ Its forerunner, the youthful ‘flapper look’ of the 1920s, which comprised a short and tubular silhouette, is said to have likewise not lasted very long, only from about 1925 to 1928.¹¹¹ Although it was an emancipating style that had hardly any connection to the ‘encumbered fashions of the pre-world War 1 era (with their floor-grazing skirts and corseting), it was also shapeless and masked the body underneath’.¹¹² According to Mears, two distinctive looks were born in the 1930s. The first,

with its articulated (but not exaggerated) shoulder, fitted torso, natural waistline, narrow hip, and elongated hemline – began to emerge as early as 1927, was firmly in place by 1930, and reflected clearly the streamlined *art moderne* aesthetic. By 1934, it was beginning to be supplemented by the neo-romantic mode. As the decade wore on, hemlines rose, skirts became fuller, and waistlines tightened.¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ Patricia Mears, *The Arc of Modernity I: Women’s Couture in the 1930s* (New York: Yale University Press, 2014), p. 61.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.; Sarah Hume, *Flapper Style: 1920s Fashion* (Kent: Kent University State Museum, 2015), p. 1.

¹¹² Mears, p. 62.

¹¹³ Ibid.

Fashion and cultural historians have argued that the 1930s produced an aesthetic which was more ‘modern’ even than Christian Dior’s 1947 ‘New Look’ debut collection. Joanne Entwistle, for example, notes that the origins of the ‘New Look can be traced back to before the Second World War’.¹¹⁴ Mears adds that ‘many historians agree that had World War 11 not halted the progress of fashion production, this post-war revival would have taken place at the onset of the 1940s’.¹¹⁵ The post-war revival of the ‘new look’ in women’s fashion is significant for understanding the ways in which a proportion of young women in bebop clubs in post-war Soho dressed. This is discussed further on.

The new look in women’s fashion, though, was not limited to the minimalistic, sleek black dresses created by Dior, which were then emulated by the fashion markets. Trousers, although not ‘respectable wear for women... for leisure until well after the Second World War’, are, as Elizabeth Wilson has argued, perhaps ‘the most significant fashion change of the twentieth century’.¹¹⁶

According to Crane, women’s fashion in the 1940s had a social and political as well as aesthetic function. But the decade preceding that was a period in which clothing blurred gender boundaries due to a number of factors and conditions. Fundamental to these were the entertainment industry on the one hand, and the tumultuous economic crash of the 1920s on the other. Crane observes that multiple

seemingly contradictory trends came together in the 1930s that led to trousers being worn with greater frequency for leisure activities... Hollywood films, which were then an important influence on clothing fashions, depicted numerous strong, “masculine” heroines. Marlene Dietrich’s heroines, who engaged in “cross-dressing,” were probably the most powerful of these characterisations.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Social Theory* (Boston: Polity, 2015), p. 140.

¹¹⁵ Mears, p. 62.

¹¹⁶ Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (Brunswick: Rutgers University Press), p. 162.

¹¹⁷ Crane, *Fashion and its Social Agendas*, p. 123.

This is elaborated on by Andrea Fisher, who argues that ‘the depression in the 1930s was a social as well as an economic crisis and produced profound anxiety about personal identity and particularly gender identity... prevailing ideas of masculinity and femininity were in flux during this period’.¹¹⁸

The wearing of trousers by women became more common during World War Two, but was demarcated along class lines. It is noted that in England the wearing of trousers was

accelerated by the Second World War both for work and leisure. The Women’s Land Army was given uniforms that included ties and knee breeches or denim dungarees... Trousers were accepted by working-class women during the war and only much later in the sixties by middle-class women, after pants began to appear in the collections of French fashion designers.¹¹⁹

The way in which trousers were bound up with social class and accepted social norms during that historical period is important for illuminating the subversive ways in which women dressed in jazz clubs in post-war Soho, who in constructing improvised identities through clothing blurred class boundaries and upended conventional cultural norms.

¹¹⁸ Crane, *Fashion and its Social Agendas*, p. 123.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

The difference between women's bebop style and women's trad jazz style in the clubs in Soho



*Women's trad jazz fashion (left) and women's bebop fashion (right), Jazz Illustrated, 1949.
Source: National Jazz Archive, UK*

The ways in which women constructed style and meaning through clothing in post-war Soho jazz clubs can be seen in a number of historical sources. However, before looking at these and the key report in *Melody Maker* about the different fashions affiliated with both bebop and trad jazz, it is worth outlining the different aesthetic styles that women wore which were associated with the two forms of jazz.

As we saw earlier, one eyewitness to the Soho bebop club scene, Raymond Thorpe, described a girl being whirled around the dancefloor by the Cypriot wide-boy, Johnny. Thorpe recalls that Johnny's female partner

was dressed in black from top to her literally bare toes. Her breasts jumped crazily beneath a black sweater. She wore tight black pants and had a handkerchief tucked through a black bangle on her wrist. Her shoes and socks were on the edge of the dance-floor. They, too, were black[.]¹²⁰

This description portrays the girl abandoning her clothing, and in so doing conjures up a sense of self- abandonment, independence and freedom: she is immersed in the music being played at the club – which was seemingly a sanctuary from the harrowing conditions of bomb-battered London. Her whole outfit, including her accessories – the bangle on her wrist and shoes and socks – are black, a classic example of the bebop look for women and girls. Thorpe does not allude to the music being played in this particular club, but thanks to his depiction of Johnny, the Cypriot youth who is dancing with the girl and who, as we saw earlier in this chapter, is dressed in the male bebop look – a slick, sharp zoot or drape-shape suit with a loosely knotted tie – it is viable to assume that they are in a bebop club.

The clothes that the girl is wearing raises questions regarding aesthetics and social class. First, in terms of aesthetics, black seems to be indicative of the bebop look for women; not the *only* colour bebop women and girls wore, but nevertheless a distinguishing feature of their look. Secondly, as already discussed, trousers were socially acceptable in public spaces only for working-class women until the 1960s. Therefore, it would be easy to suggest that the woman in the club described by Thorpe was working class, but, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter, evidence suggests that the Soho bebop clubs were inhabited by a fusion of men and women, boys and girls, from across all strata of society, blurring the contours of race, gender and social class.

¹²⁰ Thorpe, p. 14.

This look is also described by ‘Berry Morgan, bebop girl’, a female clubgoer in post-war Soho.¹²¹ Morgan recalled the sheer intensity of the scene and the cool, chic, hipster aesthetic that defined female bebop style. She remembered that: ‘We went down the club [Eleven] which was quite extraordinary. For a start it was pitch dark. You couldn’t see anything at all which made it tremendously exciting. The noise was tremendous and we all wore sunglasses in this pitch dark as well as tight trousers, the bebop look.’¹²²

There were other items of clothing that bebop women and girls cobbled together to shape their identity. Ernest Borneman’s *Melody Maker* article, for instance, not only emphasises the two opposing looks and ideological features that distinguished female beboppers from female trad jazz fans, it also provides a snapshot of the other material objects of clothing that female beboppers wore. Borneman asked:

Why does everyone try to look as casual as possible at a Dixieland club and as carefully groomed as possible at a bop club. Well... isn’t it possible that much of this is just a fashion? It’s *done* to show exuberance at a New Orleans club; it’s *done* to look bored at a bop club. It’s the right *thing* to wear jeans rolled up to the calves if you dance to Dixieland, and it’s the right thing to wear a tightly skirted, deeply decolleted afternoon dress (preferably what the New York girl calls “basic black”) if you dance to bop.¹²³

The portrayal of female beboppers as more elegant than trad jazz fans seems to suggest that their identity was inspired by the ‘New Look’ created by Dior in 1947. And like Thorpe’s description of the girl in tight, black, figure-hugging clothing, Borneman’s article shows that female beboppers, also wearing black, in ‘tightly skirted, deeply decolleted’ dresses, were also clad in a way that was sexually provocative and empowering.

Furthermore, the allusion to ‘what the New York girl calls “basic black”’ is an indicator of the way in which female identities were constructed and hybridised in

¹²¹ Hewitt, p. 30.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ernest Borneman, ‘One Night Stand’, *Melody Maker*, February 16, 1950, p. 2.

bebop clubs. These styles were transatlantic and transnational in their origins, like the music, as shown throughout this thesis. In parallel with the music, women's bebop fashion on both sides of the Atlantic drew from European aesthetic styles: ideas for clothes migrated from Paris and became reconfigured in their own unique way by female beboppers in London.

The modern, chic, French influence on female Soho beboppers' identity is elaborated in another portrait in the music press. In 1949, a fan wrote to *Jazz Illustrated* and described the other styles that they wore. She claimed that women and girl bebop aficionados were indeed inspired by French designers, stating that 'some indication of the recent French trend is the full plaid skirt and jacket... We feminine fans still find time to devote half our interest to current jazz fashions, with as much enthusiasm as Christian Dior devotees.'¹²⁴ This look can be seen in the photograph below.

¹²⁴ 'Jazz a la Mode by Sonya', *Jazz Illustrated*, November 1949, p. 13.



Woman in nightclub, Soho, in check dress, date unknown. Source: Bill Brandt Archive

To return to Ernest Borneman's article for *Melody Maker*, his piece not only demonstrates how bebop and trad jazz identities, for both men and women, were constructed through clothing, it also strengthens the notion that bebop was the first post-war youth fashion to be associated with music and that this notion was disseminated by the press. Borneman notes that the fashion adopted by each group of fans has

certainly obtained the status of a... kind of ideal to which one should conform to one's own best ability. And, of course, they have had the effect of bringing out certain manners and mannerisms among Dixieland fans, who, until the coming of bop, certainly were free from other than musical fads[.]¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Borneman, 'One Night Stand', *Melody Maker*, p. 2.

Borneman crucially tells us that Dixieland (trad jazz) fans never had to worry about conforming to fashionable clothing until the advent of bebop. This is not to say that trad jazz fans did not have their own unique look before the dawn of bebop; this may or may not have been the case. It does, however, exemplify that the meanings encoded within bebop fashion were the first to cause a public stir. As we have seen throughout this chapter, beboppers were constructed by various media sources as spivs, unpatriotic rebels and ostentatious frauds. In the process they became the first distinctly visual style-based group affiliated with a music scene in post-war Britain to be mediated by the tabloids and the music press.

Borneman also makes significant observations about each style's practicality for clubbing. In so doing, he debunks the myth that jazz fans never danced to bebop. Firstly, he describes the 'Dixieland costume', which constitutes 'three-quarter slacks or trousers, shirt tails hanging out (checked flannel preferred), bobby sox and soft shoes', explaining that

there might be a functional reason; but if it is really a kind of uniform which makes dancing easier and gives greater freedom of movement, how is it that the chicks in the tight skirts and the off-the-shoulder dresses and the cats in the Charing Cross-road suits dance just as well (and often better) at the bop clubs?¹²⁶

As we have seen throughout this chapter, Charing Cross Road was where Cecil Gee's, David's and Williams' shops were located. These were the first major retailers in Britain (other than independent tailors) to sell drape suits, 'spiv' suits, gangster chic and zoot suits: the bebop look.

However, while the visual style associated with the two forms of jazz was fixed, movement by the two sets of fans across the spaces and boundaries of the clubs was more fluid. Borneman provides a significant snapshot of the way in which female jazz

¹²⁶ Ibid.

fans adhered to the fashions associated with each form of jazz, but attended both trad jazz and bebop clubs. The journalist notes that he

saw one particularly attractive young lady on a Sunday at about nine o' clock with two dog collars round her neck, straw in her hair, a lumberjack's shirt, and the dirtiest jeans ever at the Delta Club; and the same little chick two hours later at Kenny Graham's club in a low-and-behold dress of the slinkiest black, high heels, and a fair version of Paris Coiffure[.]¹²⁷

The Delta Club was a Soho club specialising in trad jazz, while Kenny Graham was a jazz musician affiliated with the bebop idiom. This would seem to prove that some female jazz fans moved freely between the clubs and expressed themselves through the grungy look when at the trad jazz clubs, and the modern, Dior-inspired attire when at the bebop clubs. The way in which both sets of women and girl fans floated freely between the clubs, adopting the visual style associated with each genre of the music, seems to suggest brand-new, pioneering ways of constructing identity in the post-war period, which enabled women to express their agency to some degree.

Summing up

Men's suit fashions in the Soho bebop clubs are not easy to analyse because the historical record is so patchy. In addition, the terminology used to describe certain suit styles was not always accurate. The evidence suggests that men were wearing a range of suits, with zoots at one end of the spectrum, and spiv suits, as seen in films and other media, at the other. There seems to have been some variation in between, but always with the intention of being loud, garish and different – different to the trad jazz sartorial style, and different to the standardised demob suits and other suit styles that the majority of the population in post-war Britain were wearing in the immediate post-war period. The addition of garish ties, spear-point collared shirts, and crepe-soled and

¹²⁷ Ibid.

patent-leather shoes also served as cultural signifiers of the bebop style. This chapter has demonstrated that the improvised style – a mixture of gangster chic, zoot suits and East-End tailoring – ‘bubbled up’ from below, and was first worn in Soho by black and white male musicians and other Soho characters before suburban youths came into the clubs, noticed the style and emulated it in the London suburbs, following which it spread all over England.

Hebdige and Thornton have helped shed light on how male beboppers resisted the established social order: the bebop look was seen to transgress conservative ideologies that were embedded in the traditional suit, and to contravene the political and economic conditions of clothes rationing and austerity. The resulting images of beboppers as anti-patriot rebels were widely disseminated by the press. This threat was also intensified due to the transatlantic nature of the bebop sartorial style, the way in which it migrated across the Atlantic and was reinterpreted and hybridised by both black and white musicians and fans in the Soho bebop clubs, who stamped the suit with a unique set of British connotations.

In terms of female beboppers, the chapter has not only provided evidence of the bebop look for women, but it has also demonstrated that while some women clubbers moved freely between jazz clubs that played bebop and trad jazz, they adhered to the accepted fashions that were affiliated with each set of fans.

The next chapter details the social, cultural and political processes that led to the police raids on the Soho bebop clubs between 1947 and 1950.

Chapter Four

The Police Raids on the Soho Bebop Clubs, 1947–1950



Bouillabaisse Club (later to become the Fullado Club), New Compton Street, Soho, 1943. Source: Getty

Introduction

From 1947 to 1950, police regularly raided Soho's bebop clubs, exercising warrants issued by the authorities 'under the 1920 Dangerous Drugs Act'.¹ Both musicians and revellers were arrested for possession of drugs and the clubs were closed down, some temporarily and others permanently. The common thread here is that the clubs which were raided were, as we have seen throughout this narrative, spaces inhabited by black British males, white British males and females, Caribbean and African males and females from the colonies, and African American servicemen; they were places where racial and gender lines were transgressed.

This chapter, then, explores not only drug use within the clubs, but also demonstrates, by delving beneath the surface, that less obvious fears concerning transracial fraternisation between black men and white women and the perceived threat of Americanisation also played a significant role in the raids. These fears, I suggest, were nationalistic and are embedded in society on a historical and structural level. Drawing from a wide range of hitherto unexplored historical reports in the music press, national and local newspaper articles, oral histories of jazz in Britain, police reports, autobiographical accounts, and theories around moral panic, this chapter looks at a number of themes concerning the raids. First, it offers primary accounts of drug use on the bebop scene by people who were there. The chapter then presents basic information about the raids: dates and times of the raids, where the clubs were, and who was there at the time. Following that, I briefly historicise drug fears and miscegenation anxieties in Britain in order to paint a more accurate picture of what happened in the raids on Soho's bebop clubs between 1947 and 1950. Finally, the chapter returns to the police raids and

¹ Ernest Borneman, 'One Night Stand', *Melody Maker*, July 8, 1950, p. 2.

explores them in more detail, examining a wide range of primary sources in order to demonstrate that the bebop club scene in post-war Soho sparked a moral panic.

Drug use in the clubs



*Musician Tommy Pollard, who tragically died of a heroin overdose in his early twenties, place and date unknown
Source: henrybebop.com*

Drug use in post-war Soho was an overt cultural signifier of the bebop scene. While there exists some difference of opinion between the 1940s musicians as far as their moral perspective on drugs is concerned, drug use in Soho during the period was predominately associated with the beboppers and was not so much affiliated with the trad jazz and other jazz genres of the period. Oral history testimonies by Soho bebop pioneers, autobiographical accounts by clubbers, and articles published in the music press reveal to some extent the nature of drug consumption within bebop culture in Soho. Jack Chilkes, for example, recalls how

The mainstream ones and the ones that played Dixieland were heavy drinkers. The first thing I used to notice would be them saying, “Where’s the bar? Or, “I don’t like that beer.” But the modernists were getting a bad name because... there was drug taking. One guy died. He was a wonderful player, Tommy Pollard. He died in his twenties from drugs, it was terrible.²

While Chilkes’ account reveals that drugs were a notable social and cultural feature of the bebop club scene in Soho, the musicians differed on their choices regarding personal consumption. Jack Parnell recalled that ‘Lennie Bush had a heroin habit, but I didn’t have that – I used to smoke pot. I knew Dave Goldberg got hooked in America, but I don’t think he had an influence on the others – they got into bad habits well before he got back from there.’³ Lennie Bush himself remembered that ‘I had a similar condition myself with regard to heroin. Dave Goldberg and a lot of us, who have been straight for years, were in a bad way at one time or another, [but] everyone used to smoke pot.’⁴

Melody Maker writer Ernest Borneman cynically suggested that ‘not until the coming of bop has any class or trade taken it upon itself to use drug addiction almost as a visa for travel in the land of Oo-Bla-Dee,’ perhaps implying that the beboppers believed that drug using was cool, inseparable from the music and a form of subcultural capital in the Soho bebop scene.⁵

In terms of the fans that frequented bebop clubs in Soho, Raymond Thorpe’s autobiography *Viper* details drug-taking and provides an important historical snapshot of Club Eleven. Thorpe depicts the carnivalesque atmosphere, the demi-monde and the way in which the emergent youth culture brought excitement, at first, to his dreary suburban life in austere post-war London. He reveals that his ventures into Soho and the people that he met changed ‘the drab world I stepped out of into a world of sound and colour and life. There was always something new to be seen at the Eleven, something

² Chilkes, 1994.

³ Parnell, 1955.

⁴ Bush, 1992.

⁵ Ernest Borneman, ‘One Night Stand’, *Melody Maker*, July 8, 1950, p. 2.

fresh to discover.’⁶ But drug use is also prominent: ‘Now that I had broken the crust I could see... a little of the drug trade that went on behind its doors.’⁷ Distinguishing between the Feldman Club, which, as discussed in previous chapters, hosted a bebop night on Sundays between 1948 and 1950, and Club Eleven, Thorpe continues:

At Feldmans the subject of drug addiction was rarely mentioned. Certainly, drugs were never seen and never used there. Once in a while someone would lean over and whisper: “He’s on the hook,” or “That one smokes, you know.” And a face and a figure, hardly seen and rarely remembered, would pass by without registering, on into the crowd. But the Club Eleven was different... I found that spades and musicians I had known for months were regular hemp smokers, some of them even injecting or sniffing cocaine or heroin. Now that I knew this I could understand the references I heard to “tea” – the slang term for a hemp cigarette then in use. It later gave way to the expression “charge.”⁸

Thorpe’s portrait of the racially integrated bands and fans at Club Eleven demonstrates that drugs were a large part of the post-war bebop scene. It also shows the substances – cannabis, cocaine and heroin – that were available in post-war London and used by the beboppers.

With regard to heroin, some musicians and writers have assumed that the Soho artists were emulating their hero Charlie Parker, who was addicted to the drug. Jack Chilkes has asserted that Tommy Pollard ‘was copying what his idol was doing’ and says that ‘there was things like that going on in those days’.⁹ Much has been written about Parker’s battle with drugs. Some writers have suggested that the bebop icon felt an ‘overpowering need to alter the distasteful reality of everyday consciousness’, through ‘his shield to the outside world [which] was heroin’.¹⁰ Cultural historian Harry Shapiro places heroin use amongst bebop musicians in America within its wider social, cultural and economic contexts. Although he alleges that many black and white jazz musicians

⁶ Thorpe, p.32.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Chilkes, 1994.

¹⁰ Harry Shapiro, *Waiting for the Man: The Story of Drugs and Popular Music* (London: Helter Skelter, 2003), p. 77.

used heroin during this period, Shapiro draws specifically from black musicians who attest that wider societal conditions in late 1940s and early 1950s New York played an instrumental role in their heroin addiction. Shapiro says that at that time, heroin was low-cost and readily available. He explains how the drug came in ‘pharmaceutical No. 5 capsules, ranging from \$1 to \$3 each. Ten of these capsules contained one gram of heroin’, and he states that some of the musicians had ‘habits in excess of four or five grams a day’.¹¹ In 1939, numerous musicians moved to New York, and nightclubs ‘such as Minton’s... played host to bebop and to every drug dealer in the city’.¹² As discussed in chapter two, Minton’s was one of the first clubs where bebop was pioneered.

One of the early leaders of the Black Panthers, Eldridge Cleaver, and bebop jazz musician Hampton Hawes have both elaborated on the conditions that they felt intensified addiction in urban black communities. Cleaver recalled that before 1954, African Americans ‘lived in an atmosphere of novocaine’, and in order to hang on to their sanity, they felt the need ‘to remain somewhat aloof and detached from the “problem”’, whereas Hawes’ perspective was more direct.¹³ He felt that black people ‘had to act in a different way around white people and it was all that fear and oppression which made niggers get high’.¹⁴ Heroin enabled creativity for these musicians as well as helping to shake off the shackles of their subjugation.¹⁵

In Soho, London, the social, political and economic conditions in which drug consumption took place were themselves problematic. Post-war Soho had been traumatised by the Blitz, and rationing and austerity meant that people were starved of their basic needs, no doubt creating the desire for some to escape the miserable reality

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Shapiro, p. 78; Eric C. Schneider, *Smack: Heroin and the American City* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press: 2008), p. 29.

of their existence. Ronnie Scott's biographer John Fordham has pointed out how 'drugs [were] part of the scenery', and for people 'living day to day in a city under attack, edging along a highwire of nerves, it was bad enough'.¹⁶ He adds that 'for musicians in that world, driven moreover by a boiling desire to crash through a sound barrier to the sublime, to play as well their heroes, to play as well as each other and better, some drugs seemed an aid to stamina and concentration'.¹⁷

Whatever the causes and conditions were for drug use in bebop clubs in Soho, drug convictions were in fact pretty minimal in London during this period. Arrests for illegal drugs remained low between 1945 and 1950, as demonstrated below in the presentation of police evidence. *Melody Maker* also pointed out that 'there has, of course, always been less addiction than some of the boppers themselves have led us to believe.

Listening to some of the boys in the really cool clique, you would be expected to believe that just about every musician worth his salt took either the needle, the hemp or the little white powders.'¹⁸ Even tabloids such as the *Daily Mirror* claimed that 'among drug takers, musicians have been numbered, it is true. But these... are a very small minority', perhaps suggesting that the scale of drug consumption in post-war Soho was slightly exaggerated by some of the beboppers.'¹⁹

Raymond Thorpe describes the drug underground that was centred around the bebop scene in Soho:

In the Club Eleven at least one pusher was always hanging around. If you could not find him there it was a certainty someone would be standing on the corner of Archer Street or sitting in the Harmony Inn waiting for business. Some of these places like the Club Eleven, the harmony, and the sidewalks were later to be raided by detectives. But at this time, just after the war, drug convictions were few and far between. They were such a rarity, in fact, that it was almost hard to

¹⁶ Fordham, p. 41.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ernest Borneman, 'One Night Stand', *Melody Maker*, July 8, 1950, p. 2.

¹⁹ The Marquis of Donegal: President of the National Federation of Jazz, 'A Slur and the Facts', *Daily Mirror*, April 19, 1950, p. 8.

realise that selling or using drugs was an offense. No one gave the law a second thought.²⁰

Theories of drug consumption, whether in economically deprived African American areas such as Harlem in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, or austere Soho in the wake of the Second World War, offer their own analytical perspectives as to why people use drugs and become addicts. Studies in the sociology of deviance shed more light on these matters.²¹ However, as Thorpe and Borneman have demonstrated, drug usage in London was confined to a very small area and a group of users that affiliated themselves with the bebop youth culture of the immediate post-war years. And although using was illegal and the clubs were the focus of drugs raids, there are deeper, underlying social and political questions concerning the police clampdown on the bebop clubs in Soho between 1947 and 1950, which are explored further on. First, though, it is important to provide a snapshot of the raids and what happened during them.

The Police Raids on the Clubs

The Fullado Club

The first raid took place during 1947. The Fullado Club, located at 6 New Compton Street, Soho, and, as shown in chapter one, ‘the first place where English bebop musicians got together as groups and played’, was stormed by police.²² While the historical record concerning the actual date and time of the raid is hazy, Jack Chilkes, who regularly played at the club, was on the premises the night that the police crashed through its doors. He recalled that in

²⁰ Thorpe, p. 44.

²¹ See Becker, *Outsiders*; J. H. Mills, *Cannabis Nation: Control and Consumption in Britain, 1928–2008* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

²² Pip Granger, *Up West: Voices from the Streets of Post-War London* (London: Corgi, 2006), p. 297. Granger says her information was extracted from musician Laurie Morgan and his wife Betty’s TV documentary *Smoky Dives*.

late 47... The night it was raided... there was Ronnie [Scott] and myself playing, [and] Denis Rose, a guru on the trumpet [who] was very interested in bop. The police came up and asked us, while they searched everybody for drugs, our names. I'll always remember Ronnie saying to me, "shall I give 'em my right name?" Because his real name isn't Scott. It was always amusing at the time. He was known in the business as Ronnie Scott, not by his real name. But anyway, the club was closed and that was the end of that.²³

This hitherto unexplored oral history not only offers an evocative account of the police raid on the Fullado Club, but it also underscores the notion that bebop clubs were criminalised from the very start of the London scene.

Earlier that year, a reporter from the *Daily Mirror* went undercover to a club in Soho. He wrote a sensational piece about his observations there. While it is not explicitly stated that the club was the Fullado, the evidence points towards it being so. For instance, the reporter claimed that he:

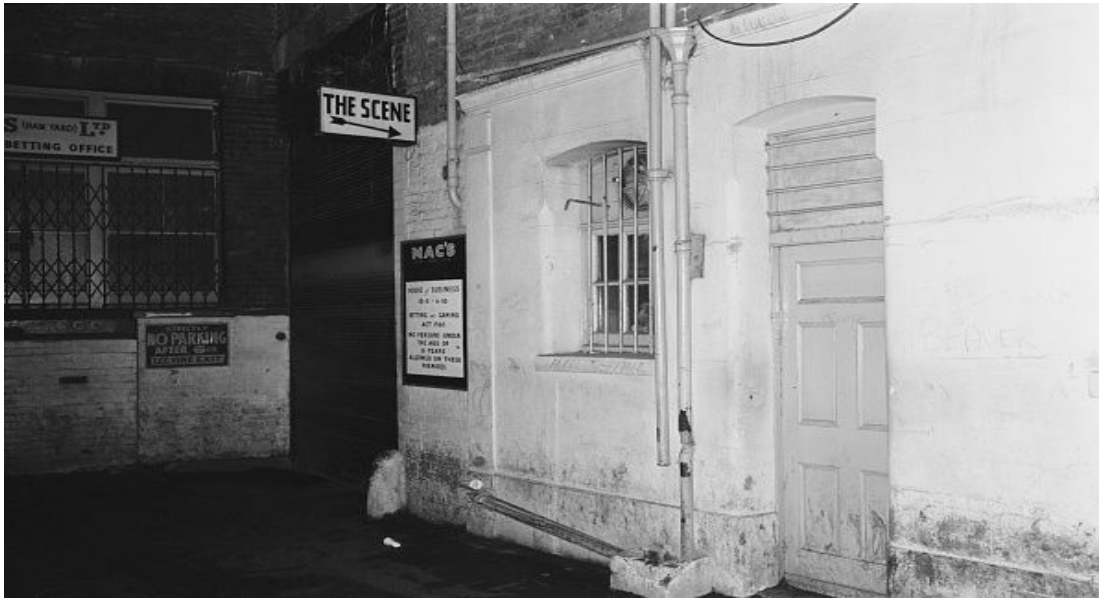
bought samples [of] benzedrine, heroin, and Indian hemp, the last being made into crude cigarettes known as "reefers". All the drugs are known to peddlers and addicts as "smack." These narcotics are often smuggled into the country in small quantities from the continent. Men have brought them here concealed in the shoulder-pads of their "spiv" like overcoats.²⁴

As the Fullado was raided in 1947, just a few months after this report, and the way in which 'spiv' like drug smugglers are tied to the club in this article, it is almost certain that this is the Fullado; as demonstrated in the previous chapter, we know that bebop hipsters, who dressed in a loud, ostentatious fashion, were labelled by the media as spivs. This raid and its social and political implications are explored further in the final section of this chapter, when the raids are explored in more detail.

²³ Chilkes, 1994; Ronnie Scott's real name was Ronald Schatt. He was of Russian and Jewish heritage and came from Aldgate, East London.

²⁴ 'Dope' – Vilest of all Rackets', *Daily Mirror*, 26 March 1947, p. 2.

Club Eleven



Mac's Rehearsal Room, which would later become Club Eleven, 41 Great Windmill Street, Soho.

Source: Getty 1950

The next raid took place on 15 April 1950. Club Eleven, one of the more infamous post-war Soho bebop clubs, was at that time situated at 50 Carnaby Street, Soho, having moved from its former premises at 41 Great Windmill Street due to an expanding membership. The music press published an article the following week on 22 April, shedding light on the transracial make-up of the band members and fans that were arrested: ‘In the early hours of Saturday last (15th)’, claimed *Melody Maker*,

Flying Squad and Drug Squad officers raided Club Eleven in Carnaby Street, Soho, and arrested twelve men. Later they appeared at Marlborough Street on drug charges. Among those charged with illegally possessing Indian hemp were the following musicians: Harold Robinson, Asuqus Eyo, Leonard Bush, Denis Rose, Cecil Jacob Winston and Mario Fabrizi. In addition, Winston, Fabrizi and another musician, Roanld [*sic*] Schatt, were accused of being in unauthorized possession of cocaine, and Rose was also charged with being a deserter from the RAMC [Royal Army Medical Corps] since July, 1944.²⁵

²⁵ ‘Drug Squad Swoop on Club Eleven’, *Melody Maker*, 22 April 1950, p. 1.

The national newspapers also documented the raid, with the *Daily Mirror* claiming that ‘Three American seaman were fined last Saturday for being in possession of Indian hemp – or Marijuana. They were arrested on the premises of a private bebop club in Soho. There were 250 people in the club at the time.’²⁶ *The People* ran a story about the raid, and, while humorous in tone, the article captured the spirit of a Blitzed-out London and an emergent underground youth culture. The article stated that ‘Club Eleven, in the basement of a burnt-out building in Carnaby Street, Soho, W1, is a private bebop club. Young people are there to hear “hot” music and gyrate through the very latest in dance steps. Recently some other people visited the club – people not interested in jive. The police.’²⁷

There are also eyewitness recollections of the event in oral history testimonies. Musician Pete Chilver remembered as follows: ‘I was at the famous raid where Ronnie was busted, and Denis [Rose] and Cecil [Jacob Winston], and taken off. That was at the... Club Eleven. Ralph Sharon was there; in fact, I think everyone was there that night. Someone had told them [the police] that marijuana was being smoked in there... there wasn’t many raids in those days.’²⁸ Flash Winstone remembered that ‘at the time of the raid, I was playing drums. Suddenly I saw this force approaching in search of the holy grail. I had something in my pocket, I tried to throw it away but I wasn’t quick enough,’ recalled the bebop drummer, adding a touch of humour to his story.²⁹

²⁶ *Daily Mirror*, 19 April 1950, p. 8.

²⁷ ‘Club Eleven’, *The People*, 23 April 1950, p. 5.

²⁸ Pete Chilver, *Oral History of Jazz in Britain*, The National Sound Archive, British Library, interview by Andrew Simons, 1995.

²⁹ Cecil Jacob ‘Flash’ Winstone, *Oral History of Jazz in Britain*, The National Sound Archive, British Library, interviewed by Jim Godbolt, 1989.

Paramount Dance Hall

Three months later on July 1, 1950, the Paramount Dance Hall in Tottenham Court Road was also busted by the police. The Paramount, which also hosted a racially diverse crowd of male and female beboppers was, like the Fullado and Club Eleven, on the surface raided for drugs. Ernest Borneman, of *Melody Maker*, solemnly reviewed the incident:

Last week, when I opened my morning paper, I saw the old familiar headline: POLICE RAID DANCE HALL. I read on, and there it said: "A force of uniformed police, including women, and Flying Squad detectives, raided the Paramount Dance Hall, Tottenham Court Road, on Saturday night. They entered with a warrant under the 1920 Dangerous Drugs Act. About 500 people, many of them coloured and partnered by white girls, were dancing when police arrived just after 10pm. Uniformed police guarded the exits while detectives checked identities. A number of dancers were searched."³⁰

Another report regarding the raid appeared in the national tabloid press. The piece, which was underscored by racialised headlines, stated that the manager of the Paramount was to ban bebop from being played following the raid, but insisted that his decision to do so had nothing to do with the alleged drugs consumption in his club:

Known as London's "Harlem" because of the amount of coloured men that go there, the Paramount Dance Hall, in Tottenham Court Road, is closing shortly. When it re-opens, public dances will no longer be held there. The hall will be used for private banquets. The manager told the *Daily Mirror* last night: "The closure has nothing to do with the drug raid made at the hall on Saturday."³¹

While it is evident that drugs were a cultural signifier of bebop identity and were being used in the clubs by a proportion of the musicians and fans, there are other common strands that permeate all of the police raids. These require problematising in order to produce a fuller account of the implications of the raids on the clubs.

First, all of the clubs comprised English bands and audiences that were black and white, men and women, as well as some African Americans, and therefore blurred the

³⁰ Ernest Borneman, *Melody Maker*, July 8, 1950, p. 2.

³¹ 'London's Dance "Harlem" to Close', *Daily Mirror*, 7 July 1950, p. 5.

boundaries of national identity. Second, all three clubs played bebop, a subversive, unorthodox jazz style, as we have seen throughout this story. And thirdly, all of the clubs crossed racial and gender lines, to the consternation of the media and the established social and political order.

With these themes in mind, then, it is essential to delve beneath the surface and ask specific questions about the raids. What, for example, was the nature and status of drugs in Britain during this period? Did they represent a potential threat to the social, political and economic structure of society? What was the significance of black men dancing with white women, as seen above in the media reporting of the raids, and what, if anything, has this to do with drug usage? If, according to the manager of the Paramount, his decision to ban bebop being played in his dance hall had nothing to do with the drugs raid, then what were the real reasons for his decision to do so?

In order to answer these questions, the next few sections of this chapter discuss race, gender and drugs in this context, which requires a look back to ‘the birth of a drug underground... taking place under conditions of unprecedented national trauma’, in the aftermath of World War One.³²

A brief history of drug fears in Britain

Throughout the nineteenth century through to 1916, drugs were easily obtainable over the counter from a wide range of outlets. Opium, morphine, heroin and cocaine were accessible to anyone who could afford them ‘from respectable doctors, pharmacists and even street-corner grocery stores and business-men selling patent medicines.’³³ There

³² Marek Kohn, *Dope Girls: The Birth of the British Drug Underground* (London: Granta Books, 2001), p. 4.

³³ Shapiro, p. 124.

were ‘no restrictions on the possession and use of [these substances] and other psychoactive drugs in Britain’.³⁴

Nevertheless, it has been argued that prior to the Great War, ‘drug addiction and related social problems affected only a tiny proportion of the population, largely confined in the popular imagination to Chinese-run Opium Dens [and] the ease with which narcotics could be purchased... does not seem to have been widely abused’.³⁵ Although there were no clearly defined drugs laws, perceptions of their usage were rooted in class, reflecting a bias towards members of a higher social standing over those of the lower classes. In the nineteenth century, for example, it was acknowledged that ‘certain middle-class women and professional men had the “drug habit,”’ but they were viewed as ‘individual burdens... the unfortunate by-products of medical treatment, or unwise attempts to cope with the demands of brain-work. Private weaknesses like these did not lead to serious restrictions on the availability of opiates or cocaine, let alone the criminalisation of their non-medical use.’³⁶ The subsequent criminalisation of drugs, their ‘outlawing... was the consequence not of their pharmacology, but of their association with criminal groups that were perceived as potentially dangerous’.³⁷

The trajectory of the prohibition of dope began in America in the ‘1870s when white gamblers, delinquents and prostitutes took up the Chinese practice of smoking opium’, and by late 1914 the Harrison Narcotics Act was promulgated by Hamilton Wright.³⁸ Although Britain ‘was lukewarm about implementing the international agreements, partly because it did not want to impede its own pharmaceutical industry’,³⁹ the

³⁴ Richard Marshall, *World War I Centenary: Continuations and Beginnings*, University of Oxford, <http://www1centenary.oucs.ox.ac.uk/?p=2439> [last accessed 23 October 2017], p. 1.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Kohn, p. 2.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 4.

subsequent laws that led to the criminalisation of drugs in the United Kingdom were due, in part, to ‘the media [who] played a supporting role through their moralistic and sensational portrayal of drug use [and] their criminalisation of the drug user’, and by novelists during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Such discourse, like its American counterpart, situated not only Chinese and black people at the heart of the drug debate in England, but also the military.⁴⁰

The politicisation of these fears was at first both military and moral in nature. The moral fears can be traced back to the literature of the late Victorian and Edwardian eras where, in the ‘writings of Charles Dickens, Edgar Allen Poe and Oscar Wilde... the opium den took on a more mysterious, sexually threatening appeal’.⁴¹ It was not too long after this that Sax Rohmer published his first stories about his infamous character Fu Manchu.⁴² All of these writers were instrumental in creating a shift in the public’s outlook and shaping public opinions of drug use. As Marshall describes, ‘drugs in fiction increasingly played the role of a corrupting influence: novels abounded in which naïve young people were tempted to experiment and inevitably fell into drug-fuelled depravity’.⁴³

With regard to the military issues, they were cast as the result of anxieties that soldiers would become docile and inactive during the war. As Richard Marshall writes,

In early 1916, a moral panic was whipped up by the press over the sale of narcotics to troops. A widely-publicised trial lead to the conviction of Horace Dennis Kingsley and Rose Edwards for selling cocaine on three separate occasions to Canadian troops in Folkestone; during the trial, it emerged that 40 men in a local camp had developed a drug habit.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Shane Blackman, *Chilling Out: The Cultural Politics of Substance Consumption, Youth and Drug Policy* (Maidenhead: Open University Press), p. 19.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁴² Shapiro, p. 31.

⁴³ Marshall, p. 1.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Public anxieties were amplified by a succession of sensationalised newspaper articles. The ‘young recruit, unaware of the risks attendant on taking morphine, might unwittingly render themselves unfit for active service and soon develop the most evil habits... [A]pparent links between cocaine use and prostitution added to moral concern’.⁴⁵

On 8 August 1914, shortly after the outbreak of war, the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA), was created by the government, ‘allowing the executive to create criminal offenses through regulation’.⁴⁶ Two years later in May 1916 army chiefs ‘banned the non-medical sale or supply of cocaine to armed forces personnel’, and also exploited those powers ‘to enact regulation 40B, which banned the sale of... opium, Indian Hemp [cannabis] and other psychoactive drugs to troops without a prescription’.⁴⁷ On the day DORA was implemented, a court trial had fallen apart in which a ‘Mr Johnson, known to be supplying cocaine to soldiers via prostitutes, could not be convicted under the terms of existing legislation – a fact strongly condemned by the presiding magistrate’.⁴⁸ Johnson’s court case was influential in the subsequent calls for ‘controls on the civilian possession of narcotics to be mounted, to which pre-war campaigners for the suppression of the international opium trade leant their influential support’.⁴⁹ This incident, together with the ‘largely illusory’ fear of a ‘cocaine epidemic in the army’ in turn led to a further tightening of drugs laws.⁵⁰ On 28 July 1916 ‘the provisions of DORA 40B were widened to criminalise the possession of cocaine and opium by anyone not connected with the medical or veterinary professions, and stipulated that the

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Adrian Barton, *Illicit Drugs: Use and Control* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 16; Marshall, p. 1.

⁴⁸ Marshall, p. 1.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Virginia Berridge, ‘War Conditions and Narcotics Control: The Passing of Defence of the Realm Act Regulation 40B’, *Journal of Social Policy*, 7:3, 2009, pp. 285–304 (p. 285).

drugs should only be dispensed to patients (whether military or civilian) on exhibition of a non-reusable prescription signed by their doctors'.⁵¹ Thus, the first 'effective' controls on drugs in Britain, the Dangerous Drugs Act of 1920, were enacted in response to a 'wartime panic' whereby 'the control of drugs became a matter for the police and therefore drug users became criminalised in the American manner'.⁵² The Dangerous Drugs Act 1920 'retained most of the provisions of DORA 40B, but was more broadly aimed at bringing Britain into line with restrictions on the international opium trade demanded by the Versailles peace conference'.⁵³

During the 1920s the image of white women and black men became the focus of sensationalist and politicised media attention. As mentioned briefly in chapter one, Freda Kempton, a hostess at the 43 Club in Soho, had overdosed on cocaine, and her death became racialised in the tabloid press. Marek Kohn writes:

Two individuals in particular, one Chinese and one black, were identified as "dope kings", and invested with a highly sexualised menace. It was claimed that the attraction of cocaine for men like Brilliant Chang, a Chinese restaurant proprietor, and Edgar Manning, a jazz drummer from Jamaica, was a means of seducing and enslaving white women. Along with women like the actress Billie Carleton and the nightclub dancer Freda Kempton, both of whom were killed by drugs, Chang and Manning became characters in a rich dope folklore, which ranged from highly fictionized journalism to novels and films.⁵⁴

An example of the way in which Manning in particular was elevated by the press to public enemy number one can be seen in an article in the *Birmingham Daily Gazette* under the racialised headline 'The Dope King Sentenced – Penal Servitude for Coloured Man'.⁵⁵ The racialised and gendered discourses around drugs require analysis. Why, for example, were racial others and women the focus of these discourses about drugs?

Marek Kohn has argued that drug culture was

⁵¹ Marshall, p. 1.

⁵² Blackman, *Chilling Out*, p. 23; Marshall, p. 1.

⁵³ Marshall, p. 1.

⁵⁴ Kohn, p. 7.

⁵⁵ 'The Dope King Sentenced', *The Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 13 September 1929, p. 3.

a symptom of a crisis in Britain's evolution as a modern society. Drug panics derive their electric intensity from a concentration of meanings: In Britain, the detection of a drug underground provided a way of speaking simultaneously about women, race, sex and the nation's place in the world. It was a symbolic issue in which a larger national crisis was reworked in microcosm.⁵⁶

Kohn's observation helps us to understand the wider implications of the drugs raids on Soho's bebop clubs between 1947 and 1950. As explained above, the drugs being used in the clubs had become criminalised with the Dangerous Drugs Act 1920, so drug use was therefore illegal by the time that the clubs were raided. However, as Kohn suggests, other forces were at work historically that led to the drug panic after the Great War. In terms of the bebop scene in 1940s Soho, then, it is essential to understand the significance of race and gender relations and their socio-historical, political and economic embeddedness within the raids. This requires an analysis of miscegenation fears in Britain and the media panic around them in the post-World War One years.

Miscegenation fears in Britain after World War 1

The term miscegenation,

from the Latin *miscere* (mix) and *genus* (race), was coined in 1864 by two anti-Abolitionist journalists who, during the American Civil War, wrote a hoax pamphlet entitled *Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races Applied to the American White Man and Negro*. The pamphlet implied that Abolitionists sought to free slaves because they sexually desired them and wished to amalgamate the two races.⁵⁷

Some historians have noted that, following this, the term was used to 'cover interracial sex, interracial marriage and the potentiality of mixed race offspring'.⁵⁸ Others suggest that 'fear of

interracial mixing was a driving force behind the Jim Crow system in the U.S. South and the black codes in the U.S. North. Mulattoes in the antebellum South occupied a distinct position between blacks and whites... [there were] reports

⁵⁶ Kohn, p. 4.

⁵⁷ Lucy Bland, 'White Women and Men of Colour: Miscegenation Fears in Britain after the Great War', *Gender & History*, 17:1, 2005, pp. 29–61.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

that children of mixed-race heritage were thought to be morally and physically inferior to “pure” blacks and more prone to tuberculosis.⁵⁹

In terms of miscegenation fears in Britain, during 1919 there were race riots in Britain’s major ports – Bristol, Cardiff, London and Liverpool – when black men minding their own business ‘peacefully walking the... streets were attacked again and again’. ⁶⁰In the wake of the riots, *The Times* published a letter which stated that

intimate association between black or coloured men and white women is a thing of horror... It is an instinctive certainty that sexual relations between white women and coloured men revolt our very nature... What blame... to those white men who, seeing these conditions and loathing them, resort to violence?⁶¹

The abhorrent validation by the right-wing media of racial violence towards black men and white women involved in romantic relations, which saw ‘Blacks... mobbed and randomly attacked by roving gangs of white men’, has a two-way structural and ideological connection.⁶² The letter was written by Ralph Williams, a former British colonial administrator. Williams had worked in Bechuanaland, now known as Botswana in southern Africa, and had been governor of the Windward Islands in the British West Indies.⁶³ As both localities were part of the British Empire, it is arguable that Williams had a vested, hegemonic interest in encouraging racial hatred towards colonial subjects in an effort to reinforce the Empire’s power and keep black people subjugated and blacks and whites divided. This can be seen in the way he forges a connection between violence, racism and nature. His assertion is that transracial relationships are biologically *unnatural*, rather than socially and ideologically constructed as immoral, and therefore trigger a *natural* violent response by white men on seeing black men with white women.

⁵⁹ R. G. Fryer, L. Kahn, S. D. Levitt and J. L. Spenkuch, ‘The Plight of Mixed-Race Adolescents’, *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 94:3, 2012, pp. 621–634 (p. 622).

⁶⁰ Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), p. 300.

⁶¹ Bland, ‘White Women and Men of Colour’, p. 29.

⁶² Jacqueline Nassy Brown, *Dropping Anchor, Setting Sail: Geographies of Race in Black Liverpool* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 21.

⁶³ Bland, ‘White Women and Men of Colour’, bibliography, reference no. 1, p. 52.

The Times newspaper, during that period, was thus a media outlet that represented imperial ideologies through the proliferation of information that constructed black people as inferior to white people, an idea that was rooted in the colonial agenda.

Stuart Hall has noted how after 1890,

with the rise of the popular press, from the *Illustrated London News* to the Hamsworth *Daily Mail*, the imagery of mass commodity production entered the world of the working classes via the spectacle of advertising... The gallery of imperial heroes and their masculine exploits in “Darkest Africa” were immortalised on matchboxes, needle cases, toothpaste pots, pencil boxes, cigarette packets, board games, paperweights, sheet music ... biscuit tins, whiskey bottles, tea tins and chocolate bars ... No pre-existing form of organised racism had ever before been able to reach so large and so differentiated a mass of the populace.⁶⁴

This reveals to some extent how the white superiority complex was internalised, consciously and subconsciously, as these images were projected from the top of society downwards.

In terms of miscegenation fears in Britain after the Great War, historians have argued that they were social, political and economic in nature, tied to imperialism and the decline of Britain’s world dominance as an industrial power. Britain had ‘difficulties in converting from a war economy (including unemployment, strikes and riots), [as well as] wider structural problems linked to Britain’s weakened global industrial standing and challenges from both Socialism (invigorated by the new Soviet Union) and anti-colonialism’.⁶⁵ Although these instabilities played a role in shattering Britain’s self-image and national identity, Lucy Bland suggests, similar to Marek Kohn, that ‘there was an historical specificity to the miscegenation anxieties of the immediate post-war period that related to shifts in race relations on the one hand, and in gender relations on the other’.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage, 2013), p. 240.

⁶⁵ Bland, ‘White Women and Men of Colour’, p. 30.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

With regard to gender roles, a shift in power relations occurred during World War One in which women took on more central roles in society, enabling them to express their agency in ways that had previously been denied them. Their social and political mobility was due in part to the fact that, as the war ‘consumed manpower at an unprecedented rate’, women filled the void that was created at home: ‘half a million of them abandoned servants’ quarters and sweatshops for munition factories and offices, and women’s wages doubled.’⁶⁷ As a result of men being away at war, women also ‘controlled the household economy [and while] in public, they acquired an unprecedented visibility’.⁶⁸ They began to don uniforms related to their new roles as ticket collectors, bus conductors, and ambulance and train drivers. Women had started to ‘take on industrial tasks previously defined as beyond their capabilities’ and a uniform, ‘even a low-ranking civilian one, was significant’.⁶⁹ It has been noted that ‘the women’s movement created and promoted women’s auxiliary services to demonstrate their capacity for full citizenship’ and their claim was ‘acknowledged in 1918, with enfranchisement of women over thirty’, an historical landmark for British women.⁷⁰

These elements are said to have reflected the ‘growth of women’s self-confidence and independence’, and as a result ‘sexual issues were discussed more openly during the war, including subjects previously seen as taboo, such as illegitimacy, venereal disease and birth control’.⁷¹ This period of upward social and political mobility also had cultural and economic implications for certain women. It has been argued that ‘women munitions workers spent their wages freely on clothes and outings to pubs, cinemas and restaurants’ and ‘in many ways they were breaching the boundaries of the old gender

⁶⁷ Kohn, p. 5.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Susan R. Grayzel, *Women and the First World War* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 196.

⁷⁰ Kohn, p. 5.

⁷¹ Bland, p. 31.

order. For some of these women, this “breach” included the right to choose one’s partner, regardless of race.’⁷²

A shift in race relations had occurred after huge numbers of black and Asian men from the colonies had fought in the war. This had instilled in them more confidence and ‘led to their greater self-esteem, but also their fury at their unequal treatment, at the ingratitude shown towards them and the non-commemoration of their sacrifice. Any illusions of white superiority were shattered once and for all.’⁷³ Demobbed in Britain, black soldiers from the colonies who had been in the army or the merchant navy during the war felt they had earned their entitlement to full British citizenship. It was the same ‘for those black men who had worked during the war in Britain’s munitions and chemical factories: they had all been well paid and now had a new self-confidence, new expectations and a determination to claim their rights as colonial subjects’.⁷⁴

In contrast, while women and black men were gaining confidence and self-esteem, white working-class men were returning home from the war having suffered ‘the emasculating conditions of trench warfare’.⁷⁵ Not only had the war created the conditions for subverting gender roles, destabilising traditional conceptions of masculinity and empowering women, but also black men, the subjects of colonialisation, had begun to feel validated. Lucy Bland has argued that in the post-Great War period, a triumphant but disillusioned and often ‘physically... damaged army of white British working-class men returned home, initially to face unemployment, and, in Britain’s main ports, the spectre of the racial “other” courting “their” women’.⁷⁶

⁷² Ibid, p. 31.

⁷³ Ibid, p. 30.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 30.

⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 37.

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 37.

Bland notes that they ‘now came up against challenges to definers of British masculinity, namely the ability to work and the ability to attract the opposite sex’.⁷⁷

Women who were drawn to black men were represented by the mainstream press as ‘either passive victims, the prey of licentious, immoral “aliens”, or alternatively, they were seen as active in their choice, as a result largely of their own sexual immorality and social marginality’.⁷⁸ Referring to newspapers of the period, Bland points out that the media and people in power could not understand why white women would behave in a way that was ‘repugnant to our finer instincts’.⁷⁹ The racist belief assumed by many was that black people were attracted to white people, but not the other way around, and the press tried to make sense of this mystery by claiming that women who consorted with black men were

loose, “of a low type” or “of a certain class,” that is, prostitutes or akin to such. The nineteenth century claim that prostitutes were atavistic and on a par with “primitive” races may also have implicitly informed their judgement: the women were simply attracted to their “own kind”. “There are women in Liverpool who have no self-respect”, trumpeted the *Liverpool Courier*.⁸⁰

Fierce hatred directed towards transracial relationships, however, cannot be viewed as simply occurring due to post-war social and economic conditions in working-class areas around Britain’s major ports, or the emasculating trauma caused by war. Racial subordination in this historical moment was systemic and, as discussed earlier, was embedded within the structure of British imperialism. Racism and fears of blackness were not only woven throughout the colonial structure, filtered through the media, and then projected at a social and physical level, they were also taught in British schools and thereby internalised during childhood. Again, as touched upon already, the racial representations of colonised countries and their societies were transmitted back to

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 37.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 33.

⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 33.

⁸⁰ *Liverpool Courier*, 11 June 1919, in Bland, ‘White Women and Men of Colour’, p. 36.

Britain through myriad material forms, one of which was children's literature. As Stuart Hall has noted:

The progress of the great white explorer-adventurers and the encounters with the black African exotic was charted, recorded and depicted in maps and drawings, etchings and (especially) the new photography, in newspaper illustrations and accounts, diaries, travel writing, learned treatises, official reports and boy's-own adventure novels.⁸¹

In the education sector, through novels, black people were infantilised, animalised, ridiculed, and painted as malicious and senseless. It has been argued that the pervasiveness of

racism in the education system, popular children's literature, the press and culture generally rendered such opposition fairly unsurprising... in the *School History of England* (1911) the black inhabitants of the West Indies are described as "lazy, vicious and incapable of any serious improvement or of work". G. A. Henty, the most widely-read British author of boys' adventure stories in the years up to World War 1, wrote of black people in *By Sheer Pluck: A Tale of the Ashanti War* as being "just like children... they are always laughing or quarrelling. They are... clever up to a certain point, densely stupid beyond".⁸²

These racist representations of the peoples of Africa were sharply contrasted to the 'Imperial adventurers and conquerors [who] were held up as paragons of manliness... a chivalrous, nationalistic, muscular, stoic masculinity... celebrated in the best-selling fiction of such writers as G.A. Henty, Rider Haggard, and Rudyard Kipling'.⁸³

Hall has argued that these racialised discourses are rooted in

binary oppositions... the powerful opposition between "civilisation" (white) and "savagery" (black) [and] the rich distinctions which cluster around the supposed link, on the one hand, between the white "races" and intellectual development – refinement, learning and knowledge, a belief in reason, the presence of developed institutions, formal government and law, and a "civilised restraint" in their emotional, sexual and civic life, all of which are associated with "Culture"; on the other hand, the link between the black "races" and whatever is instinctual – the open expression of emotion and feeling rather than intellect, a lack of "civilised refinement" in sexual and social life, a reliance on custom and ritual, and the lack of developed civil institutions, all of which are linked to "nature." Finally, there is the polarized opposition between racial "purity" on the one

⁸¹ Hall, *Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, p. 240.

⁸² Bland, 'White Women and Men of Colour', pp. 36–37.

⁸³ Adrian Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 182.

hand, and the “pollution” which comes from intermarriage, racial hybridity and interbreeding.⁸⁴

Hall’s hypothesis is important for explaining how white women that were attracted to black men during this historical period were stripped of their ‘civilised’ status and instead rendered as ‘primitive’ and ‘immoral’ ‘prostitutes’.

The return of pseudo-scientific racism

During the 1920s, miscegenation as a sociocultural construct was again said to be biologically unnatural, and pseudo-scientific arguments that were opposed to transracial relationships were advanced by imperialists. They saw these relationships as ‘having “disastrous” procreative consequences’, whereby the ‘half-caste child was deemed to inherit the worst features of both parents, namely immorality and laziness’.⁸⁵ The terms used to describe sexual interactions between black and white people and the children of mixed heritage tended ‘to pathologize those who cannot easily be fitted into taken-for-granted racialised binary opposition’.⁸⁶ Consequently, as Brah and Coombes have noted, ‘half-caste, mixed-race, bi-racial, maroon, mullatto (from mule) and metis (French for mongrel dog) all demonstrate essentialism [and] many are also riven with pathologizing tones of impurity’.⁸⁷

This can be seen when in 1920 Dr Reginald Ruggles Gates, the geneticist and eugenicist, claimed that ‘miscegenation between Europeans and more backward peoples led to physical, mental and moral disharmonies’, while in 1923, Major Leonard Darwin, a son of Charles Darwin and president of the Eugenics Education Society, warned the national leaders at the 1923 Imperial Conference that ‘interbreeding between widely

⁸⁴ Hall, *Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, p. 243.

⁸⁵ Bland, ‘White Women and Men of Colour’, p. 33.

⁸⁶ Avtar Brah and Annie Coombes, *Hybridity and its Discontents: Politics, Science, Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 74.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

divergent races could result in the production of types inferior to both parent stocks'.⁸⁸ The claim that the offspring of transracial relations were 'inferior to both parents was widely expressed – by various officials, by the press, by scientists'.⁸⁹ People in positions of power had started to express the view that 'mixed race peoples tended to degeneracy: a reversal of the evolutionary process, a regression to an earlier, more primitive stage. To be mixed race was to be classified a hybrid bastard, prone to sexual immorality and disease.'⁹⁰

The yearning to reimagine a collective national identity that represented 'true' Englishness and which excluded racial others needed to be recreated, as, after the war, 'the national unity... against the "common enemy" [had begun] to disintegrate. Patriotism and a sense of... Englishness needed to be constructed yet again.'⁹¹ A racist narrative that alienated mixed-race children, particularly those of African and white European descent, was revived when in 1924, the Eugenics Society undertook 'its own investigation of what it called "race crossing."⁹² Having studied a small group of Anglo-Chinese children, two anthropologists, Herbert Fleure from the University of Aberystwyth and Rachel Fleming, conducted a 'study of children with white mothers and black fathers, and found these children more disadvantaged than those termed the "yellow/white hybrids."⁹³

Fleure and Fleming studied only 'physical characteristics – typical anthropometric calculations such as the colour of skin, hair and eyes, the shape of the skull, eyes and nose, etc; they refused to undertake mental measurements, despite pressure from the

⁸⁸ Lucy Bland, 'British Eugenics and "Race Crossing": A Study of an Interwar Investigation', *New Formations*, 60, 2007, pp, 66–78 (p. 67).

⁸⁹ Bland, 'White Women and Men of Colour', p. 48.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Bland, 'British Eugenics and "Race Crossing"', p. 67.

⁹³ Bland, 'British Eugenics and "Race Crossing"', p. 67.

Secretary of the Eugenics Society'.⁹⁴ Their results showed that 'for both groups studied

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those children with Chinese fathers, those with black – characteristics from the father's side were more markedly inherited than those from the mothers. In relation to those with black fathers... 43 per cent gave "immediate impression" of negroid, 52 per cent were half-caste in appearance, while only 5 per cent would pass as English.⁹⁵

The idea of Englishness, it is assumed, not only meant whiteness in terms of skin colour, 'but also a kind of eye, nose, lips, hair, all carefully calibrated and recorded'.⁹⁶

In analysing the study, Lucy Bland notes that 'the idea of passing [as English] implied... the belief that the offspring of mixed heritage can never be truly English, despite being born in England and having an English mother'.⁹⁷ These insights reveal the ways in which miscegenation fears were whipped up by the establishment – the government and the right wing press – after the Great War and then reproduced by elitist academics and scientists during the 1920s.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Bland, 'White Women and Men of Colour', p. 49.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

Miscegenation fears and the 'colour bar' during World War Two



Soho, 1943, 'Inside London's Coloured Clubs', By Felix Mann, Source: Getty

During the early and mid-1930s, miscegenation fears lay dormant. However, the problem flared up again after 1941 when England became inundated with droves of black American servicemen and West Indian troops from the colonies who went there to help with the war effort. There are many different narratives regarding the way in which black soldiers, both subjects of the Empire and from America, were treated and received by the British population during the war. Historian David Reynolds, for example, has argued that 'to a degree that may seem surprising today, British people transcended the stereotypes about "negroes" and welcomed non-white GIs'.⁹⁸ Another social and cultural historian, Graham Smith, notes that 'the evidence points overwhelmingly to the conclusion that blacks[sic] were warmly welcomed in Britain, and the action of the white Americans in furthering a colour bar was roundly condemned'.⁹⁹ However, these claims would appear to exclude the ways in which the British hegemony, the United

⁹⁸ David Reynolds, *Rich Relations: The American Occupation of Britain 1942–1945* (London: Harper Collins, 1995), p. 302.

⁹⁹ Graham Smith, *When Jim Crow Met John Bull: Black American Soldiers in World War II Britain* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1987), p. 240.

States Airforce and white American soldiers reacted to transracial relationships between white British women and black soldiers, both from the United States and the British colonies.

Writer and academic Edward Scobie noted that before war was declared against Nazi Germany there were ‘ten thousand blacks (including 261 African and West Indian students) living in British cities, primarily the sea ports’.¹⁰⁰ With regard to the influx of non-white troops, Reynolds claims that during the period from December 1942 to D-Day, the number of non-white military personnel in Britain grew from ‘7,000 to 13,000. The 844th Engineer Aviation Battalion, engaged in aircraft construction in Suffolk in the summer of 1943, consisted largely of “Spanish-speaking Mexicans” from around the California-Mexico border, but most of the non-white GIs were what would be now be called African-American.’¹⁰¹ This was not an expression that British people used during the war. Most of them ‘referred to “coloured people,” or, gradually adopting American racial terminology, to “Negroes.”’¹⁰² Reynolds wrote that lots of English people, especially those living in the countryside and villages, had never seen a person that was not white before. He explained that

stories were frequent of black GIs representing themselves as “Red Indians” and white GIs persuading British people that the blacks had tails. Even where such credulity was lacking, many English people were simply fascinated by physical appearance – dark faces offsetting white teeth... and their responses to black GIs were often somewhat naïve and superficial.¹⁰³

Although these responses were, in some cases, somewhat innocent, this chapter has already explored how pseudo-scientific racism dating back to the nineteenth century had an impact on the British imagination. This, I have argued, flowed from the imperial

¹⁰⁰ Edward Scobie, *Black Britannia: A History of Blacks in Britain* (London: Johnson Publishers, 1972) p. 185.

¹⁰¹ Reynolds, p. 303.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

power structure and down through society to schools, where literature that infantilised black people and stripped them of their humanity was taught and filtered through education. While racial fears deeply embedded within British culture both at the top and the bottom of the social ladder and at various historical moments may have been latent, the American forces, on arrival in Britain, are said to have ‘brought their racism with them’.¹⁰⁴ They whipped up much of the hostility, aggression and violence towards black troops, both GIs and colonials, which was the result of operating a system of segregation.



Soho, 1943, 'Inside London's Coloured Clubs', by Felix Mann, Source: Getty

In their perceptive book *Out of Whiteness: Colour, Politics, and Culture* (2001) Les Back and Vron Ware have noted that a harsh system of racial segregation was imposed by the American military, mainly centred around the English countryside. They claim

¹⁰⁴ Neil A. Wynn. ““Race War”: Black American GIs and West Indians in Britain During the Second World War”, *Immigrants & Minorities*, 24:3, 2006, pp. 324–346 (p. 327).

that this segregation was particularly severe and rigorously imposed in East Anglia, where many of the air force bases and military corps were located. Many black American servicemen were stationed in this region, and they are noted to have

served as engineers, truck drivers, and ordnance workers. The U.S. Army decided that the innocently named River Drove, which flowed through East Anglia, would provide the geographical expression of the colour line. All areas East [*sic*] of the river were out of bounds to the black GIs who were stationed at Eye and Debach and in Haughley Park near Stowmarket.¹⁰⁵

Anecdotal evidence passed on to the American civil rights activist Walter Wright, who came to Britain during the war, suggests that white American troops would become aggravated if they observed black men and white women transgressing racial boundaries. Wright recalled that ‘one had told of the distinguished British family inviting a group of American soldiers to their home for dinner and dancing. Everything moved smoothly during the meal, but when one of the Negro soldiers danced with one of the English women, he had been assaulted by a Southern white soldier. A free-for-all followed in which the British took the side of the Negroes.’¹⁰⁶ In London, stories of racial segregation and racial violence in the military were similar. Reynolds writes about a young woman student from south-east London who wrote to a friend in April 1943 regarding an altercation that took place at a canteen attended by various allied troops and a black airman:

an American airman walked in, and seeing the coloured airman quietly sitting at a table, strolled up to him and slashed [slapped] him across the face! Of course everyone jumped up ready for a fight but the proprietress managed to stop it. Someone said “send for the U.S. police” but the Americans tried to pass it off, and said that if the coloured man would go, everything would be alright. The British said if anyone ought to go it was the American. A schoolmistress who was helping at the back, dashed out and slashed the American’s face, and her language was very choice! Anyway, they smuggled him out, but our men said if they saw him again they’d kill him and all the rest of it. Meanwhile, the coloured man sat there as if dazed, it was unexpected and so unwarranted. It seems

¹⁰⁵ Les Back and Vron Ware, *Out of Whiteness: Colour, Politics, and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 183.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 186

amazing that the Americans are fighting on our side, when you hear things like that.¹⁰⁷

Other stories suggest that ‘White U.S. servicemen did discriminate against colonial servicemen as well as against their own black troops in Britain. This led to pitched battles in English pubs and dance halls around the country.’¹⁰⁸

White British women not only came to the aid of black soldiers during the war, but many also developed intimate sexual and romantic relationships with both black American GIs and black colonial soldiers. According to one black American serviceman, ‘The white girls all over Europe have fallen in love with the black soldier and many of them have cried worse than any American girl ever did when the boys move from a town they have lived in. I have known the girls to follow them from town to town as far as they could go.’¹⁰⁹ Revered Trinidadian pan-Africanist, journalist and author George Padmore, is known to have recounted an episode during the war when English women were infuriated that black soldiers were leaving Bristol. Padmore wrote:

“To hell with the U.S. Army colour bar! We want our coloured sweethearts!” shouted hundreds of English girls who tried to break into an American army camp at Bristol when the coloured troops, who recently arrived in this country from Germany, were about to embark for America. British police officers had to be called to protect the coloured soldiers from being mobbed by the hysterical girls, whose ages ranged between seventeen and twenty-four. Kissing and embracing went on for hours until, with a special reinforcement of military police, the couples were separated and the Negroes forced back to their barracks.¹¹⁰

These are just a few of many anecdotes which led to an attempted curtailment of transracial relationships by Major General Dowler of the United States Army, facilitated by the British establishment. Speaking about the ‘near-universal hostility towards interracial sexual relations in Britain before and during the war’, Major Dowler made

¹⁰⁷ Reynolds, p. 302.

¹⁰⁸ Scobie, p. 188.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

some notes in August 1942 proposing a solution to black and white people interacting romantically.¹¹¹ The following October, cabinet discussions took place. During these talks, Dowler argued that in the United States, ‘the racial problem “demands that the white man or woman does not intimately associate with the coloured man” and it was his view that same should prevail in Britain’.¹¹² Three propositions were put forward for discussion:

firstly... attempts to stop blacks coming into Britain at all, or to limit their numbers if a total ban was not possible; secondly if they were of necessity to come it was suggested that they should be restricted to certain geographical areas of the country; finally it was argued that if black American female personnel could be brought to Britain to serve in various capacities the soldiers’ sexual urges could be directed to women of their race.¹¹³

While all three propositions were given serious consideration by British and American authorities, ‘all three floundered’.¹¹⁴ Anthony Eden, the Conservative Foreign Secretary, is said to have been ‘most concerned about the presence of black soldiers in Britain, and it was he who was most energetic in trying to stop them coming. By September 1942 it was clear this policy had failed.’¹¹⁵ Eden’s Conservative Party colleague Maurice Petherick, ‘the member for Penryn and Falmouth and a post-war high sheriff of Cornwall [,] had offered the most vitriolic advice to Eden’; he sent a letter to Eden on 16 August 1942 in which he ‘advanced several reasons’ to try and prevent ‘black soldiers from entering Britain’.¹¹⁶ They are as follows:

- 1) They will obviously consort with white girls and their will be a number of half-caste babies about when they have gone – a bad thing for any country.
- 2) Not knowing that the girls who go with them are the lowest of the low it will give them a bad opinion of Englishwomen.
- 3) It will upset the local population when this occurs.
- 4) It will frighten the men from these parts who are serving abroad as it did the French soldiers in the last war.

¹¹¹ Smith, p. 160.

¹¹² Smith, p. 188.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

These four intersecting points demonstrate that although the consensus by historians is that black soldiers, both American GIs and colonials, were generally accepted by the majority of the British public, the hegemonic forces tried to prevent black soldiers from America and the colonies from entering Britain's borders. As seen in this list, miscegenation fears from the period after World War One and the eugenics revival of the 1920s had been stirred up once again during World War Two.

These fears, however, were not only directed towards black men and white women; they were also anti-American anxieties produced by Britain's ailing imperial power. In another letter to Anthony Eden in December 1943, Falmouth complained that

as in other parts of England women of the lowest order are consorting with the blackamoors. There is very strong feeling about this... Surely we are in a strong enough position to stand up to the USA... and tell them that we will not have any more black troops here and ask them [to] send these we have to North Africa, where poor devils, they would be much more happy.¹¹⁷

Following the war, and with the migration of the alien cultural form bebop, questions concerning race, gender and nation were raised again by the establishment and the media, and drugs were situated at the centre of that discourse, culminating with the spate of police raids on the bebop clubs in Soho.

¹¹⁷ Smith, p. 190.

The police raids in detail



Club Eleven, Soho, 1950. Source: Baehr Pictures

As established at the start of this chapter, the three key bebop clubs in Soho were the focus of drug raids by police. The Fullado Club, the first club in Britain to play bebop, was busted in 1947. Following that, Club Eleven and the Paramount Dance Hall were raided three years later in 1950. The scene had by then become much more conspicuous around Soho, the London suburbs and other parts of Britain. Moreover, as discussed by musicians in oral histories and clubbers in autobiographies, some beboppers used heroin, Benzedrine and cocaine, and most were cannabis users. While it is difficult to know the number of drug users in London during that period, convictions for possession in post-war London were relatively low (as demonstrated below) and confined mainly to the Soho area.

Having historicised the miscegenation anxieties that dated back to 1919, and that flared up again with the arrival of African American and colonial servicemen during the Second World War, this chapter will now demonstrate how the bebop scene in post-war Soho became the focus of a cyclical discourse in which drugs were feared to be the

agent that ‘dissolved [racial and gender] boundaries [and led] to drug-induced sexual contact across race lines’.¹¹⁸ This moral panic, although present in the wake of the Second World War, was amplified with the arrival of migrants from the colonies after 1948, in particular the *Windrush* generation.

Not long before the Fullado Club was raided and closed down, a *Daily Mirror* reporter went undercover to a club in Soho, as we have already seen. His report indicated that drugs were only one part of the story in terms of threats to society:

There is a “black and tan” (coloured and half-breeds) club in Soho where the cigarettes are rolled while you wait. The tall, slim, half-caste who specialises in them smokes himself. He starts off an evening at the club, snarling and bad-tempered. He ends up a sparkling creature – and richer – by smoking and selling reefers... One of the worst is the woman who is known around the West End by a courtesy title. She is a benevolent looking old dame. It is the benevolence of a snake coiled in the sun always ready to strike... she will lend money to a girl [who is] hard up [and] offer her Benzedrine tablets for a shilling or so.¹¹⁹

There are a number of hidden meanings in this article that require analysis in order to demonstrate that the police raids on the bebop clubs in Soho were concerned with more than people merely using and dealing drugs. First, to reiterate, the story was published a few months before the Fullado Club was raided. As already demonstrated through oral history testimonies in chapter two, the club was, according to Lennie Bush, ‘black owned’, and a place where musicians and the ‘clientele’, both black and white, could ‘go and smoke’.¹²⁰ Not only that, but as seen earlier in another section from this report, ‘spiv’-like males in zoot suits could be found at the club. We know from evidence presented throughout the previous chapter that ‘spiv’ clothing and zoot suits were signifiers of bebop identity. Therefore, it is almost certain that the report was referring to the Fullado.

¹¹⁸ Kohn, p. 177.

¹¹⁹ ‘Dope’ – Vilest of all Rackets’, *Daily Mirror*, 26 March, 1947, p. 2.

¹²⁰ Bush, 1992.

In terms of this section of the article, though, there are a number of meanings encoded within it. First, the reporter labels the space a ‘black and tan club’, a term used to describe a club inhabited by what the writer calls ‘coloured and half breeds’. This language, although clearly racialised, conjures up a broader sense of imperialism across the British Empire. For example, here the expression is referring to black and mixed-race people, but the ‘black and tans’ were also an amalgamation of English ex-soldiers and criminals recruited by the Royal Irish Constabulary to fight in the war of independence after 1918.¹²¹ Secondly, the racialised imagery suggests that the offspring of both black and white people – the ‘half-caste’ – is a continuation of historical stereotyping of mixed-race people as folk devils, as a menace to society, and draws from the historical discourse that pathologized mixed-race people with tones of impurity. These ideas, as seen previously in the chapter, were constructed by the establishment, who developed pseudo-scientific racism which characterised mixed-race people as inferior human beings. However, in this instance, the image is even more vivid: the man is presented as a snarling creature – a vicious animal stripped of his humanity. Similarly, the woman is referred to as a snake, coiled-up and ready to attack. This not only casts her, like the man of mixed heritage, as less than human, but also presents her as poisonous, and thereby as a serious threat to society. This is seen in the idea that she preys upon vulnerable young girls, to whom she allegedly deals drugs. This media reporting is rooted in the historical miscegenation fears that were expressed through the drugs discourse after the First World War, and, following that, during the 1920s in the eugenics debates.

¹²¹ See, David Leeson (2003) The ‘scum of London’s underworld’? British Recruits for the Royal Irish Constabulary, 1920–21, *Contemporary British History*, 17:1, pp. 1–38.

Although bebop and the youth culture that formed around it were not as defined by the mainstream press during 1947, this report conveys an image of an ‘alien’ hybrid culture consisting of male and female clubbers that blurred racial boundaries, some of whom used drugs and wore clothing that was perceived as rebellious and un-English, coming into existence and starting to be recognised by the establishment and the press around the time the Fullado Club was raided.

By 1950 bebop had become a fully-fledged signifier of transgression. As discussed in the first section of this chapter, Club Eleven was raided on Saturday 15 April, and, as *Melody Maker* pointed out, twelve men were arrested for possession of drugs. A string of newspaper reports whipped up a frenzy, again conjuring up an image of Britain’s national borders under threat, claiming that the club was raided after ‘a ship’s steward was arrested at Southampton with the drug [cannabis] concealed in chocolate boxes. Under interrogation the steward stated that he had obtained the drug at Club Eleven in London.’¹²² The *Daily Mirror* also ran a story shortly after the raid indicating that ‘three American seamen were ... arrested on the premises of a private bebop club in Soho. There were 250 people in the club at the time.’¹²³ Under the headline ‘Drugs Clean-Up in Bebop Dives’, the *Daily Herald*, in the wake of the raid, stated that

A Scotland Yard “drug squad” is ready to go into action against bebop... clubs in London which have become centres of a new traffic in dope. Information has been collected by the Dangerous Drugs Branch of the Home Office... At Marlborough-Street police court on Saturday eight young men – six of them dance band musicians – were fined from £5 to £15, for having drugs at Club Eleven, a bebop dance room in Carnaby-Street, Soho.¹²⁴

Drug convictions between 1945 and 1950, however, were relatively low. For example, on 20 January 1953, Detective Inspector George Lyle of Scotland Yard delivered a

¹²² Richard Davenport-Hines, *The Pursuit of Oblivion: A Social History of Drugs*, (London: Orion, 2002), p. 299.

¹²³ *Daily Mirror*, April 19, 1950, p. 8.

¹²⁴ ‘Drugs Clean Up in Bebop Dives’, *Daily Herald*, 24 April 1950, p. 3.

speech to the Society for the Study of Addiction at the Medical Society at 11 Chandos Street, London. He claimed that when the three bebop clubs in Soho were raided, six people were prosecuted for heroin in 1947 and one in 1950; none were prosecuted for cocaine in 1947 and only one person in 1950. In terms of Indian hemp (cannabis), 15 people were prosecuted in 1947 compared to 50 in 1950.

Referring to the Club Eleven raid three years previously, during his talk Lyle claimed that ‘in 1950 complaints began to be received that Indian Hemp was being sold in certain dance clubs in the West End’. He continued:

On 15th April, 1950, at 12.30 p.m., a large force of police, about forty, raided Club 11, a private dance club in Carnaby Street, W.1. There were on the premises between 200 and 250 persons, coloured and white, of both sexes, the majority being between 17 and 30. All these people were searched. Ten men were found to be in possession of Indian Hemp. Two also had a small quantity of cocaine and another man had a small quantity of morphine. In addition 23 packets of Indian Hemp, a number of hemp cigarettes, a small packet of cocaine, a small quantity of prepared opium and an empty morphine ampoule were found on the floor of the club. All the cocaine had been adulterated with boric acid. All were later convicted and fined.¹²⁵

During the court case, the fact that the club played bebop music was highlighted by the arresting officer, and the notion of drugs and that type of jazz were tied together, when the magistrate, Daniel Hopkin, asked ‘What is bebop?’, to which the Inspector replied ‘It is a queer form of modern dancing – a Negro jive’.¹²⁶

It is important to note the incongruences in Lyle’s statement: bebop is a type of jazz music, not a type of dance. It is true, however, that the term jive was generally understood as a type of dance or a form of argot; a slang form in which ‘Cab Calloway led the way with his “Harlemese” language or jive talk’.¹²⁷ Secondly, from this declaration we can see how the language used to describe the club, its queer dancing and drug taking, is tied to the notions of blackness and strangeness. This is a significant

¹²⁵ G. Lyle, ‘Dangerous Drug Traffic in London’, *The British Journal of Addiction*, 50, 1953, p. 47.

¹²⁶ ‘Drug Squad Swoop on Club Eleven’, *Melody Maker*, 22 April 1950, p. 1.

¹²⁷ Bruce M. Tyler, ‘Black Jive and White Repression’, *The Journal of Ethnic Studies*, 16:4, p. 31.

insight as, in terms of the police statement, of the 12 men arrested at the club, eight were white males. Furthermore, one white woman, an RAF servicewoman, was also arrested in the raid. She spoke of how she was demonised for being in a bebop club, and, as the space was inhabited by black males, she was also accused of potentially being a drug addict. The woman, who wished to remain anonymous, wrote a letter to *Melody Maker* which was published in July 1950. She recalled that:

I was the only servicewoman picked up at the Club Eleven raid and found my first clash with the police a harrowing experience. It left me filled with resentment of the police, because I was accused of possessing a low moral standard: fraternising with (to recall a certain lieutenant's phrase): "Buck Niggers"; and the likelihood of becoming a drug addict. I personally have an interest in bop and all forms of modern music, as a listener rather than a dancer, and I felt that I must defend bop and my own character. I explained to the police officials that they were condemning bop without knowing anything about it; that if they studied it, they would find that it has musical value; and that in my own personal experience their condemnation of the Negroes found at bop clubs was most unfounded.¹²⁸

The notion that this bebop fan was compelled to tell the police that she was an avid listener of the music, rather than a dancer, epitomises her palpable fears with regard to the feeling towards transracial fraternisation between black men and white women in the Soho bebop clubs. Why did she feel the need to tell the policeman this? It appears to be due to the notion that the physical movement of dancing evokes intimacy, even eroticism, which in turn invokes in the imagination sexually charged pictures of black men and white women together. In light of the social and political conditions of the period, if this clubber had explained to the lieutenant that she had been physically transgressing racial boundaries in this manner, her treatment by the police would likely have been significantly worse. The lieutenant's patriarchal, racist response to her expressing her views was vicious enough. She continued:

In reply, I was told that a girl of my education should not frequent jazz clubs; that I deserved horsewhipping for my opinions; and that a report would be sent

¹²⁸ Ernest Borneman, 'One Night Stand', *Melody Maker*, July 29 1950, p. 2.

to the RAF police to ensure my punishment. When I was eventually handed over to the RAF Special Investigation Branch, I was interrogated again and informed that I deserved a fortnight in the cells as punishment – for what? Being at Club Eleven at a 12-4 a.m. session with a perfectly respectable escort from camp? When I was released, I was told that there was to be a series of raids on jazz clubs and I was *forbidden* to go to a jazz club again. After reading the press reports on the raid, which were fantastic exaggerations and distortions of the truth... I knew at last what... other types think about jazz.¹²⁹

The *Daily Mirror*, despite the sensationalist story about the ‘black and tan’ club three years earlier, which I have speculated was the Fullado, was sympathetic to the raid on the Club Eleven. Its article about the raid, referring to another newspaper report, stated that:

Three days ago, a Sunday newspaper carried a sensational story under banner headlines alleging that the jazz clubs and hot dance halls of London’s West End were the focal points in a police drive to clean up drug peddling. It was stated that the clientele of these clubs and dance halls was composed almost entirely of coloured men and white girls – and that the coloured men persuaded the white girls to smoke the drugged cigarettes. This is a gross piece of exaggerated sensationalism. What are the facts?¹³⁰

We know from the evidence presented in this chapter, and in previous chapters, that this is indeed sensationalised. Club Eleven, although attracting many people from the African diaspora in London, was frequented by both black and white men, women and youths. In fact, two of the main bands that played at the club were fronted by saxophonists Ronnie Scott and Johnny Dankworth, two white youngsters from the East End. The other band known to play at the Club Eleven was led by the Jamaican trumpeter Pete Pitterson.

The racialisation of drug usage, the simultaneous condemnation of transracial fraternisation across gender and the fixing of these two images to bebop happened again

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ “‘A Slur and the Facts’ by The Marquis of Donegal: President of the National Federation of Jazz’, *Daily Mirror*, 19 April 1950, p. 8.

three months later, on 'the 1st July, 1950 when police raided the Paramount Dancehall in Tottenham Court Road'.¹³¹



Beboppers dancing at The Paramount Club. Source: Jazz Illustrated, 1950

The People reported the raid and disseminated images in which drugs, black males and white females were grouped together. The article stated that:

Over fifty policemen in uniform and plain clothes made a drug raid on a dance hall in Tottenham Court-Rd last night. Six persons were taken in charge of possession of drugs... As the police entered the hall about a hundred Negroes who were dancing there made a rush for the doors. They were stopped as they crowded round the exits and lined up to await search. White girls who were dancing with them screamed and some of them fainted.¹³²

¹³¹ Lyle, p. 53.

¹³² 'Dance Hall Drug Raid: Six Held', *The People*, 2 July 1950, p. 1.

As we can see, the Paramount's audience was alleged to have consisted of mainly black males and white females. In his statement about the raid to the Society for the Study of Addiction, Detective Inspector George Lyle claimed that:

On the 1st July, 1950, at 10 p.m., about 80 Police Officers raided the Paramount Dance Hall, Tottenham Court Road, W.C.1, and searched the 500 or so persons who were in the Hall [*sic*]. The men were mainly coloured and the girls white. Eight coloured men were arrested for having Indian Hemp in their possession. Several of the coloured men in the hall were very excited and hysterical during the raid. One of these men bit the policemen and a civilian. At court he solemnly [*sic*] stated that he had bitten these persons because they had bitten him first... During the search 20 packets of hemp, several knives... were found on the floor. In the ladies' toilet a large number of contraceptives was found.¹³³

There are a number of significant, intersecting elements in this statement, as well as the demonisation of transracial relations, which demonstrate the racialisation of drug use at bebop clubs. First, when delivering his statement about the raid at Club Eleven, Lyle specifically informs the Society for the Study of Addiction that ten people were arrested for possession of Indian Hemp, two were arrested for cocaine and one was arrested for morphine. Nowhere in the statement does he make any allusion to their race, and similarly he omits any reference to the female servicewoman who was arrested. When speaking about the raid at the Paramount Dance Hall, on the other hand, he explicitly states that the eight men arrested for drugs were 'coloured'. Secondly, the fact that Lyle highlights the biting incident is indicative of the way in which the establishment and the media historically represented black people as savages, animalising them, thereby stripping them of their humanity. And third, Lyle's presentation of the information about contraceptives being found in the ladies' toilets affirms that not only were miscegenation fears still being disseminated into the public consciousness by the imperial power structure in the post-war period, but in tying the notions of race, sex and drugs together, he also highlights the historical fears that drugs relax boundaries and

¹³³ Ibid.

lead to sexual contact across colour lines. Finally, Lyle presents the black males as ‘men’ while portraying the white females as ‘girls’. This evokes a sense that older alien forces are corrupting naïve English teenagers and getting them hooked on drugs.

This perception is elaborated on further when Lyle goes on to assert, some time after his comments on the police raid at the Paramount club, that

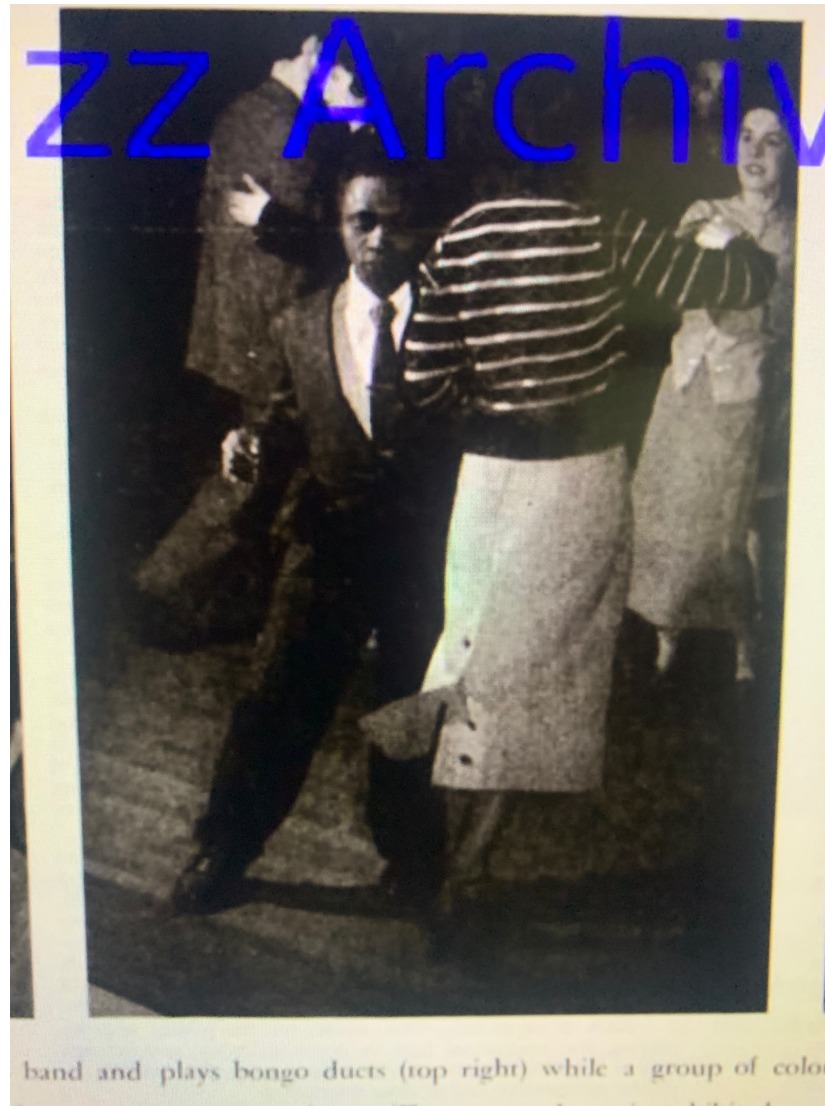
two 17-year-old... girls made several visits to Bebop [clubs] in London, where they made the acquaintance of several negroes. When the girls returned home they wrote to these negroes asking for “doped cigarettes, reefers, marihuana, or whatever you call these things.” One of these negroes replied enclosing a quantity of hemp... When arrested the negro became very violent and threw chairs and a table about his room, breaking up his furniture.¹³⁴

Again, the recurring motif in Lyle’s statement, which also appeared in certain national newspapers at the time, is the image of uncivilised black people preying on innocent white girls. In this case, the two girls were represented by the *Northampton Mercury* as coming from ‘very respectable parents’, and were said to be ‘very respectable girls’.¹³⁵

Lyle’s testimonial and the tabloids’ representations of bebop, black men and white women reveal the underlying fears with regard to the police raids: drug use and transracial fraternisation across gender were perceived as threats to the dominant ideologies of what constitutes Englishness, not only in regard to whiteness and the bloodline, but also to what the imperial power structure perceived to be the moral image of the collective national identity. Bebop clubs were themselves constructed and presented as places that embodied these unconventional activities, symbolising transgression, corruption, immorality and alienism.

¹³⁴ Lyle, p. 54.

¹³⁵ ‘Teenagers’ Evidence In Drug Case’, *Northampton Mercury*, 23 November 1951, p. 10.



Beboppers dancing at the Paramount Club. Source: Jazz Illustrated, 1950

Eyewitness accounts of the social and political conditions at the Paramount Dance Hall by audience members imply that police racism and media panic were incessant even before the raid. Enrico A Stennett, a ‘young Jamaican political activist who had moved to Britain during 1947’ and ‘achieved... notoriety for his prowess in the dance-halls of London’,¹³⁶ giving ‘exhibitions in be-bop [*sic*] jiving’ at the Paramount, spoke of incidents in which black men and white women were represented in the print media

¹³⁶ Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (London: Routledge, 1987), p. 212.

as a degenerate threat to society.¹³⁷ In an article for the *Caribbean Times*, Stennett recalled that ‘it was said by newspapers at the time that the Paramount Dance Hall should be closed because many white girls from the suburbs flocked there to mix with black people and that was degrading to white Britain’.¹³⁸ He added, at ‘the Paramount Dancehall in Tottenham Court Road... the racism was operated by the police. Every weekend they would gather in front of The Paramount Dancehall, and outside the Robuck Public House opposite with their cars and black marias [the term used to describe police wagons] waiting for the dance to finish and looking for trouble.’¹³⁹ He continued:

Some policemen would be standing outside the entrance, their fun was to wait until a black man came out arm in arm with a beautiful girl, and then they would deliberately stick their foot out tripping up either the woman or the man that was the nearest. This would cause trouble involving a lot of black teenagers with the police and before long many would be arrested on trumped up charges such as breach of the peace, obstruction and assault on police officers.¹⁴⁰

Stennett demonstrates that police racism and fierce opposition to cross-racial and cross-gender fraternisation at the Paramount were both deeply embedded within the police unit that patrolled the Tottenham Court Road area. He claims to have witnessed a violent episode in which black men were attacked by white men and the police turned a blind eye:

On one occasion I had left “The Paramount Dance Hall” alone and walked to the No.1. Bus Stop in Warren Street. As I stood in a long queue of mostly women I saw three African men with five English women enter a small café next to the Bus Stop. They were not in the café for more than five minutes when a gang of white men entered the café, pulled them outside and set about attacking them, one of the Africans was badly beaten so I rushed to the telephone to call the Police. It was not long before they arrived in their cars and Meat Wagons. The arrival of the Police did not help the Africans; the leading police car saw what

¹³⁷ Enrico A Stennett, ‘Racism in Britain and The Paramount Dancehall’, *The Caribbean Times*, 241, 25 October 1985, p. 1.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

was happening so he blew his horn repeatedly giving the white men the chance to escape, they then arrested the three Africans.¹⁴¹

Stennett continues to explain that

this did not go down well with the women in the queue, as they started attacking the police using their stiletto heels as weapons. This resulted in many women being arrested along with the three Africans and taken to the police station off Marylebone Road. I went to the police station and tried to explain to the sergeant that I saw everything that had happened and I was the one who called the police. I was abused by the sergeant and other Policemen swore at me and told me where to go. I protested but was told if I did not leave immediately I would be arrested, so I left.¹⁴²

There are two significant points to be derived from Stennett's claims. First, contrary to the information disseminated by the media, women were not passive subjects preyed upon by alien races. In this instance, when they realised their partners and friends had not been represented by the law they collectively organised and intervened. And second, the statement demonstrates that during this historical period, racism and opposition to black and white people mixing was systemic and rooted in contemporary power structures.

Although concerned with the moral panic regarding the alleged mugging epidemic that swept through Britain in the 1970s, Stuart Hall and the CCCS's classic study *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order* (1978) can be useful in understanding the ways in which the police groups operated at the Paramount in 1950. In their analysis, the CCCS examine how the Special Patrol Group (SPG) were set up in order to target social groups suspected of street robbery in predominantly black and ethnic areas of Britain. One aspect of the SPG's method of policing was to

expect trouble, to anticipate trouble and to take the offensive. Given this style... some degree of harassment and intimidation was almost inevitable. If the policeman is constrained by his organisation, he is also constrained by the society of which he is a part. Formally, the police enforce and apply the law and uphold public order; in this they see themselves and are seen as acting on

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

society's behalf. But in a more informal sense, they must also be sensitive to shifts in public feeling, in society's anxieties and concerns.¹⁴³

Again, while this study is concerned with the perceived mugging epidemic in British inner cities during the 1970s, it reflects the way in which policing at the Paramount Club was a reaction to the shift in public concern and society's anxieties. These fears were intensified by sensationalist newspaper reporting about the mixing between black men and white women in bebop clubs in Soho during the late 1940s and early 1950s. As demonstrated in the eyewitness account by Enrico Stennett, the sensationalist story in the *Daily Mirror* regarding the 'black and tan club' (which was presumably the Fullado) and the police reports by George Lyle, the police raids were not only concerned with drug use in the clubs, but were also an expression of wider underlying fears concerning miscegenation and the transgressing of racial boundaries. Thus, although the SPG signified a more modern way of policing and were an entirely different force, it would appear that this type of policing was historically rooted in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

The racialisation and sexualisation of drug misuse and its association with bebop clubs is again epitomised by another former high-profile policeman, Robert Fabian. Fabian was a Detective Superintendent in the Metropolitan Police during the 1950s who afterwards turned to writing crime fiction. In contrast to Stennett's eyewitness account of white women siding with their friends and lovers, Fabian pushes the classic imperial narrative that white women are the victims of the nefarious behaviours of black men. Although a fictional work, he appears to be alluding to the Flamingo Club, a bebop club that was located at Coventry Street during the early 1950s (before moving to Wardour Street), not far from Gerrard Street. Fabian describes the 'Twilight Club, behind Gerrard

¹⁴³ Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke and Brian Roberts, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1978), p. 50.

Street' where marijuana 'hangs in the air like the taste of sin' and the band plays

'bewitching rhythms'. He adds that:

It is not the fault of the coloured boys that this is one of the most dangerous clubs in London... They have the brains of children, can only dimly know the cruel harm they do the "teen-age girls who dance with them and try thrilled puffs at those harmless-looking, crude pungent marijuana cigarettes."¹⁴⁴

Not only does Fabian suggest that drugs act as the agent that enables contact across racial and gender lines, but his allusions to jazz music as bewitching also suggest that jazz and drugs are magical, hypnotic forces that seduce and corrupt white women.

Fabian's depiction of white women socialising with black men and consuming drugs in jazz clubs also seems to suggest that transracial fraternisation, alien jazz music and drugs represent a threat to sacred culture. For example, his portrayal of cannabis smoke hanging in the air like the taste of sin evokes the transgression of Christian values. This subtle use of powerful language conjures up the idea that bebop clubs are precarious social spaces where evil and immoral behaviour takes place. In this way, the passage casts aspersions that the audiences within these spaces are a threat to the fabric of society: they defy Western Christian values and the image of Englishness. This imagery and typecasting of black men as folk devils, in the sense that they seduce and corrupt 'pure' white girls, reflects the ways in which, as McRobbie and Thornton have argued, 'moral panics are... often characterised by a certain religious fervour, and historically most effectively used by the right'.¹⁴⁵

The notion that adult black people have the brains of children echoes the historical pseudo-scientific racism manufactured by scientists and elitist academics in the nineteenth century, and the repetition of the trend in the 1920s [as discussed earlier in

¹⁴⁴ Robert Fabian, *London After Dark* (Kingswood: The Naldrett Press, 1955), p. 26.

¹⁴⁵ Angela McRobbie and Sarah L. Thornton, 'Rethinking "Moral Panic" for Multi Mediated Social Worlds', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 46:4, 1995, pp. 559–574 (p. 567).

this chapter]. Fabian's commentary affirms that a continuous racist thread permeated the early 1950s – arguably intensified and amplified due to the beginning of mass migration from the colonies – which infantilised black people and which was disseminated in fiction by voices from within the establishment. In this case, and as demonstrated in the Stennett anecdotes above, one of the forces using racist imagery to incite panic about transracial relationships and bebop clubs was the police. Again, Fabian, although at this point a novelist, was a former high-ranking officer in the Metropolitan Police. Chaz Critcher, citing Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda's book *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance* (1994), has noted that 'interests play a vital role [in moral panics]: religious groups, professional associations and the police', in so far as they 'exaggerate the threat, polarize opinion and vilify opponents'.¹⁴⁶

This idea reflects the way in which the accounts of George Lyle, Robert Fabian and the police at the Paramount Dance Hall acted as agents of social control during the lead-up to the clampdown on Soho's bebop clubs. As demonstrated throughout this chapter, media in the form of certain newspapers, images of colonial exploits transmitted back to Britain during the nineteenth century, novels written by people in positions of power, pseudo-scientific racism manufactured by elitist academics, colonial governors in the Caribbean, as well as certain police officers, all arguably promoted the interests of the establishment during that period.

However, McRobbie and Thornton's notion that media is also a space in which counter-voices can be heard is significant. By no means as sophisticated and widespread as the numerous media outlets such as the style press, fanzines and other youth media

¹⁴⁶ Chaz Critcher, 'Moral Panic Analysis: Past, Present and Future', *Sociology Compass*, 2008, pp. 1127–1144, (p. 1132).

available during the 1990s, *Melody Maker* was nevertheless able to present an alternative voice during the bebop era. Although peripheral during the 1950s, the music press was able to oppose the reporting by the mainstream media that whipped up panic about transracial mixing at the clubs. An example of this can be found in Ernest Borneman's response to the tabloids' depiction of the raid on the Paramount Dance Hall. Borneman asserted that 'there is nothing wrong in a coloured boy dancing with a white girl. In fact, there's nothing worth taking notice of.'¹⁴⁷ Again, although marginal, *Melody Maker* attempted to 'counter what they perceive[d] to be the biased media of mainstream'.¹⁴⁸ Borneman's article also perhaps demonstrates that *Melody Maker*, or at least certain writers situated at the newspaper, were welcoming of the modern England that was beginning to emerge in the post-war years and were in a sense a beacon of liberal hope.

Summing up

The police raids on the Fullado Club, Club Eleven, and the Paramount Dance Hall which took place between 1947 and 1950 were on the surface drugs raids. However, newspaper reports of the social make-up of the clubs suggests that they were under the surface the result of historical fears concerning transracial fraternisation, the perceived threat of Americanisation, and the notion that drug use collapses racial and gender boundaries and leads to sexual contact across the 'colour lines'.

This chapter has shown how these fears were deeply ingrained in the popular imagination and stretch back to the aftermath of the Great War, and how during that period race and miscegenation fears stemmed from the contemporary power structure –

¹⁴⁷ Ernest Borneman, 'One Night Stand', *Melody Maker*, July 8, 1950, p. 2.

¹⁴⁸ McRobbie and Thornton, p. 566.

the political class, elitist academics, colonial teachers, novelists and the print media – and how these fears then flowed downwards and were projected into wider society.

The chapter has demonstrated how these fears then lay dormant until the arrival of African American troops during the Second World War, when they were whipped up again by the establishment. To add to this, with the arrival of the SS *Windrush* from Jamaica in 1948, by the time that Club Eleven and the Paramount Club were raided (both in 1950), the fears of ‘alien’ forces – this time reflected through people from the Caribbean as well as America – added to the anxieties already present: the transracial bands and audiences, subversive sartorial styles, drugs, and bebop music. All of these strands together symbolised a threat to the conservative image of the national identity and led to the media panic and police clampdown on the clubs.

Chapter Five

Soho After the Raids



'The corner of Dean Street and Old Compton Street', Soho, 1950s. Source: Nika Garrett

Introduction

Following the police raids on Soho's bebop clubs, a number of new clubs sprang up in the area. Although the establishment attempted to clamp down on the scene due to the perceived threat to English conservative values posed by the transracial, cross-gender, flamboyantly dressed audiences and musicians that constituted the scene, the music and culture flourished throughout the next decade. However, jazz music in general, whether bebop, the traditional New Orleans style, or other genres such as cool jazz and fusion, never reached the same mainstream appeal as other popular musics which became synonymous with the 1950s and then the 1960s.

With this in mind, then, and through a synthesis of historical and archival primary sources mined from the music press [some of which are previously unexplored], oral histories of jazz in Britain, social and cultural histories of Britain in the 1950s, and literary and cultural criticism, this chapter maps the social, aesthetic and cultural landscape of Soho in the 1950s and early 1960s. Due to the extensive nature of the social, political and economic changes within this period, and the fact that this time frame is mainly outside the scope of this research, this will not be a comprehensive account. The chapter does, however, answer a number of questions.

What, for example, happened to bebop clubs in Soho in the 1950s – a brand-new decade which had begun with the establishment's clampdown on the subversive culture that came to epitomise these clubs? What happened to the musicians, and how did bebop evolve? Did drug use continue, and were there more police raids? Were there any technical advances made in bebop in the 1950s? What was the nature of the audience in terms of race, gender and social class? What happened to the beboppers – the fans that constituted the scene – with the arrival of other youth cultures in Britain? What

happened to the record labels that produced bebop music, and what direction did popular culture take more generally in Soho throughout the 1950s and early 1960s?

It is widely understood that the 1950s were a period of immense social and cultural transformation. By the middle of the decade, due to an economic upsurge, the working classes were in a position to participate in economic and social life more than ever before.¹ Increased earnings, changing configurations of work and leisure, and the regeneration of ‘traditional neighbourhoods’ all served to ‘reshape and recast the forms and practices of working-class culture’.² Bill Osgerby has argued that although the ‘British working class did not, in any case, decompose or disappear, the dominant imagery of the period was one of a dawning classlessness, the pace of economic growth perceived as steadily ameliorating social divisions, neutralising traditional class conflicts and ushering in a new epoch of post-capitalism’.³ Osgerby goes on to note that the renowned social scientist Mark Abrams exemplified these views in arguing that ‘since the war class barriers had tended to lose their clarity, with some working-class families having incomes as high as some white-collar families and there being little to choose between their styles of living’.⁴ Accompanying this ‘mythology of affluence there emerged a trinity of constructed social types that seemed to embody the new cultural order – the “bourgeois worker”, “the housewife” and, above all, “the teenager.”’⁵ The teenager is acknowledged as ultimately epitomising these social and cultural transformations due to becoming ‘newly enfranchised, in an economic sense.’⁶

¹ Christine Jacqueline Feldman, *“We are the Mods”: A Transnational History of a Youth Subculture* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2009), p. 18

² Bill Osgerby, *Youth in Britain Since 1945* (New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 1997), p. 31.

³ Osgerby, *Youth in Britain*, p. 31.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Stuart Hall, *Absolute Beginnings: Reflections on the Secondary Modern*, *Universities and Left Review* 7 *Autumn*, Springer, 1959, pp. 16–25. (p. 22).

This was due to their recently acquired ‘unprecedented levels of disposable income.’⁷

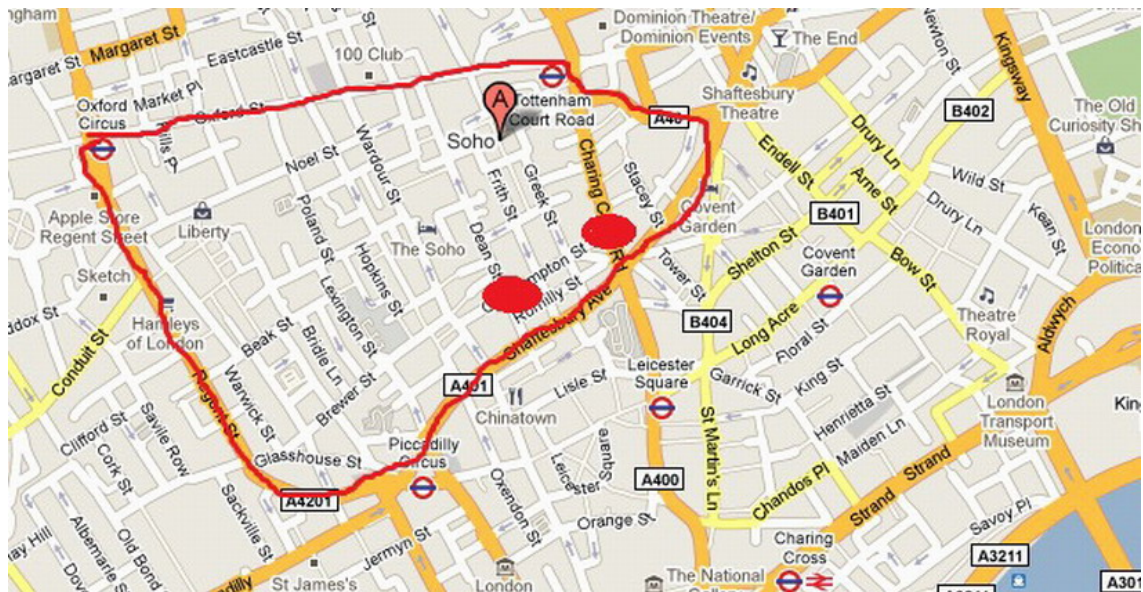
The notion of the teenager as a cultural category and their leisure spaces in Soho are explored further on.

In addition, I will demonstrate how the music press and the dominant press, though sympathetic to youth in certain publications (the *Daily Mirror*, for example), constructed Teddy Boys and Teddy Girls as the new folk devils. This, I argue, was not simply a new discourse about problematic youth in post-war England, but a complex issue that echoed the bebop panic in Soho during the late 1940s, which culminated in bebop clubs, as seen in the previous chapter, being raided by police.

Before looking at that, though, it is important to map the bebop landscape in Soho in the 1950s and ask specific questions relating to the scene. For example, and to reiterate, what happened to bebop clubs, audiences and musicians in the aftermath of the police raids? Did drug use continue to rise, or did it descend underground? What was the nature of social class amongst the audiences in the clubs during this period?

⁷ David Fowler, ‘From Jukebox Boys to Revolting Students: Richard Hoggart and the Study of British Youth Culture’, in S. Owens (ed.), *Richard Hoggart and Cultural Studies* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 105–122 (p. 106).

A short history of Soho's bebop clubs after the police raids



Map of Soho. Source: mosoho.org.uk

In her research article 'Post-World War II Jazz in Britain: Venues and Values, 1945–1950', jazz scholar Katherine Williams claims that

At the beginning of the 1950s two jazz venues with a focus on bebop existed in London: Studio 51 and the Feldman Club at 100 Oxford Street... As bebop grew in popularity through the decade, several modern jazz clubs were founded in Soho. Prominent amongst these clubs were the Flamingo Club on Wardour Street (opened 1952), the Marquee Club on Oxford Street (opened 1958) and Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club on Gerrard Street (opened 1959).⁸

We can add another significant club to Williams' inventory. Oral history accounts reveal that in the aftermath of the Club Eleven raid, the musicians furtively continued to play bebop in Soho under a different guise. Tony Crombie recalls that following the Club Eleven's ostensible demise, '[We] opened a few nights later under another name – the club Coco-cabana, and it went on like that for a while'.⁹ Crombie does not reveal the venue in which the reinvented club night was held, nor is he asked by Tony Middleton

⁸ Williams, 'Post-World War II Jazz in Britain', p. 124.

⁹ Tony Crombie, *Oral History of Jazz in Britain*, The National Sound Archive, British Library, interviewed by Tony Middleton, 1995.

[the interviewer], but this is undoubtedly an important, hidden part of the history of Eleven.

Musician David Lund also adds to Williams' list, revealing that 'back in those days there was [*sic*] about half a dozen clubs next to each other where you could take in a lot of jazz. I'm talking about the mid-50s, early 60s... Places like the Flamingo, the Mapleton, Studio 51. Ronnie [Scott's] old place in Gerrard Street. They were all mainly in the Soho area.'¹⁰ Lund remembers that they 'were often quite small... unpretentious... and inexpensive. You could go from one place to another and not spend a great deal of money.'¹¹ The musician's account sheds light on the aesthetics, economics and audience aspects of the early 1950s Soho clubs.

Studio '51

First, Studio '51, active in mid- to late 1951; there is debate in terms of the club's economic ownership and precise location. Musicians Tony Kinsey and Tommy Whittle offer opposing perspectives on where the club was situated. Kinsey recalls that Studio '51 'was at Edmundo Ros's club'.¹² Ros, a Trinidadian born in Port of Spain on 7 December 1910, moved to London in 1937 to study harmony, composition and orchestration at the Royal Academy of Music. In 1951, Ros bought the Coconut Grove club on Regent Street. Tommy Whittle, on the other hand, recalls that Studio '51 was [situated] at 'Little Great Newport Street' and was 'ran [*sic*] and owned by a lady called Vi Highland'.¹³ It is unclear which version is the correct one.

¹⁰ David Lund, *Oral History of Jazz in Britain*, The National Sound Archive, British Library, interviewed by Andy Simons, 1995.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Tony Kinsey, *Oral History of Jazz in Britain*, The National Sound Archive, British Library, interviewed by Tony Middleton, 1998.

¹³ Tommy Whittle, *Oral History of Jazz in Britain*, The National Sound Archive, British Library, interviewed by Pete Vaccher, 1992.

The club's opening hours, interior, audience and atmosphere are also recalled by Whittle, who paints a vibrant picture of the transformation from the bleak, austerity-driven late 1940s to the flourishing prosperity of the early 1950s. Whittle recalls that

there were [mainly] young people in there who came in to dance. They didn't sit about. Well, a few did, but a lot of them danced. [They were] jiving, smooching, whatever you like. It wasn't like in a concert where you would have chairs. There was a couple of chairs and stools on the sides, but straight [in front of] the stage there was a dancefloor. There was a little alcove you had to go through to get out, with coffees and soft drinks, but no alcohol. This was an early evening club, [open] from around eight pm until eleven pm... I became a band leader and played in the Flamingo Club, but I went back to the '51 as well with Harry Klein as my side man... it was my quintet.¹⁴

While Whittle's lively account of Studio '51 conjures up a bubbly, youthful atmosphere, it also reveals the club to embody a much soberer feel than the darker, druggy, hedonistic days of the late 1940s at the Fullado Club, the Paramount and Club Eleven. In contrast to those clubs, where the British bebop scene was born, developed and reached its pinnacle, Whittle portrays a much brighter picture of bebop at the Studio '51 in the early 1950s. A sign of the times, this description reflects the dawn of a new decade, in which the political and economic conditions of rationing and austerity had drawn to a close, and young people were on the verge of becoming a consumer force in society.

Whittle's description of Studio '51 is important as it challenges received narratives about the aesthetic conditions of bebop clubs in 1950s Soho. Katherine Williams, for example, has noted that 'the London bebop clubs, and their American counterparts, were built for neither dancing nor a concert audience. They still share a similar aesthetic... Audiences are seated at tables, on benches, or at the bar. Attention is focused on the stage, and near-silence is demanded.'¹⁵ While Williams' description of

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Williams, 'Post-World War II Jazz in Britain', p. 12.

bebop clubs in the 1950s, particularly Ronnie Scott's club in Soho, is mostly accurate, Whittle's oral history account expands the limitations of jazz histories in Britain which suggest that bebop audiences never danced.

The Flamingo Club



Cleo Laine performing at the Flamingo Club 'Jazz Nursery', Soho, 1960. Source: Getty

The Flamingo Club, again a reflection of the prosperous economic conditions of the 1950s, was opened in August 1952 by 21-year-old Jeff Kruger, who came from the East End of London. At first, the club was located 'in the basement of the Mapleton Hotel by the Prince of Wales Theatre in Leicester Square'.¹⁶ The Flamingo is noted to have 'generated such a buzz about the opening night that it required forty policemen to control the crowds'.¹⁷ The club became a huge success and is reported to have 'built up

¹⁶ 'Jeff Kruger: Businessman who Opened the Flamingo Club, which was at the Epicentre of the British Jazz and R'n'b Scene', *Independent*, independent.co.uk, 23 May 2014 [last accessed on the 31/08/ 2020].

¹⁷ Haslam, p. 46.

an enviable reputation for good jazz in the most comfortable deluxe surroundings the average jazz fan has ever experienced'.¹⁸ Initially the club functioned on Sunday evenings, but due to its success 'they added Saturdays and then Thursdays to the schedule [and] the crowd they began attracting – including the young Kray twins – grew larger by the week,' exemplifying the historically socially diverse make up of bebop fans.¹⁹

In 1957, the Flamingo Club moved to new premises at 33 Wardour Street, Soho. Located in the same building that hosted the iconic Wag Club during the 1980s, the venue opened with the Jazz Couriers, a band consisting of one of the English bebop pioneers, Ronnie Scott, and the players establishing themselves in the 1950s (these players and the bands are discussed further on).

The Flamingo Club became one of the most significant clubs in the development of the mod subculture at the dawning of the 1960s. Bill Osgerby has noted that the Flamingo was one of the first clubs where 'young, white mods came into contact with black American soul music (on the Motown, Stax and Volt labels)'.²⁰ He adds that the mods 'embraced black American rhythm and blues (emulated by "mod" groups such as the Who and the Small Faces), together with Afro Caribbean ska and bluebeat which was brought into the country by West Indians, settling in Britain in greater numbers from the late 1940s'.²¹ The cultural exchange 'between mod and Afro-Caribbean styles' is said to have 'marked a crucial stage in the developing intersection between black and

¹⁸ This quotation is taken from the henrybebop.com website [last accessed 21 January 2019] and is from the February 1953 issue of *Jazz Journal*. *Jazz Journal* is a periodical now stored at the National Jazz Archive in Loughton.

¹⁹ Eddie Harvey, quoted in Hewitt, p. 34.

²⁰ Osgerby, *Youth in Britain since 1945*, p. 42.

²¹ Ibid.

white popular culture which became a central feature of British youth subcultures in the decades after 1945'.²²

Although these Black Atlantic sounds and textures were reflected in the musical styles of the mods, we have seen how bebop – originally a black music originating in Harlem – was pioneered and played by transracial and transcultural bands in Soho clubs consisting of African Americans, black musicians from West Africa and the Caribbean, black British musicians and white musicians from the East End of London from as far back as 1946. This demonstrates that black and white people were together presenting a musical and visual style influenced by various cultural backgrounds to a sizable audience in Soho which spread to the London suburbs and went nationwide thereafter, at least a decade before the mod subculture was born in Britain. As Christine Feldman has noted, 'Modern jazz provided a guiding light for and is the most direct ancestor of Mod culture'.²³ The shared connection of these two styles taking place at the Flamingo reinforces this.

Although the fashion had become more streamlined by the time the mods arrived, evolving from the wide-shouldered, drape-style, American-influenced tailoring to the sharp clean lines that delineated the Italian suit, the bebop scene in Soho in the late 1940s, as analysed in chapter three, was also characterised by black and white youths that collectively identified themselves through a hybrid visual style. This, as we have seen, drew from black American zoot suits, gangster films and spiv culture. There is historical continuity between bebop and mod fashions. Cecil Gee, one of the English tailors who was ahead of the curve in this respect and who supplied much of the 1940s bebop fashion, also moved 'towards Italian- inspired clothing... during the 1950s'.²⁴ As

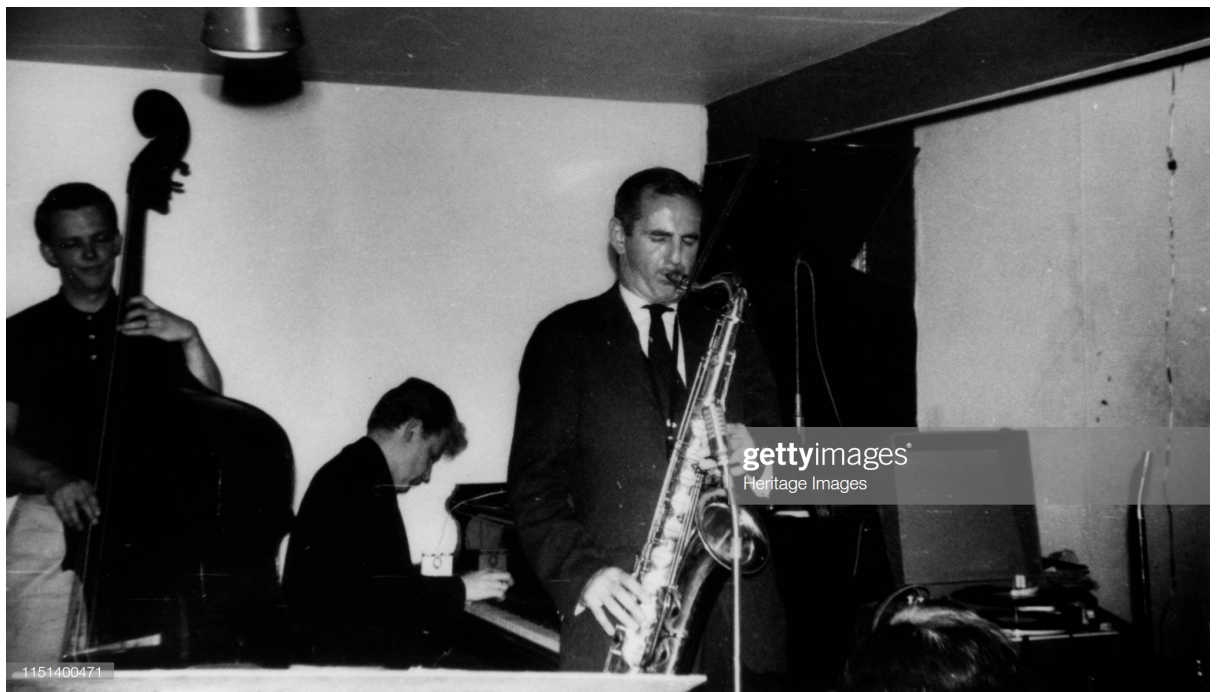
²² Ibid.

²³ Feldman, p. 19.

²⁴ Chibnall, p. 73.

this is during the same era that the Flamingo Club was operating, it is likely that a proportion of the early mods that frequented the Flamingo would have been shopping at Cecil Gee's in Charing Cross Road, which was located a few hundred yards from the Flamingo Club.

Ronnie Scott's: 'First Place' and Frith Street



*Ronnie Scott, 'The Old Place', Gerrard Street, Soho, 1959, artist Brian Foskett, National Jazz Archive.
Source: Getty*

As described by Ronnie Scott's biographer John Fordham, 'In Gerrard Street, in the heart of London's Chinatown, there was a shabby and dimly lit basement owned by a small-time businessman by the name of Jack Fordham [not to be confused with Scott's biographer John Fordham]'.²⁵ This venue was to become Ronnie Scott and co-founder

²⁵ Fordham, p. 64.

Pete King's first club. According to renowned jazz historian and photographer Val Wilmer, 'Ronnie's opened up in 1959. At first it was only a coffee bar with sandwiches. Then they got a license for the bar. That was only open for a short time. Later-on they had all-nighters there on a Saturday.'²⁶

Melody Maker depicted how Scott and Flamingo Club owner Jeff Kruger had pioneered a cultural and aesthetic shift in Soho's bebop venues. During the late 1940s, jiving and other dance styles had been the norm, but with the opening of the Flamingo and Ronnie Scott's the clubs were reshaped into sophisticated places where audiences had space to dance, but were also reimagined with a focus on relaxing, observing and listening. A *Melody Maker* article stated that 'Ronnie Scott, co-leader of the recently disbanded Jazz Couriers, is to open his own jazz club. The premises – at 39, Gerrard Street... are currently being redesigned so that members may listen in comfort, unaffected by those who wish to dance.'²⁷ Scott told the music paper that he thought 'Too many clubs seem to degenerate into jiving palaces, where it is difficult to appreciate what is happening on the stand. Here, there will be plenty of room to dance, but also plenty of room to sit and listen – and see the musicians.'²⁸

During 1965, Ronnie Scott's club moved to premises at 47 Frith Street, Soho, where in 2020 the club remains today. Ronnie Scott's is the only club from 1950s Soho to still exist in the twenty first century. Black Atlantic music, from legendary American artist Roy Ayers to London based Ghanaian Afro Rock band Osibisa, have played at the club in recent years.

²⁶ Val Wilmer, quoted in Hewitt, p. 44.

²⁷ 'Ronnie Scott to Open Jazz Club', *Melody Maker*, September 1959, p. 4.

²⁸ Ibid.

The musicians and bands: Soho pioneers, emergent players and drugs



Tubby Hayes, date unknown, Source: tubbyhayes.jazzgiants.net

In terms of band formations and the musicians that played at these clubs, the 1950s saw new innovations in bebop. These technical advances were made by a mixture of the performers that pioneered the idiom back in the 1940s and up-and-coming new players. In the tradition of the 1940s, the new bebop bands were composed of musicians that cut across racial lines, coming from both London and the Caribbean. Musician David Lund recalls that there was ‘a whole series of musicians emerging, particularly people like Tubby Hayes, a sensational player’.²⁹ Hayes was a renowned white bebop tenor-saxophonist. A Londoner, born in St Pancras on 30 January 1935, Hayes played during the mid-1950s (and beyond).

The iconic Jamaican saxophonist Joe Harriott also added to the transracial fusion of artists that pioneered and came to define British bebop. Born in Kingston on 15 July 1928, Harriott emigrated to Britain from Jamaica in 1951, and ‘worked freelance and in

²⁹ Lund, 1995.

the band of trumpeter Pete Pitterson'.³⁰ Pitterson, as demonstrated in chapter two, was yet another black musician who had made significant contributions to the birth of the bebop scene at the Fullado Club back in 1946.



Joe Harriott, circa 1950s. Source: theperlichpost.blogspot.com

Harriott later went on to work with Ronnie Scott in his big band orchestra. According to musician Tony Kinsey, who played at Studio '51 but moved on to hold a residency at the Flamingo Club in 1952, '[I] heard him play and asked him if he would like to join the group, to which Harriott replied, "yeah, man, great" [*Kinsey attempts a Jamaican accent*]. He did, and it was about that time we got the job at the Flamingo Club... It was a residency, three times a week.'³¹ Harriott is said to have 'played conventional bop in his first years in London, [but] there was something recognisably different in [his] saxophone tone'.³² Jazz historian George McKay has argued that Harriott 'was responsible for a series of brilliant experiments in new music in Britain through the 1960s'.³³

³⁰ Chris Kelsey, www.allmusic.com [last accessed 17 January 2019].

³¹ Kinsey, 1998.

³² McKay, p. 152.

³³ Ibid.

Dizzy Reece, another Jamaican, and Shake Keane, from Saint Vincent, also helped add to the Black Atlantic sounds and textures that shaped the modern jazz scene in Soho and shifted it forward. Reece, who came to Britain in 1948 from Jamaica and who also played at the Club Eleven, is noted to have ‘studied at that fine musical academy in Kingston, the Alpha Boys School’ and ‘spent quite an amount of time playing in Europe, in particular Paris, with various visiting or expatriate Americans like saxophonist Don Byas and drummer Kenny Clarke. He was gifted with a strong, full tone and was capable of dazzling flights of melodic ingenuity.’³⁴ Kenny Clarke was, as seen throughout this thesis, one of the original bebop musicians from Harlem.

In April 1955, *Melody Maker* ran a story claiming that Reece was about to lead a transracial band at Soho’s newest bebop venue. Journalist Steve Race enthusiastically stated that

A quintet formed by trumpeter Dizzy Reece makes its debut at the Flamingo Club tomorrow (Saturday) when the club holds a special New Year session. Dizzy will lead Jack Sharpe (thr.), Ashley Kozak (bass), Flash Winstone (drms.) and a pianist yet to be fixed. Appearing with the Reece band on Saturday are the Jimmy Deuchar, Tony Kinsey, Don Rendell and Tubby Hayes Groups.³⁵

As revealed in chapter two, Rendell and Winstone were amongst the earliest pioneers of British bebop. Both were residents at the Fullado Club back in 1946 and had continued to perform there until it was raided and closed by police in 1947. Although this new mixture of artists from the African diaspora and London-born musicians developed bebop further in the 1950s, this band is exemplary of the way in which bebop phrasing was inflected by the intercultural bands who played at the Fullado club in the late 1940s. Flash Winstone, as explored in chapter two, was aiding his colleagues, the ‘African drummers’, on a bebop rendition of Woody Herman’s ‘Caldonia’ during one of

³⁴ Heining, p. 66.

³⁵ ‘Dizzy Reece Forms 5 for Club Work’, *Melody Maker*, 26 April 1955, p. 3.

the first ever modern jazz sessions at the Fullado. Therefore, although there were more technical innovations in bebop in Britain during the 1950s, the very nature of the transracial, transcultural bands jamming in the 1940s, Johnny Dankworth incorporating his formal Western musical training, and Jamaican Pete Pitterson writing his own songs at the Club Eleven in 1950, means that a local expression of a transatlantic music was already being created.

In terms of the various other bands and musicians, the ensembles were fluid, with players leaping from one group to another with impunity. Tony Kinsey remembered that

In those days a lot of people were jumping around from band to band. If you took someone into your band, you didn't expect to get married to them. We did change around a lot. Joe went with Ronnie Scott's big band. It was going on all the time, [people] being swapped around. But because I became known as a jazz band leader, I could only work with my own band, except for sessions.³⁶

With regard to drug use during this period, it was present, but unlike during the moral panic which led to the police swoops on the Fullado (1947), Club Eleven (1950) and the Paramount Dance Hall (1950), none of the 1950s bebop clubs discussed here were raided and closed down. Drug use, however, continued to permeate the modern jazz scene and was problematic for some of the emergent musicians. In his book *Trad Dads, Dirty Boppers and Free Fusioneers: British Jazz, 1960–1975*, Duncan Heining writes about drug use amongst British jazz musicians. Although he does not make any of the arguments made in this thesis, nor does he analyse drug consumption in the 1940s bebop scene in Soho, he does offer some illuminating insights, derived from autobiographies and interviews, into drug use amongst jazz musicians in the 1950s and 1960s. Eminent new player Tubby Hayes, for example, was a heroin addict and was 'fitfully a cause for worry because he could not control his drinking or his habits with

³⁶ Kinsey, 1998.

narcotics'.³⁷ By way of example, Heining distinguishes between Hayes and drummer Phil Seaman. He notes that Seaman 'was sometimes incapable of performance', but 'Hayes was rarely inhibited from playing at least acceptably, and often brilliantly, certainly in his early twenties. The effect of heroin use [however], when it finally took its toll of him... was first crippling then fatal.'³⁸

Anxieties around drug use in Soho more widely are said to have become more pronounced towards the end of the 1950s, when 'reports of a new drug epidemic began to circulate'.³⁹ It has been noted that these 'concerns centred on the use of drugs by ethnic minorities, notably black West Indians and Africans in "blues clubs" and visiting black American musicians in jazz clubs'.⁴⁰ However, the development of the national market for illegal drugs was not reported to have started 'until the beginning of the 1960s [when] the Metropolitan Police Office created specialist intelligent units to combat the "drug menace" from Soho to Southwark'.⁴¹ These insights into the links between drug consumption, music and policing during the 1960s echo the post-war bebop scene in 1940s Soho which became the focus of a moral panic in which, drugs, music, race and nation were used to express fears around miscegenation.

Women, class and students at bebop clubs in 1950s Soho

In terms of social class, women and students in the bebop audiences in 1950s Soho, it is not easy to make an assessment. The traditional New Orleans-style jazz revival that began in the early 1940s and peaked in the 1950s encompassed a mixture of musicians

³⁷ Heining, p. 187.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Rowdy Yates, 'A Brief History of British Drugs Policy, 1950–2001', *Drugs: Education, Prevention and Policy*, 9:2, 2002, pp. 113–124 (p. 113).

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ William M. Meier, *Property Crime in London, 1850–Present* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 137.

and audience members whose class boundaries were fluid, with George Webb (working class), Chris Barber (middle class) and Humphrey Lyttleton (upper class). All of these musicians, however, were white males. According to Duncan Heining, the mid-1950s trad jazz fans are said to have been ‘beatniks’, solemnly dedicated, grimly puritan, with their black jeans, shoulder-length hair and donkey jackets’ and whose ‘hardcore fans’, says Heining, ‘probably did come from the educated upper and middle classes, and included leftist intellectuals and students, and those who were amongst the first in their families to enter higher education.’⁴²

In contrast, Val Wilmer notes that bebop fans in the 1950s ‘were sharp-suited working-class men’.⁴³ However, as shown in chapter three, although Wilmer’s observation that beboppers were sharply dressed echoes primary source evidence from the 1940s, neither social class, across the genders, is easily defined amongst bebop clubbers in post-war Soho. Although the evidence presented in this thesis would suggest that a large number (maybe even a majority) of male bebop clubgoers were working class, epitomised in the music press and the popular press through the descriptions of the wide-shouldered, rainbow tied, loud-talking ‘barrow boy’ youths that identified themselves with bebop, John Fordham suggests that there was a small student contingent present at Club Eleven back in 1950. As Saint Martin’s School of Art was located on the peripheries of Soho, from 1939 when the new school building opened at 109 Charing Cross Road, it is plausible to speculate that some of those students would have frequented both bebop and trad jazz clubs located within the area.

As far as the issue of women and social class is concerned, the previous chapter confirmed that a large number of women were present at bebop clubs and club nights,

⁴² Heining, p. 48.

⁴³ Val Wilmer quoted in *ibid.*, p. 46.

particularly at Club Eleven and the Paramount Dance Hall. Similarly, primary accounts of women revellers arrested during the police raid on Club Eleven reveal that some middle-class woman affiliated themselves with the bebop scene in Soho.

Musicians' Union ban relaxed

The mid-1950s also represented an important political shift which opened up a creative space for musicians on either side of the Atlantic. Both the Musicians' Union (MU) in Britain and the American Federation of Musicians (AFM) reached an agreement whereby some American musicians would be permitted to play in Britain if the same quantity of musicians from Britain were allowed to play in America.⁴⁴ The logic behind this move was that 'local bands could still be hired to accompany visiting artists, and it would be a fruitful exchange of ideas rather than a reduction of opportunities for British musicians'.⁴⁵ This agreement was reached in 1955, and following that Stan Kenton became the first American player to perform in Britain, his shows being 'largely announced by the end of the year and took place in March and April 1956, while [British player Ted] Heath's Carnegie Hall appearance was announced as the start of his US venture'.⁴⁶ Following this, a succession of tours of America over the next year by a series of bebop musicians and bands ensued. *Melody Maker* announced that 'The Tommy Whittle Quartet will leave for America on the "Queen Mary" on April 18th. Tommy, who goes in exchange for the Gerry Mulligan Quartet, will open in Berkley, California, on April 27 for a 14 days' tour. Apart from Tommy (tnr.), the group will

⁴⁴ *The Musicians' Union: A History (1893–2013)*, muhistory.com [last accessed 25 January 2019]; Williams, 'Post-World War 11 Jazz in Britain', pp. 124–125 (p. 124.)

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ John Williamson and Martin Cloonan, *Players' Time: A History of the Musicians' Union, 1893–2013* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), p. 142.

comprise Eddie Thompson (pno.), Brian Brocklehurst (bass) and Jackie Dougan (drs.).⁴⁷

However, as far back as January 1952, Dave Goldberg is reported to have played in America, presumably under the radar of the MU's ban. *Melody Maker* affirmed this by claiming that: 'While American fans rave about the recorded work of Britain's Dave Goldberg, the... guitarist gigs around Hollywood waiting for a break... Dave['s] work on Bob Farnon's 1949 "Don't Blame Me" / "Blue Skies" has received acclaim from U.S. critics.'⁴⁸ Goldberg, as explored in previous chapters, was a pioneer of the British bebop scene in Soho in the late 1940s.

The relaxation of the MU laws was not the only defining cultural and political shift of the 1950s. As touched upon at the beginning of this chapter, this was an era which also saw significant economic developments in Britain that ushered in major social transformations. This, in turn, led to a shift in popular culture and music: the importation from America of rock and roll records, rock and roll media (films), and following those, rock and roll bands. The emergence of British skiffle, which evolved out of the trad jazz scene, and the work of teenage phenomenon Tommy Steele, soon followed.

In terms of the materialisation of rock 'n' roll and its effect on bebop in the mid-1950s, David Lund recalled:

You had groups led by Tony Kinsey, Vic Ash and so on. There was always good choice. [But] it didn't survive the rock revolution. A lot of them went over to rock music. It became more and more difficult to hear live jazz.⁴⁹

The crossover from bebop to rock 'n' roll by certain British bebop pioneers was exemplified through, in particular, Tony Crombie. Crombie, as seen throughout this

⁴⁷ 'Tommy Whittle All Ready for States', *Melody Maker*, 13 April 1957, p. 2.

⁴⁸ 'Goldberg Waits and Gigs while U.S Critics Rave', *Melody Maker*, 12 January 1952, p. 7.

⁴⁹ Lund, 1995.

thesis, was one of the early beboppers making transatlantic voyages to New York in the late 1940s. He was amongst the first cohort of artists to bring records and items of clothing back to Britain. However, in terms of rock 'n' roll, it is necessary to briefly sketch the social, political and economic conditions in which this cultural shift occurred.

The birth of the teenager and the rise of rock 'n' roll



*Dancing to Rock 'n' Roll, London, 18 September 1956
Credit, Daily Herald Archive, Getty*

Bill Osgerby has argued that it is 'impossible to understand the post-war saliency of youth as a cultural category without placing it in the context of the wider social, economic and political changes that took place in Britain during the period'.⁵⁰ While he recognises that Britain's main political parties have always held different ideological

⁵⁰ Osgerby, *Youth in Britain Since 1945*, p. 30

views, he notes that Labour and Conservative governments of the 1950s and early 1960s both functioned ‘within a framework of shared assumptions’, which included ‘the provision of the welfare state, the maintenance of high levels of employment and an acknowledgement of the state’s general responsibility for the management of a mixed economy’.⁵¹ Osgerby notes that there were a succession of Conservative victories during the 1950s, which ‘seemed to be part of a more wholesale social transformation wrought by economic prosperity and a marked growth in living standards. Full employment and demand for labour sustained rises in real earnings throughout the fifties and early sixties and laid bare the basis for a steady growth in consumer spending.’⁵²

Similarly, in his classic collection of essays and literary criticism *England, Half English*, Colin MacInnes, a writer who is often credited with having his finger pressed firmly on the pulse of a changing nation during the 1950s, noted that ‘we are in the presence here, of an entirely, new phenomenon in human history: that youth is rich... earning good wages, and living for little, or even for free, like billeted troops on poor harassed Dad and Mum, the kids have more spending money than any other age group of the population’.⁵³ Although these newly acquired riches may have been, in Osgerby’s view, ephemeral, the reality is that youth was suddenly becoming categorised as a distinct social entity.

The economic, cultural and linguistic frameworks that paved the way for these social transformations permeated the next decade and helped to establish the newly constructed images of youth as a social and cultural type. During the 1950s and early 1960s, advertisers consistently used ‘images of youth to associate their products with

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Colin MacInnes, *England, Half English* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1961), p. 47.

dynamic modernity and “swinging” enjoyment’, and the term teenager became a part of common vocabulary, expressing the connection between youth and consumerism.⁵⁴ The word teenager was first invented in the mid-1940s ‘by American market researchers [and] was formalised in the early fifties through the research organisations such as the Student Marketing Institute, Teenage Survey Incorporated and Eugene Gilbert and Company’.⁵⁵ Together with a combination of magazine articles, books and newspaper reports, they ‘revealed to the US public what appeared to be a new social caste with its own culture and lifestyle’.⁵⁶ The term is noted to have entered Britain in the late 1940s ‘and was rapidly integrated into popular discourse, the press making liberal use of the term by the early fifties’.⁵⁷

New folk devils: The Teddy Boys



Teddy Boys at the Mecca Dance Hall, Tottenham, London, 29 May 1956, Rolling Stone. Source: Alex Dellow, Getty

⁵⁴ Osgerby, *Youth in Britain Since 1945*, pp. 33–35.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

I now want to make an argument based on similarities in reports in the music press about the way in which Teddy Boys who affiliated themselves with rock and roll music were constructed as folk devils in the mid- to late 1950s. The analysis is concerned with their unconventional, spectacular sartorial style rather than the violence associated with that youth subculture. This section argues that the discourse concerning social deviance, youth, style and music was not an entirely new phenomenon that started with the Teds, but a continuation of themes that began with the media construction and demonisation of beboppers in the late 1940s.

In February 1957, American rock and roll band Bill Haley and the Comets made their British debut. The show was received enthusiastically by the music press, who reported that:

It was precisely 7.27 p.m. on Wednesday when the rock set in at the Dominion, Tottenham Court road. If noise is the measure of success, then Bill Haley and his Comets are a sensation. The boom of an electric guitar behind a closed curtain heralded that the Comets were on stage. The fans took it from there. “We want Bill!” they screamed. The cry was taken up, echoed round the packed theatre, almost drowned passing traffic in Oxford Street. The six bobbies stationed at the entrance had an anxious moment[.]⁵⁸

This concert marked a new era in British popular cultural history, not only because of rock ‘n’ roll’s commercial appeal, but also because of the ‘teenage’ audience’s shrieking, star-struck response – a stark contrast to the underground, esoteric bebop youth movement that characterised the gritty basement clubs of Soho during the late 1940s. During the opening night of the British tour, sponsored by *The Daily Mirror*, which ‘increasingly jump[ed] on the youth bandwagon [during] the fifties’, police were ‘stationed at the Dominion in case of trouble’.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Laurie Henshaw, ‘The Comets’ First Concert’, *Melody Maker*, 9 February 1957, pp. 8–9.

⁵⁹ Osgerby, *Youth in Britain Since 1945*, p. 33; Henshaw, *Melody Maker*, pp. 8–9.

The police presence was due to rioting the previous year by Teddy Boys, first at the Odeon in Elephant and Castle, and then in other parts of Britain when Bill Haley's film *Rock Around the Clock* was shown in cinemas nationwide. Haley's opening night at the dominion, however, was said to have been peaceful: when 'the first concert was over, [the audience] quietly dispersed to tube stations and bus stops' without causing any trouble.⁶⁰



Bill Haley and the Comets, date unknown. Source: sknazari1981.wordpress.com

The previous month, on 26 January 1957, *Melody Maker* journalist Steve Race launched a scathing attack on this new youth culture. In a piece that grouped together and broadcast images of Teddy Boys, delinquency and sartorial style, the article stated:

If one of the boys wants to make himself conspicuous by wearing flashy clothes, he mustn't be surprised if he gets most of the publicity... The Teddies of this world have chosen to defy convention, and they can't complain if convention defies them once in a while. It seems to me that the same reasoning applies to Teddy Boys who don't like being called juvenile delinquents. A great many juvenile delinquents are Teddy Boys. Therefore, if the rest don't like the stigma, all they have to do is put on a nice quiet suit.⁶¹

⁶⁰ *Melody Maker*, 9 February 1957, p. 1.

⁶¹ Steve Race, *Melody Maker*, January 26, 1957, p. 6.

Race's tone, language and general perspective echo earlier accounts of beboppers and delinquency published in the music press by both fans and journalists. As analysed in chapter three, the vilification of youth, style and music had been amplified by the press during the 1940s, long before this article. Race attacks Teddy Boys in the same way that the popular press, and fans of Dixieland jazz who wrote letters to *Melody Maker* in the late 1940s, depicted beboppers as social deviants due to their 'dress and behaviour'. The writer's allusions to 'convention' and the unconventional are almost identical to the way in which male bebop youths that frequented the Soho clubs between 1946 and 1950 were, due to their sartorial style, labelled spivs, barrow-boys, flashy, insecure and ostentatious by other jazz fans, music writers and the mainstream press. Similarly, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, young women beboppers were constructed as immoral due to their late-night clubbing, cast as potential drug addicts, and ultimately seen as a threat to whiteness and the English bloodline because they frequented bebop clubs and danced with black males.

The idea that young people should put on a 'nice quiet suit' if they do not wish to be stigmatised further supports the notion that the media construction of Teds was a continuation of the discourse about beboppers in the late 1940s. Again, as demonstrated in chapter three, the bebop look – a hybrid sartorial style which drew from the American zoot suit, gangster chic and the spiv suit as it was referred to by various media sources – was a style that reversed the way in which fashion was historically diffused: the style bubbled up from the ground as opposed to flowing down the social classes from the top of society. And bebop style, customised and worn with brash, colourful, loosely knotted ties, and shirts with spear-pointed collars, was represented as a disruption of the conservative values of unobtrusiveness which the traditional suit and clothing accessories embodied. Therefore, the media narrative that links youth, style

and music with delinquency is a recurring motif that had begun before the arrival of the Teds. As shown in chapter three, the bebop look was being reported by tabloids and the music press nationally by 1951, and young men in the army who were in bebop bands were forbidden from wearing the style even when they were off duty. Not only that, but the term ‘bebop’, a signifier of rebellion by 1947, was by 1950 banned from Wimbledon Palais in the suburbs, and at one time also by the BBC.

By the early 1950s, bebop style had also been mentioned in British cinema. The movie *Cosh Boys* (1953) included characters who were noted to have been ‘delinquents’ and who were depicted in the press as ‘East End youth gangs’,⁶² and who were also said to have mutated into the ‘Teddy’ subculture. One of the film’s protagonists sported a ‘be-bop haircut’ which consisted of a ‘cut and perm’.⁶³ Thus, not only had bebop style become mainstream by the early 1950s, but perhaps a proportion of the 1940s beboppers had transmuted into the Teds subculture. Ultimately, though, the amplification of Teds as unconventionally dressed delinquents, although more pronounced during the 1950s due to the multiple media networks established during that decade, was an extension and morphing of the previous discourse that constructed beboppers as folk devils and thereby a threat to national identity.⁶⁴

In addition to this, the 1950s discourses concerning music, style and youth also encompassed an anti-American narrative. Again, this was not an entirely new media amplification. As explored in previous chapters, fears regarding the Americanisation of culture can be traced back to the Second World War and before. Cultural historians

⁶² Amy Helen Bell, ‘Teddy Boys and Girls as Neo-flaneurs in Postwar London’, *The Literary London Journal*, 11:2, 2014, p. 3.

⁶³ Peter Stansfield, ‘Jiving at the 2i’s with the Cosh Boys’, *peterstansfield.com* [last accessed 29 January 2020].

⁶⁴ It is important to note that the Teds’ subculture was not solely male-oriented. Like the way in which bebop audiences consisted of boys and girls, men and women, there were also Teddy Girls. See photos by Ken Russell for a visual description of Teddy Girls in the 1950s.

have pointed out that from the 1930s onwards a ‘nostalgic defence of high cultural forms and contempt for mass culture and mass consumption becomes a recurring theme in cultural criticism of both left and right; it appears in the work of Adorno and Horkheimer as well as, for example, in that of the conservative critic F. R. Leavis’.⁶⁵ America is noted as the country ‘where these cultural transformations are most clearly taking place, poses the greatest threat in this respect and becomes itself a kind of metaphor for all that is disturbing about modernity and democracy’.⁶⁶

The progression, though, was ‘accelerated in the post-war period’ and Dick Hebdige, ‘in his analysis of its specific British manifestation has called it “the spectre of Americanisation”’. He draws attention to the way in which a number of significant authors of the forties and fifties from quite different political perspectives (he singles out Evelyn Waugh, George Orwell and Richard Hoggart in particular) used similar imagery to express their anxiety about the advent of a vulgar and materialistic American-inspired consumer culture.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, American popular cultural forms, reshaped and reconfigured in a local context, continued to influence Soho’s social and leisure spaces during the 1950s and 1960s. Coffee shops, for example, became a defining feature of teenage life in Soho.

⁶⁵ Mica Nave, ‘Consumerism Reconsidered: Buying and Power’, *Cultural Studies*, 5:2, 1991, pp. 157–173 (p. 159).

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Soho's coffee shops and skiffle



The 2i's Coffee Bar, Old Compton Street, Soho, circa 1956. Source: Getty, 2013

In Soho, coffee shops had become the meeting point for teenagers, and with the advent of American rock 'n' roll, and another American musical style – skiffle – Britain soon produced its own teenage stars.⁶⁸ Colin MacInnes was amongst the earliest cultural critics to analyse skiffle. He argued that:

skiffle (onomatopoeic) music has existed in America certainly since the last century and, in its original form, it was played by groups of amateur musicians who sang traditional (and sometimes newly created) ballads accompanying themselves on home-made instruments – many of these, like the celebrated washboard, domestic utensils. It was thus, at first, a “folk art” of sorts, and the reason why primitive instruments were used was simply that there was no money to buy real ones. A few years ago, for reasons that remain mysterious, and coinciding with the eruption of the coffee bars (and still more, their cellars) all over London, skiffle groups appeared and spread like mushrooms... several of which have won commercial fame.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Colin MacInnes has argued that Skiffle is rooted in American folk music. In his book *Which Side Are You On?: An Inside History of the Folk Music Revival in America* (London: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2005), Dick Weissman says that: ‘Lonnie Donegan recorded Leadbelly’s version of the song “Rock Island Line”, which became a big hit record in both the United States and the United Kingdom. In England, it led to the “skiffle” movement’ (p. 74).

⁶⁹ MacInnes, *England, Half English*, p. 51.

The flourishing coffee bars are noted to have been the nucleus of teenage life in Britain, and they were where ‘youngsters could gather freely and chat amongst themselves or dance to their favourite records on the juke box (itself appearing in much greater numbers from the mid-fifties)’.⁷⁰ The most prominent ones were in London: the Gyre and Gymbble near Charing Cross, the Breadbasket near the Middlesex Hospital and the 2i’s in Old Compton Street (reputedly the site of the discovery of Tommy Steele).⁷¹ All of these coffee bars were located in and around the edges of Soho.



Lonnie Donegan, Rock Island Line (Live), 15 June 1961. Source: Alamy

In terms of the music, the two most distinguished figures in British rock ‘n’ roll and skiffle were, respectively, Tommy Steele and Lonnie Donegan. Steele, from a working-class background in Bermondsey, south-east London, and noted to have been the first teenage star in Britain, wrote an article for *Melody Maker* which was published on 9

⁷⁰ Osgerby, *Youth in Britain Since 1945*, p. 41.

⁷¹ Ibid.

March 1957. In it conveyed the supposed cultural politics that divided the two musical forms:

It's fabulous... though I'm not part of the skiffle movement. I played it in coffee houses not long ago. Lonnie Donegan is, despite all arguments to the contrary, the best in England. He has the real feeling and puts it over with a bang. He's definitely the king. Chas McDevitt and Bob Cort groups are top. These are the skiffle players. The others are imposters. People say skiffle appeals to the same audience as rock- 'n' - roll. That's not true. Skiffle is more intellectual. You have to sit down and listen to it, not dance. I'm a jazz fan and while I was collecting records I followed skiffle. Had quite a few Leadbelly records.⁷²

Steele articulates the differences between the two forms, implying that one is cerebral and the other emotional. These arguments, or mythologies, are reminiscent of the old received narratives about bebop and traditional New Orleans jazz. This thesis has consistently demonstrated that bebop, while requiring a more sophisticated musical sensibility as opposed to the DIY ethos of traditional jazz, was nevertheless danced to at bebop clubs throughout the late 1940s and 1950s until the point at which Ronnie Scott and Peter King opened Ronnie Scott's club in 1959.

This snapshot of the rock and roll and skiffle scenes of the 1950s, predominantly centred around, as many historians have pointed out, cellars and coffee bars in Soho, demonstrates that these different styles and their politics were not an entirely new pop-cultural phenomenon in the post-war moment. On the contrary, bebop and traditional jazz fans were also divided by taste, and embodied their own social and cultural codes, long before the advent of rock and roll and skiffle.

⁷² Tommy Steele, 'Skiffle on Trial', *Melody Maker*, 9 March 1957, pp. 2–3.

Record labels and the rise of Tin Pan Alley

As discussed in chapter two, the live bebop scene in the late 1940s was relatively small and centred around Soho. Although it eventually spread to the London suburbs and consequently other parts of Britain, spearheaded by band tours, and spread by the music press and the dominant media, who assisted its growth by disseminating stories and projecting images (albeit mostly negative) of the culture, bebop's recorded output was similarly small, independent and concentrated largely around Soho at the beginning of the 1950s. Most of the vinyl was released by Esquire Records, Britain's first bebop label, founded by Carlo Krahmer and Peter Newbrook, as discussed in chapter two.

During an interview for the National Sound Archive's *Oral History of Recorded Sound* project, Newbrook explained that:

Once the initial demand for British jazz started ... in the bebop era... after about six or seven years of operation the majors and other people involved did cotton on to what was going on, and they started to put the pressure on and put out some competition, of course. We had signed all the English artists, so there was nobody left to sign. So, once this market was sated we was putting out less jazz records, there was really only the demand then for skiffle bands, Lonnie Donegan type music, early Rock 'n' Roll.⁷³

Competition and the demand for recorded music led some British beboppers to record for other labels. To give just one example, on 8 January 1955 *Melody Maker* explained that:

Johnny Dankworth, whose signing with America's Capitol Records was reported in the MM [*Melody Maker*] last November, recorded his first sides for that label on Thursday and Friday of last week. The four titles recorded by Johnny's full 17-piece orchestra comprised two Dankworth originals and two standards. All are due for simultaneous release here and in the States in March.⁷⁴

⁷³ Peter Newbrook, *Oral History of Recorded Sound*, The National Sound Archive, British Library, August, 1986. There is no reference/credit to the name of the interviewer.

⁷⁴ 'Dankworth Cuts First Sides for Capitol', *Melody Maker*, 8 January 1955, p. 1.



Mixed record sleeves, Capitol, Decca, EMI, dates unknown. Source: popsike.com

News was also reported, in the same issue, that Tony Kinsey and his band were due to sign a deal with another label, Decca. The music paper observed that the ‘Tony Kinsey Trio was expected to sign for Decca this week. It is likely that the group will accompany Lita Roza on sides to be made in February. The Trio was formerly under contract to Esquire.’⁷⁵ Although *Melody Maker* explicitly states that the Trio were expected to sign to Decca, that company was, two years later in 1957, ‘contracted to press and distribute for *Starlite*’, a subsidiary of Esquire Records.⁷⁶

In 1956 and 1957, Britain and America saw an explosion in record sales, possibly the biggest of the post-war years. The music press reported:

In both Britain and America, 1956–57 looks like being the biggest boom year for the record business. In the ten months ending January 31, 1957, some 25,200,000 were sold on the British Market. This compared with the previous financial year, when the total was 27,100,000. And there are still two months to go. In America it is estimated from tax figures that the public paid out 320 million dollars for discs in 1956 – 25 per cent. increase. Biggest increase was in 12 in. LPs, which accounted for some 150 million dollars of the total. The old 78

⁷⁵ ‘Decca Expected to Sign Up Tony Kinsey 3’, *Melody Maker*, 8 January 1955, p. 16.

⁷⁶ ‘Biography – Starlite’, 45cat.com [last accessed 3 February 2019].

rpm records took a big drop and 10 in. LPs dropped by about 50 per cent. These figures do not include some of the independent labels.⁷⁷

However, prior to this a cultural shift occurred in the early 1950s. Bill Osgerby has noted that

The 7 inch, 45 r.p.m. single (introduced in 1952 and accounting for 80 per cent of British record sales by 1963), as well as the introduction of sales-based singles' charts (the first British singles' chart appearing in the *New Musical Express* in 1952, followed by *Record Mirror*'s 'Top Fifty' in 1954) and the emergence of the popstar as a cultural phenomenon – most strikingly manifested in 1956 with the arrival from America of rock n roll.⁷⁸

Osgerby goes on to argue that the original cluster of American stars such as Bill Haley, Little Richard, Chuck Berry and Elvis Presley 'was soon supplemented by home-grown talent such as Tommy Steele, Bill Fury, Adam Faith and Marty Wilde and, with the rise of British beat and rhythm and blues in the early sixties, British performers came to dominate the pop market'.⁷⁹

In terms of bebop, the wider recording networks that had been established by the 1950s meant that fans could consume the music through a wider system of dissemination: more available records, more radio exposure, and more music papers to add to *Melody Maker*, *Jazz Illustrated* and *Jazz Journal*.

⁷⁷ 'Discs Click in U.S and in Britain', *Melody Maker*, 23 March 1957, p. 4.

⁷⁸ Osgerby, *Youth in Britain*, p. 38.

⁷⁹ Ibid.



*London's Tin Pan Alley, Denmark Street, April 1956
Credit, Popperfoto, Getty*

As discussed in chapter one, Soho had historically been the home of sheet-music publishers, dating back to the eighteenth century. Mozart, as touched upon earlier, was a Soho resident during his time in London, and during the nineteenth century publishers of sheet music continued to trade in the area. Denmark Street, also known as Tin Pan Alley, had been a 'focus of the popular music industry since the 1920s [and] for a number of years 19 Denmark Street was the offices of... *Melody Maker*'.⁸⁰ Britain's first bebop club the Fullado had a historical connection to Tin Pan Alley, as the gritty basement club was located adjacent to Denmark Street at 6 New Compton Street.

In the 1950s, a club was founded to cater for the people in the music industry. It was the first of its kind, marking a historic occasion and symbolic of the boom in popular music during that decade. 'A Tin Pan Alley Club for song publishers, songwriters and

⁸⁰ Paul Graves-Brown, 'Where the Streets Have No Name: A Guided Tour of Pop Heritage Sites in London's West End', in S. May, H. Orange and S. Penrose (eds), *The Good, the Bad and the Unbuilt: Handling the Heritage of the Recent Past*, p. 64.

allied members of the profession’, reported *Melody Maker* proudly, ‘is being opened by publishers Elton Box and Ben Nisbet Next Monday, St. Patrick’s Day. The premises, which will be licensed, are at 7, Denmark Street, London, W.C.2. Ben Nisbit told the MM: “For a long time we’ve all thought there should be a club for the Tin Pan Alley boys. I think the one we’re opening is the answer.”’⁸¹

Denmark Street was not only the nucleus of music publishers and the music press: in the 1950s and 1960s the street was renowned for shops that repaired and traded in musical instruments. One noteworthy place was ‘Macari’s – founded in 1958’, the creators of ‘the Fuzz Box effects pedals beloved of Jimmy Page, Pete Townsend and countless other [musical] heroes’.⁸² In addition to this, *The New Musical Express*, which became ‘*Melody Maker*’s great rival and ultimately absorbed it, was launched at 5 Denmark Street in 1952’.⁸³ Following this, in 1954 a violinist by the name of Ralph Elman opened a recording studio in the street, and

Regent Sounds followed in 1962 and soon almost every square foot of Denmark Street was devoted to rock and pop music, with publishers in upstairs offices (no longer requiring shop windows to display their wares), instrument and equipment retailers at street level, repairs in rear workshops and recording studios in basements.⁸⁴

⁸¹ ‘Tin Pan Alley to Have Own Club’, *Melody Maker*, 12 January 1952, p. 4.

⁸² ‘Denmark Street and Soho: London’s Tin Pan Alley’, *Lonely Planet*, lonelyplanet.com [last accessed 2 February 2019].

⁸³ ‘London’s Tin Pan Alley’, by unknown, *hidden-london.com* [last accessed 29 July 2020].

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*



Regent Sound Studio, Denmark Street, date unknown. Source: thegood-thebad.com

Histories of the Regent Sounds Studio are somewhat varied and sketchy. According to their website, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact time that they first opened. However, the Studio, which still exists today, was where the '[Rolling] Stones, Kinks and the Beatles conducted their very early recordings' in the early 1960s.⁸⁵ These albums marked a brand-new era in the history of British popular music and cultural history.

⁸⁵ 'The Beatles – London', posted by Geoff Clements, February 2017, *londonshoes.blog* [last accessed 4 February 2019].



*The Rolling Stones' debut album cover, recorded at Regent Sounds Studios, 1964.
Source: alldylan.com*

Summing up

In spite of the authorities' attempts to obliterate the bebop scene in Soho by raiding the Fullado Club, Club Eleven and the Paramount Dance Hall, the scene grew exponentially throughout the 1950s, with many more clubs sprouting up in the Soho area. Whilst bebop jazz never reached the same levels of commerciality as rock and other types of popular music, it did evolve into a more established aesthetic during the 1950s, with the influx of new musicians, both black and white, that moved bebop forward. This chapter has also shown how the success of rock 'n' roll, partly created and popularised by the teenage markets of the affluent 1950s, persuaded some bebop musicians to convert to that genre in an attempt, it seems, to cash in on the commercial success of the music.

The chapter has argued that the Teddy Boy panic of the mid 1950s was not a new phenomenon. On the contrary, this was a continuation of a previous media panic

concerning beboppers, their fashion, and the transracial and transatlantic cultural exchanges and influences which characterised the bebop scene in Soho. This chapter has also illustrated how bebop recording labels were at first independent, but folded due to competition from the major corporate organisations following the explosion in record sales in the late 1950s and with the rock revolution of the early 1960s. Crucially, however, Soho remained the nucleus of the music industry, creating and shaping popular cultural tastes.

Chapter Six

Is this a Subculture?



Club Eleven, Soho, 1950. Source: Baeur Pictures

Introduction

The chapters in this thesis have so far offered a comprehensive account and analysis of the bebop scene in post-war Soho. I have demonstrated how Soho became the cosmopolis of London as far back as the nineteenth century, and how the area was popularised in the social imagination as a carnivalesque place of transgressive cultural hedonism. Following that, I demonstrated how bebop, a subversive art form originating in New York, migrated to Soho at the end of 1945 and was reproduced and rearticulated in its local context by black and white musicians from across the continents of the Black Atlantic. Thereafter, the thesis looked at how bebop fashion – improvised and cobbled together by the beboppers from various styles of clothing into a hybrid yet coherent visual style – articulated rebellion and defiance at a historical moment in which clothes rationing and austerity were the driving economic and political forces.

I then demonstrated how the drugs raids on the clubs were, beneath the surface, not only an expression of fears concerning these ‘alien’ cultural styles, but also due to the transracial mixing across gender of the audiences and bands, the perceived threat of Americanisation, and the miscegenation fears projected into society by the imperial power structure. I then mapped the social and cultural landscape of Soho after the police clampdown and illustrated how bebop, popular music and youth cultures more generally evolved in Britain in the 1950s, with Soho the nucleus of these developments.

Drawing from classic models of subculture by Hebdige (1979) and Thornton (1995), and theories of moral panic, particularly that of Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994), this chapter demonstrates that bebop in Soho was not just a ‘scene’, but was in fact a youth subculture. Applying the relevant strands of these perspectives, I will map the following themes: music, periodisation, race, resistance, moral panic, drugs and spaces. The reason for using classic models of subculture is that both Hebdige and Thornton’s ideas

have endured since their original publication. Moreover, they are the most appropriate methods for the purposes of this research.¹

In addition to this, I demonstrate why the post-war Soho beboppers should be added to Hebdige's canon and chronology of youth subcultures. I argue that the bebop scene in Soho, 1945 to 1950, should be classified as the first youth subculture in post-war Britain. I seek not to disregard the orthodox canon, but to rewrite its first chapter. [It is also important to note that while this thesis makes the claim of writing the first chapter in the story of post-war subcultures, it acknowledges that pre-war subcultures existed and have been documented and analysed. However, while the Edwardian 'scuttlers', amongst other groups, may have expressed a unique visual style, neither they nor any other pre-WW2 subculture were underpinned by music.]²

Music and periodisation

In *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979), Hebdige positions music and periodisation as the defining features of subcultures. This was one of the first theoretical texts to analyse young people and their cultural identities, and remains relevant when exploring youth subcultural styles. On the one hand, Hebdige's model of subculture is useful for illuminating the themes of this thesis; on the other, this dissertation seeks to fill a gap that he missed. Although he presents a highly innovative reading of post-war youth subcultures, Hebdige, like the CCCS, takes as the starting point of post-war youth culture the Teddy Boys of the 1950s. This is problematic for two reasons. First, he does

¹ The notion that classic subculture theory remains relevant is evidenced by the fact that at the annual Subcultures Network event in 2018, Hebdige and Thornton dominated the conference. Not only that, but there is a wealth of articles in the *Journal of Youth Studies* that argue in defence of the classic models.

² See Geoffrey Pearson, *Hooligan: A History of Respectable Fears* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1983), for an analysis of pre-world war two subcultures. As stated above, though, scuttlers and other social groups were defined by items of clothing and were associated with violence, etc.; they were not music-based subcultures.

not analyse the role of the women and girls that were a fundamental part of that subculture, as shown in the previous chapter. Secondly, he completely overlooks the migration of bebop from New York City to Soho, London, at the end of 1945. Before his discussion of the Teds, Hebdige presents a hypothesis about ‘beats’ and ‘hipsters’ in chapter four of his book; his analysis deals with those two different cultural styles and their embeddedness in jazz, but his theory is concerned with America and the 1950s.

Hebdige’s study opens with a discussion of jazz in the 1920s and 1930s, analysing its transference to the mainstream, arguing that this ‘bowdlerized [and] drained [the music] of surplus eroticism’ and that ‘white swing... contained none of the subversive connotations of its original black sources’.³ Drawing from sources such as Norman Mailer’s classic essay *The White Negro* (1957), Hebdige continues: ‘these suppressed meanings were, however, triumphantly reaffirmed in be-bop, and by the mid-50s a new, younger white audience began to see itself reflected darkly in the dangerous, uneven surfaces of the contemporary *avant-garde*’.⁴

Again, Hebdige was specifically examining bebop and hipsters in their American context; my research has demonstrated that bebop, which I argue is a Black Atlantic cultural form – a notion drawn from Paul Gilroy – was transferred to Britain, where it was reworked and rearticulated locally in Soho in late 1945 and early 1946, and was expressed by both black and white people from the beginning at the Fullado Club. Moreover, the notion that black and white musicians together improvised this music in Britain resulted in bebop being viewed as a subversive musical form –by the music press, the BBC and the Wimbledon Palais, where it was banned. But by the time bebop had spread to the Paramount Dance Hall in 1947, and following that with the arrival in

³ Hebdige, *Subculture: the meaning of style*, pp. 46–47.

⁴ Ibid.

Soho of Club Eleven in 1948, a young, racially mixed audience had begun to see themselves reflected in not only black avant-garde music, but bebop specifically. By 1950 bebop music and bebop fashion had become mainstream, and had spread to places such as Tottenham in the London suburbs and to northern cities and counties such as Manchester and Yorkshire. This demonstrates that white British youth were identifying with black avant-garde forms long before the mods of the 1960s.

Race

As seen throughout this thesis, the bebop scene was structured around a transracial and mixed-gender community that collectively identified themselves through music and fashion. Hebdige claims, in his reading of beatniks and hipsters – again, an analysis of these social categories in their American context, not in Britain – that these two groups ‘organized around a shared identity with blacks (symbolized in jazz)’, but expressed themselves through distinctly different visual styles.⁵ He argues that, on the one hand, ‘the zoot suits and lightweight continentals of the hipster embodied the traditional aspirations (making out and moving up) of the black street corner man’, while on the other, ‘the beat, studiously ragged in jeans and sandals, expressed a magical relation to a poverty which constituted in his imagination a divine essence, a state of grace, a sanctuary’.⁶ While these two opposing styles were ideologically similar in the British context of post-war Soho in the late 1940s – that is, beboppers (hipsters) verses trad jazzers (beatniks) – Hebdige continues by making a significant point with regard to both beats and hipsters, which is delineated along the lines of race, class and historical periodicity:

⁵ Hebdige, *Subculture: the meaning of style*, p. 48.

⁶ Ibid.

It should hardly surprise us that the beat subculture alone, the product of a romantic alignment with black people, should survive the transition from America to Britain in the 1950s. Without a significant black presence in Britain's working-class communities, the equivalent hipster option was simply not available. The influx of West Indian immigrants had only just begun, and when, at last, their influence on British working-class subcultures was felt in the early 60s, it was generally articulated in and through specifically Caribbean forms (ska, bluebeat, etc.).⁷

Although it is true that mass migration to Britain from the colonies did not take off until after 1948, there are a number of problems concerning this analysis when looking at race and social class on the bebop scene in Soho. First, as this thesis has revealed, specifically in chapters two, three and four, that black hipsters wearing a version of the zoot suit, who specifically identified themselves with bebop, were present in Soho, London, from as far as back as 1946, which obviously predates the 1960s by some distance.

Secondly, these groups of black hipsters were conspicuous on the streets of Soho, converging not only outside bebop club the Fullado, as documented by *Melody Maker* writer Pat Brand in 1946, but also, as we have seen in various archival sources, at the Paramount Dance Hall during 1947 and at Club Eleven from 1948. A black hipster element in Soho that identified as beboppers was evidently present in London before the arrival of the first wave of post-war colonial migrants aboard the SS *Windrush* in 1948.

Thirdly, the notion that the black presence in Britain was too small to have an impact on working-class communities until the 1960s is not the most important idea when considering the bebop subculture in Soho. As already demonstrated, although a large number of bebop fans appear to have been working class, as demonstrated throughout this thesis the bebop scene blurred the distinctions between race, class and gender. Moreover, the black hipster contingent, comprised of various African diasporic

⁷ Ibid., p. 49.

ethnicities and cultures – ‘local blacks, West Africans, West-Indians and African-Americans’, to quote oral history accounts by musicians – together with the white fraternity of bebop hipsters, all identified themselves through music and a cohesive style.⁸ This therefore demonstrates that a black hipster style, albeit small, was conspicuous in London and having an impact on white working-class communities before the arrival of ska, reggae and bluebeat from the Caribbean in the 1960s.

Clothes

Sartorial style, as touched upon above and as explored in depth in chapter three, was a defining feature of the bebop scene in post-war Soho, distinguishing beboppers from trad jazzers, and from wider society more generally. Hebdige is useful for an analysis of the ways in which subcultures use clothing. For example, he claims that ‘subcultures cobble together (or hybridize) styles out of the [images and] material culture that [are] available to them in the effort to construct identities which will confer on them relative “autonomy” within a social order fractured by class, generational differences, work, etc.’⁹ In accordance with this, chapter three demonstrated how the bebop look was a hybrid, woven together through the visual material culture available to the beboppers at a time in which clothes rationing was the political norm. A blend of American zoot suits, made-in-England drape-style jackets, ostentatiously colourful ties both imported from America and made in London, surplus army (Chukka) desert boots, spiv suits replicated from the iconography in gangster films seen at the cinema and thus made by London tailors, and patent leather shoes was cobbled together by the beboppers and conglomerated into a coherent visual style. This style, as we have seen through primary

⁸ Bush, 1994.

⁹ Simon During, ‘The Function of Subculture’, *The Cultural Studies Reader*, 2nd ed (New York: Routledge, 1999) pp. 441–450 (p. 441).

source evidence, was encoded with the intention of ‘looking different’ to the majority of the population in post-war Britain.

However, to reiterate, although a significant number of beboppers were working-class youths, we know from the research presented in this thesis that some middle-class women were present too, such as those arrested at the Club Eleven raid. Ronnie Scott’s biographer John Fordham also recalled that a small student cohort frequented Club Eleven. Therefore, it is unlikely that the beboppers constructed their style as a response ‘to a social order fractured by class’. Instead, Sarah Thornton’s idea that subcultures are ‘mixed... [and] cross lines of class, race and sexuality’ – as well as gender – is a more accurate description of the Soho beboppers. As seen throughout this thesis, the bebop sartorial style was constructed, improvised and weaved together by a mixture of black and white hipsters, men and women, boys and girls.

Resistance

I argue that resistance was a defining feature of the visual style expressed by the post-war Soho beboppers. If, for example, we take Hebdige’s reading of resistance, bebop style fits his definition perfectly. His analytical method, which developed the CCCS’s work, was mainly grounded in a semiotics approach. As Patrick Williams has noted in his research article ‘Youth-Subcultural Studies: Sociological Traditions and Core Concepts’ (2007), the job of the semiotician is to:

deconstruct the taken-for-granted meanings that were attributed to subcultural objects and practices. This deconstruction required the semiotician to interrogate how taken-for-granted meanings were created, distributed, and consumed. The meanings of cultural objects and practices arose through hegemony as the ruling and working classes struggled over definitions of reality (Gramsci 1971). Within this struggle, subcultures appropriated and inverted cultural meanings, often through the consumption of clothing, music, and other leisure commodities.¹⁰

¹⁰ Patrick Williams, ‘Youth Subcultural Studies: Sociological Traditions and Core Concepts’, *Sociology Compass*, 2007, pp. 572–593 (p. 576).

In the hegemonic sense, the Imperial power structure – the ruling class – exercised the social, political and cultural ideologies of Englishness. One of the forms in which these power relations were manifested was through quiet conservative clothing, which helped maintain the status quo and preserve an image of national identity. In terms of subculture, as Hebdige writes, through ‘rituals of consumption... the subculture at once reveals its “secret” identity and communicates its forbidden meanings. It is basically how commodities are used in subculture which marks the subculture off from more orthodox cultural formations.’¹¹

Hebdige’s deconstruction of the emblematic meanings embodied in the traditional suit, which were subverted by the Teds, for example, is a valuable idea, and one that fits perfectly with the post-war bebop style in Soho. For example, the meanings encoded within the suits associated with bebop – whether spiv, zoot, gangster or drape – were forbidden in the eyes of the establishment: they were ostentatious, exaggerated, loud, ‘alien’ (as the roots were American and black and Chicano sources) and flamboyant, which subverted the conservative values of unobtrusiveness embedded in the traditional, conventional suit and thereby drained it of its power and propensity for conformity. In other words, it was not a style that would have fitted into the workplace. This not only led to the dominant culture and, indeed, other trad jazz fans rejecting the style and marginalising the youths associated with bebop, but the bebop visual style also represented a further threat to the establishment – which was reflected in anti-American and anti-immigration narratives – at a historical moment when clothes rationing and austerity were the political and economic driving forces. I argue that these political and economic specificities – austerity and rationing – if, indeed, beboppers were motivated

¹¹ Hebdige, *Subculture*, p. 103.

by resistance at all, were the fundamental forces of power that they contested through symbolic style.

The garish ties that the beboppers wore, some of which were adorned with references to vice and hedonism, and most of which were constructed in dazzling colours, were at odds with the post-war conservative values of modesty that clothing accessories embodied at the time. The desert boots, originally an emblem of military power and the establishment, were removed from their original context and placed within ‘a symbolic ensemble which served to erase or subvert their original straight meaning’.¹² These desert boots were an item of clothing associated with the Teds in the 1950s; beboppers had already incorporated them into their look during the 1940s.

Moral panic

Both Hebdige and Thornton are useful for an analysis of bebop in post-war Soho in terms of the moral panic. Hebdige has argued that the

emergence of a spectacular subculture is invariably accompanied by a wave of hysteria in the press. This hysteria is typically ambivalent: it fluctuates between dread and fascination, outrage and amusement. Shock and horror headlines dominate the front page... In most cases, it is the subculture’s stylistic innovations which first attract the media’s attention. Subsequently, deviant or “anti-social acts” – vandalism, swearing, fighting, “animal behaviour” – are “discovered” by the police, the judiciary, the press; and these acts are used to “explain” the subculture’s original transgression of sartorial codes.¹³

This notion is significant for understanding the moral panic provoked by the Soho beboppers. As demonstrated earlier, an oscillation between dread and fascination, outrage and amusement, could be seen in the press. In the mainstream media, newspaper accounts conflated beboppers with ‘flashily-dressed, tough-talking spivs... with unkempt whiskers’. On the one hand, these representations ridicule the beboppers’

¹² Ibid., p. 104.

¹³ Ibid., p. 93.

style and construct them as gaudy and ‘rough around the edges’. On the other, they are conveyed as dirty in their ‘tatty clothes’, potentially a stain on society.¹⁴ In letters published by the music press, the bebop youth, again conflated with real black-market hustlers, were also described as ‘spivs’. They were portrayed as badly behaved, ‘Camden Town barrow-boys suffering from an inferiority complex’ due to their transgressive sartorial style: the ‘ostentatious, loud, rainbow-tied and wide shouldered jackets’ worn by beboppers were accused of tarnishing the good name of jazz.¹⁵

These social and cultural representations echo Hebdige’s argument that a subculture’s stylistic innovations attract the media’s attention before more threatening images of the group are transmitted. The media subsequently depicts the subculture as anti-social, deviant and animal-like. Threatening images of beboppers were indeed conveyed while the scene was in its early stages. As discussed in chapter four, in 1947, just prior to the police raid on the Fullado Club, a report in the *Daily Mirror* constructed the club as a ‘black and tan’ (i.e. mixed-race) club, and give an example of a black man and a white woman selling doped cigarettes; the man is portrayed as a snarling creature, the woman as a snake. The drugs were reported to have been smuggled into the country by spiv-like men in their wide-shouldered jackets. Here, not only is the sartorial style associated with beboppers linked to drugs, but the racialised and gendered images also transmit historical fears that drug use relaxes the boundaries between the races and leads to sexual contact across colour lines.

The hysteria surrounding the police clampdown on the Eleven and the Paramount Dance Hall in 1950 followed an almost identical pattern. Racialised and gendered

¹⁴ Noel Whitcomb, ‘Under the Counter’, *The Daily Mirror*, 21 May 1947, p. 4.; Noel Whitcomb, ‘Under the Counter’, *The Daily Mirror*, 21 June, 1947, p. 4.

¹⁵ ‘Spivs’, *Melody Maker*, April 12, 1947, p. 4; ‘Spotlight on Spivs’, *Melody Maker*, April 19, 1947, p.4; ‘Letters’, *Melody Maker*, April 26, 1947, p. 5.

newspaper reports claimed that ‘coloured men had given white girls doped cigarettes’ at bebop clubs, and the police reports in which a black man was said to have bitten a detective during the raid on the Paramount portrayed the black contingent of beboppers as animal-like sexual predators.¹⁶

Women and girls are not included in Hebdige’s theorisation of subcultures. Although Angela McRobbie of the CCCS conducted research into women and girls in subcultures, Hebdige is more concerned with male groups, mainly from the working classes. He thus fails to recognise how women and girls constitute an important part of the formation of subcultures. As discussed at length throughout this thesis, a sizable proportion of the bebop clubbers in Soho were young women. Furthermore, although the media distortion of women and girls in bebop spaces depicted them as passive victims of ‘coloured men’, their transgressive fraternisation with black males demonstrates that they expressed a certain amount of agency within the bebop scene. Thus, the notion that women and girls exerted autonomy over their selves was a fundamental cause of the moral panic sparked by the Soho beboppers.

Sarah Thornton offers a sophisticated analysis of the media’s involvement in not only provoking moral panic, but also in constructing subcultures. In the mid-1990s, Thornton published a groundbreaking work based on research she had conducted into the acid house and rave scenes of the late 1980s and early 1990s. *Club Cultures* (1995) represented a shift in perspective, technique and methodology, away from the CCCS tradition, and refined subculture theory immensely. Through an ethnographic study of clubbers, and drawing from the cultural sociology of Pierre Bourdieu and ‘Howard S. Becker’s work on Chicago dance musicians’, she argued that ‘British club cultures are invested in their

¹⁶ “‘A Slur and the Facts’ by The Marquis of Donegal: President of the National Federation of Jazz’, *Daily Mirror*, 19 April 1950, p. 8.

“hipness,” which is a form of subcultural capital, ‘tied to style and fashion but also to clubbing knowledges (to being “in the know”)’.¹⁷ Ken Gelder has noted the distinctions between Thornton’s analysis and the CCCS’s approach to youth subcultures. For CCCS scholars, social class ‘had been an originating and determining category’, whereas for Thornton ‘clubbers “live out a fantasy of classlessness”, free from work and responsibility’.¹⁸ Thornton also claimed that the CCCS ‘had over-politicized subcultures’, and instead argued that youth subcultures are based on ‘subcultural ideologies’, in the sense that

subcultures imagine themselves and their relation to others – as well as to subcultural media, which further defines and intensifies subcultural distinctions, both externally (i.e. from others, from mass culture) and internally (from different clubs and clubbers, different clubbing ideologies).¹⁹

For Thornton, media is a crucial element of how subcultures are constructed. She argued that:

Niche media like the music press construct subcultures as much as they document them. National mass media, such as the tabloids, develop youth movements as much as they distort them. Contrary to youth subcultural ideologies, “subcultures” do not germinate from a seed and grow by force of their own energy into mysterious movements only to be belatedly digested by the media. Rather, media and other culture industries are there and effective right from the start. They are central to the process of subcultural formation.²⁰

These notions of construction, development and distortion across the media spectrum help to shed light on aspects of the bebop scene in Soho. For example, although the bebop scene in Soho predated the decades which saw the construction of vast and sophisticated networks of youth media, niche media such as the music press – *Melody Maker* and later *Jazz Journal* and *Jazz Illustrated* – projected the excitement, novelty and exoticness of the bebop scene in Soho. Through documenting the unconventional,

¹⁷ Ken Gelder, *The Subcultures Reader: Second Edition* (Oxford: Routledge, 2005), p. 145.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Thornton, p. 117.

ostentatious clothes that the hipsters wore, the drugs they used and the music they produced – which broke away from orthodox forms of jazz – the music press helped to cultivate intrigue which arguably appealed to youths looking for excitement and a communal sense of belonging in austere, bomb-devastated post-war London. In this way, both the music press and the local and national newspapers were integral forces that led to bebop culture's development, which saw it spread across London and subsequently Britain.

Thornton's notion that the media distort subcultures accords with the findings of this research: chapter two on bebop being banned at halls and on the radio, chapter three on sartorial style, and chapter four on the moral panic which led to the police clampdown on the clubs have all explored the construction of bebop culture in the national imagination as a scene that transgressed conservative ideologies of 'Englishness'.

Finally, Thornton's idea that ravers demonstrate their hipness and authenticity through subcultural capital could also be applied to the beboppers. For example, as shown in chapter three, oral history accounts by musicians describe how they imagined their social world in relation to other jazz fans. Beboppers defined themselves as 'hip' in their 'sharp, almost gangster-like clothes', in contrast to the traditional jazz fans, who dressed in what the beboppers perceived to be 'duffle coats, the ones that look like a carpet, and could stand up on their own'. Similarly, letters published in *Melody Maker* announced that beboppers were sharply dressed hipsters, as opposed to the 'human adding machines' – the other category of jazz fan.²¹

In contrast to the CCCS's approach, which professes subcultures to be class-based symbolic reactions to the structural forces of power, Thornton argued that subcultures

²¹ Morgan, Fletcher, *Smokey Dives*, 2001; Mudele, *Oral history of Jazz in Britain*, 1994; *Melody Maker*, 1947.

are ‘mixed’, crossing the ‘lines of class, race and sexuality’.²² Again, as clarified throughout this thesis, beboppers indeed blurred racial, gender and class boundaries. Although the scene encompassed what looks to be a significant amount of working-class youths, I have shown how the fact that there were young women arrested during the raids who were demonised by police for being in the clubs due to their ‘good education’ demonstrates that some female bebop fans were middle or upper class.

Spaces

In terms of space, Sarah Thornton’s methods are, for a number of reasons, highly valuable for analysing spaces of bebop in post-war Soho, not least because the culture revolved around clubs. First, Thornton has argued that ‘Although club culture is a global phenomenon, it is at the same time rooted in the local’.²³ Though she is talking about the music, clothes and dance styles that revolved around the acid house subculture in Britain during the late 1980s and ‘rave’ clubs of the early 1990s, applying this idea to bebop spaces in post-war Soho is just as workable: bebop, a transatlantic, transnational and Black Atlantic cultural phenomenon, was nevertheless a highly localised scene. As discussed previously, its basic roots were in Harlem and in the beginning the culture was bound up exclusively with African Americans and American politics. When the music was transferred to Soho it was reshaped by its own unique social and cultural relations and was politicised by the British authorities and the British press. Moreover, bebop culture was consumed in Soho clubs by both black and white men and women from the colonies, the United States, the East End and other areas of London.

²² Thornton, p. 117.

²³ Thornton, p. 3.

In addition to this, all of these men, women, and youths improvised brand-new identities in the post-war moment through music, fashion and dancing – for example, as John Fordham pointed out, ‘women and girls that created their own dance styles at Club Eleven’.²⁴ In this way, bebop clubs in Soho were local spaces, and beboppers constructed these clubs through technologies of the self – DIY fashion and dance – which, as we have seen throughout this research, were unique and different to those of the majority of the public in post-war Britain.

This can be seen in Thornton’s assertion that ‘club cultures are *taste cultures*. Club cultures generally congregate on the basis of their shared taste in music... Clubs... house *ad hoc* communities with fluid boundaries... [C]lub cultures embrace their own hierarchies of what is authentic and legitimate in popular culture – embodied understandings of which can make one “hip.”’²⁵ Again, not only were spaces of bebop, as we have seen numerous times, based on a shared taste in music, but the beboppers were also invested in authenticating themselves as hip and modern, as opposed to the trad jazzers who they imagined as anachronisms and outdated, and whose taste in clothes was uncool and unhip. It is also important to note that the word hip, a term that Thornton uses in her analysis, is actually derived from jazz culture; it is a term that Becker used to describe white jazz musicians in America in his classic study *Outsiders* (1963).²⁶

In terms of Thornton’s suggestion that clubs ‘house *ad hoc* communities’ with ‘fluid boundaries’, we have seen from reports in *Melody Maker* how, to take one example, a young woman in a trad jazz club wore the clothing associated with that music, but on entering a bebop club on the same night the reporter spotted the same young woman

²⁴ Fordham, p. 37.

²⁵ Thornton, *Club Cultures*, p. 3.

²⁶ See Becker, *Outsiders*.

dressed in the ‘cooler’ bebop look, thereby adhering to the accepted social and cultural codes that each space inhabited. This is an example of how audience boundaries were more fluid, while the actual objects of their consumption – the spaces, the music and the style – were more fixed.

Drugs

As discussed in chapter four, drugs were a defining feature of the ritualistic cultural processes in bebop spaces in Soho. Thornton has argued that youth cultures ‘classify’ themselves ‘according to taste in music, forms of dance, kinds of ritual and styles of dancing’.²⁷ Archival sources and oral history evidence given by musicians demonstrate that not only were many beboppers drug consumers, the ritual of drug taking was also one of the customs by which they distinguished themselves from trad jazz fans. To reiterate, musician Jack Chilkes recalled that the ‘mainstream ones’ and the ones that played ‘Dixieland were heavy drinkers. The first thing I would notice would be them saying, “Where’s the bar?” But the modernists were getting a bad name because there was drug taking.’²⁸ Chilkes’ account is further evidenced by the fact that during the early years of bebop in post-war Soho, none of the trad jazz or ‘commercial’ jazz clubs were raided or closed down by police. In addition to this, other musicians claimed that they were addicted to heroin. Others, still, reported that most of the beboppers ‘smoked pot’.²⁹ Autobiographies of the bebop scene in Soho provide us with an important historical snapshot of the ‘drug trade that went on behind [Club Eleven’s] doors’.³⁰

Thornton is again useful here for demonstrating that youth subcultures ‘imagine themselves and their relation to others... both externally (i.e. from others, from mass culture) and internally (from different clubs and clubbers, different clubbing

²⁷ Thornton, p. 99.

²⁸ Chilkes.

²⁹ Bush, 1992.

³⁰ Thorpe, p. 32.

ideologies)'.³¹ As shown throughout this thesis, beboppers measured their hipness, authenticity and cultural identity against 'mainstream' and trad jazz fans and bands, and drug consumption was one of the cultural processes that bound them together and distinguished them from other jazzers and wider culture.

After subculture

Since Hebdige and Thornton, a number of postmodern theories of youth culture have emerged. Maffesoli (1995), Redhead (1997), Muggleton (2000) and Bennett (2004) have all challenged the classic approaches to subcultures, and have analysed the way in which 'scenes', for example, are consumed in the virtual world – at home in the bedroom, or in 'tribes', which are 'characterized by fluidity, occasional gatherings and dispersal'.³² While there is value in these methods, researchers have argued that many of the post-modern approaches to subculture dismiss the importance of the various social layers within society. For instance, Blackman has noted that this 'new "postmodern" work on subculture has been criticized by MacDonald *et al.* (2000), Cieslik (2001), Hollands (2002) and Blackman (2004) as creating problems for sociology because of the apparent reluctance to integrate social structures into analysis and instead promote an individualistic understanding of the social'.³³

Patrick Williams (2007) has noted that 'academics... remain divided in how we approach and frame youth-subcultural activities'.³⁴ However, he does suggest, like other subculture researchers, that although 'scenes', 'neo-tribes' and 'club cultures' may be 'increasingly common on the youth cultural landscape, subcultures *also* remain highly

³¹ Gelder, p. 145.

³² Blackman, *Youth Subcultural Theory*, p. 9.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ P. J. Williams, 'Youth Subcultural Studies: Sociological Traditions and Core Concepts', *Sociology Compass*, 2007, pp. 572–593 (p. 587).

salient and significant'.³⁵ In terms of this thesis, utilising ideas from classic models of subculture and merging them together is the most suitable framework for the purposes of my research.

Summing up

While Hebdige's excellent book portrays the hipster subculture associated with bebop in its place of origin, New York City during the 1950s, he overlooks the uniquely British bebop hipster equivalent that was conspicuous in Soho, London, during the late 1940s. He instead documents the origins of post-war youth subcultures in Britain beginning with the Teds in the 1950s. Furthermore, the bebop scene in Soho was not entirely demarcated along class lines, as Hebdige's theorising would lead us to think, but was a group identity that blurred the distinction between class, race and gender. In terms of symbolic resistance through style, beboppers resisted the political and economic conditions of austerity and clothes rationing: the amount of cloth needed to create their oversized padded draped jackets was a form of defiance and opposition, and their overall ostentatious style was a transgression of conservative English reserve. I argue that this was one element of bebop culture which led to the moral panic and police clampdown on the bebop scene in Soho.

Thornton's ideas regarding taste, space and media involvement in creating subcultures are also valuable for an analysis of this research. As demonstrated throughout this thesis, bebop in Soho was a hybrid subcultural identity which revolved around taste, hipness and authenticity.³⁶

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ It is important to note that for her book (1995), Sarah Thornton undertook ethnographic research and was therefore able to embed herself within her work. In terms of my own research, due to the historical period of the bebop subculture, I have had to reconstruct the narrative through mainly archival and oral history accounts.

While there has been a wealth of literature dedicated to theorising youth and their social spaces and cultural practices since Thornton's study, classic approaches to subculture remain relevant for understanding how youth subcultures work. In utilising strands from classic subculture theory to frame this research, I have demonstrated that bebop in Soho was not just a scene, but was in fact Britain's first post-war youth subculture.

Conclusion

This dissertation has told the hitherto hidden history of the bebop subculture in post-war Soho. In analysing a wide range of primary sources, many of which were previously unexplored, I have mapped the birth of the scene in Soho's underground clubs, from the moment this avant-garde music first migrated to Britain, to the development of the live scene, the fashion that formed around it, the drug consumption amongst a significant number of the group, the early record labels, and how these elements shaped brand new socially hybrid identities consisting of both black and white men and women, between 1945 and 1950.

The thesis has demonstrated how the music and fashion that constituted the bebop subculture, and the transracial fraternisation across gender that happened within it were seen as a tangible threat to the establishment at a time when the nation was recovering from the war, its empire was crumbling and the country was struggling to hold on to an image of Englishness. In terms of the music and fashion, this threat was manifested at the intersection of race and class. Concerning race, alien cultural forms were seen to be 'swamping' Britain's national borders, reflected in the African American, West Indian and West African musicians and fans from the colonies that represented a proportion of the Soho beboppers. With regard to social class, these fears were expressed through white musicians from London's East End and suburban youths who had no connections to the upper-classes— unlike many of the musicians that were associated with the trad jazz.

Once it spread to the suburbs, the music was banned by certain dance halls as it was seen as dangerous, even uncivilised. This was due not only to the notion that this alien music had infiltrated the 'civilised' white suburbs, but also to incongruent and misunderstood views of elements of the bebop scene. For example, the proprietor of the

Wimbledon Palais claimed that 'bebop dancing' brought into the establishment an undesirable element.

With regard to the fashion, the sartorial style that signalled bebop identity was another strand in the story that was thought to pose a threat to the establishment. The zoot and drape-shape jackets, garish ties, 'flash' hairstyles, spear-point collared shirts, patent leather shoes and crepe soled army surplus desert boots drawn from the iconography of gangster films and plays depicting black American jazz, and some material objects such as the flashy ties brought into the country by musicians travelling to and from New York, were seen as subversive for a number of reasons. Firstly, this was the first post-war style to reverse the way in which fashion was historically diffused. Rather than flowing from the top of society down, this style bubbled up from the ground. Secondly, the style, although made British by the beboppers, was not merely influenced by American culture, which further represented a threat to the national identity, but it was also initially rooted in African American culture. Thirdly, bebop style was not only perceived by the press as effeminate, but also as a deviation of the English values of reticence and unobtrusive modesty embodied in traditional menswear at that time. Fourthly, the style was perceived to articulate resistance to the status quo at a time of rationing: it took much more cloth to make these suits than the demob style and the men and youths that wore them were viewed as unpatriotic rebels.

In terms of the transracial fraternisation across gender, beboppers were the first music-based subculture to hybridise their identity in post-war Britain. Not only was their shared taste in music and fashion different to the way in which trad jazzers and the majority of the post-war population dressed, but these transracial social exchanges were also seen as transgressive, immoral and, more importantly, a threat to the 'colour line'. Although there was drug taking amongst beboppers, drug convictions in the period

between 1945 and 1950 remained relatively low, and evidence presented here has suggested that it was in fact the music, clothes, dancing and the improvised social relations between black and white men and women that had stirred up latent miscegenation fears which led to a moral panic and saw the police clamp down on Soho's bebop clubs between 1947 and 1950. Many historians of jazz in Britain have also subscribed to the notion that bebop music cannot be danced to. This dissertation, however, has presented archival evidence from a wide range of sources which suggests that dancing occurred and was a cultural process within bebop clubs in post-war Soho.

In exploring these elements and the media representation of these young men and women and their cultural forms, this thesis has demonstrated how bebop in Soho was not merely a scene, but was in-fact post-war Britain's first youth subculture. The evidence presented suggests that bebop fashion was a precursor to the Teds, and there is an interesting historical link between the beboppers and the mods.

The bebop subculture in Soho: Why it matters

This research is original and significant for a number of reasons, not least because the story has remained untold until now. In terms of race, the black experience has seemingly been erased from history because it does not fit with the standardised narratives told by the predominately white historians that have characterised early bebop in Britain as being pioneered by mainly white musicians. As demonstrated in chapter five, the received cultural narrative is that it was not until after the arrival of the *Windrush* in 1948, with the mass migration of West Indian men and women from the colonies, that there was a black contribution to British bebop. My evidence has demonstrated that this is not the case. This thesis has methodically shown that black musicians from West Africa and the Caribbean, African American servicemen, and

British-born black musicians were involved with bebop in Soho from the moment it crossed the Atlantic from New York in late 1945.

In terms of histories of subcultures, bebop has perhaps been excluded from the youth culture arena due to the fact that it does not fit with the narrative of the spectacular subcultures of the 1950s onwards. Again, most histories take rock 'n' roll as the starting point of post-war youth subcultures in Britain. This is generally due to the social and economic changes that epitomised the 1950s and led to the birth of the teenager [the subcultures story thereafter conventionally takes in mods, skinheads, hippies, punks and ravers]. The bebop scene in 1940s Soho, which emerged outside of the teenage markets and had a style that was completely DIY, hybridised and cobbled together during a time of economic austerity and clothes rationing, does not fit with the narrative of the 'teenager'.

The bebop subculture has been excluded from the historical canon seemingly because it does not correspond with the story of the predominately white working-class male post-war subcultures mentioned above: the teds, mods, hippies, punks, skinheads and ravers. Again, this thesis has demonstrated how bebop consisted of both black and white men and women, and that it blurred the boundaries between race, gender and social class.

Further research

Although this research has made a considerable start on the history of the bebop subculture in Britain, there remains work still to do. For example, it is evident that a small bebop scene in Manchester was visible from circa 1948 and was centred around the Astoria Ballroom in the city. Data suggests that the music was imported into the city by the Soho pioneers and therefore did not predate the birth of the scene in London.

Questions remain concerning the social make-up of and political backlash against the scene in Manchester. For instance, were these clubs raided? Did they, as in London, blur the distinctions between race, gender and social class? Was there drug using amongst the revellers in those spaces? Was the scene in Manchester underpinned by a sartorial style like in London?

Furthermore, did the bebop subculture reach other regional towns and cities – for example Bristol, Cardiff, Glasgow or Liverpool? We know from evidence presented in this dissertation that by 1951 the scene had reached Newcastle, but did bebop spread to the other major ports (and smaller rural areas) of Britain?

In addition to this, there are perhaps questions from a musicological perspective that requiring answering. How did bebop fuse with other genres and styles of jazz? These are questions that could potentially be answered in further research.

Final thoughts: Similarities with acid house, parallels with the present, and structural racism and popular culture today

Acid house

The bebop subculture in post-war Soho very much evokes similarities with the acid house subculture of 1987–1988. For instance, Britain's first bebop club, the Fullado (1945/6), followed by Club Eleven (1948–1950) – the pinnacle of the bebop subculture –parallel two of the first acid house clubs in London, Shoom (1987) and RIP (Rave in Progress, 1988). Shoom, which started life in a sweaty underground fitness centre in Southwark, was followed by the RIP parties, which were held in Clink Street, London Bridge, a couple of miles away from Shoom [both of which I was fortunate enough to attend]. These parties, which marked the birth of the acid house scene in London, were, like bebop, characterised by the Black Atlantic: they were transnational, transcultural

and collectively transracial exchanges. Similar to the bebop pioneers in Soho, early DJs from Britain were making transatlantic journeys to America, returning with records and then distributing them. Like bebop, acid house in its origins was intrinsically a black form; acid house was pioneered by mainly black musicians from Chicago's housing projects and the music first found its full expression in Chicago club The Warehouse. However, similar to the influence of European classical music on Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, acid house's innovators were not merely disco and soul fans, as is usually the standard narrative, they were also listening to predominately white European electronic and rock music – German band Kraftwerk and English band Depeche Mode, for example. Again, this demonstrates the hybrid Black Atlantic nature of both bebop and acid house, and how the musics and cultures were reshaped and inscribed with different social and political meanings once they migrated to Britain.

Perhaps an even more striking similarity, though, is that the bebop subculture provoked a moral panic forty years before the migration of acid house did likewise, due to comparable fears: fears about the unconventional, transgressive social relations and spaces in which the culture was consumed.

Parallels with the present

This thesis speaks in many ways to our current cultural and political climate. For instance, the ways in which the racial elements of the bebop subculture were represented as a threat to the national identity has, in certain ways, been reflected in the *Windrush* scandal. The structural racism found in the police reports, press clippings, colonial literature taught in schools and oral history accounts of women clubgoers during the police raids on the clubs has not been entirely eradicated, but rather continues to permeate society. The *Windrush* scandal highlighted the notion that blackness still

does not fit with the conservative image of the national identity – emphasised even more at a historical moment in which fear of immigration in Britain is widespread, whipped up by the agendas of the political right who feel the need for Britain to ‘take back control of its borders’. The police raids on the Soho bebop clubs – which were an attempt to prevent black and white people socialising and creating culture together – can be seen as a microcosm of a wider social, political and cultural hegemony that persists to the present day.

In addition, a clampdown on London’s music spaces in 2012 can be seen in The Metropolitan Police’s risk assessment form, ‘Form 696’, which states that their

recommended guidance to music event organisers, management of licensed premises or event promoters on when to complete Form 696 is where you hold an event that is – promoted/advertised to the public at any time before the event, and predominately features DJs or MCs performing to a recorded backing track, and runs anytime between the hours of 10pm and 4am, and is in a nightclub or a large public house.¹

The fact that this regulation is aimed at spaces which hold musical events where DJs or MCs perform to a backing track demonstrates that the establishment continue to clamp down on scenes and subcultures that are deemed transgressive and dangerous. Although not explicitly stated in the form, this is clearly specifically aimed at hip-hop and grime music: this music is performed in the way that the form describes. Both black and white men and women, usually from the working classes (though not solely), come together in these spaces and form around a musical style that is black in essence. This echoes the bebop scene of the post-war years.

Another example can be found in the film *Blue Story* (2019). Written and directed by black British filmmaker Andrew Onwubolu, also known as Rapman, the film reflects the current postcode wars that are destroying London’s black communities. Scored by

¹ Quote from the Metropolitan Police in Lowkey, ‘The Met Police are Stigmatising Hip-hop with the 696 Form’, by *The Guardian*, theguardian.com, 10 January 2012 [last accessed 18 November 2019].

forms of British hip-hop – known as grime and drill – produced by both black and white youths, the film was banned by cinemas across Britain due to violence that broke out in Birmingham *near* a screen that was showing it on the day it was released. There has been no evidence linking Rapman’s film to the violence. This again suggests that as was the case with bebop, acid house and the Metropolitan Police’s ‘Form 696’, the establishment continues its attack on black cultural forms and implies that they are a threat to the fabric of society. Yet perhaps even more significant is the notion that these moral panics generally occur when black and white people are mixing together.

Structural racism and popular culture today

In 2020, racism remains embedded in the structure of Britain. Popular culture and subcultures remain the focus of racist policing and moral panics, and continue to be used by the establishment to express fears concerning national identity. As highlighted by the George Floyd case in the United States, the spate of protests on both sides of the Atlantic shed light on police racism in Britain. The image of Britain as a tolerant, racist free society was shattered when black British people, from Metropolitan Police officers to youth community workers, stepped forward and told their stories about experiencing systemic racism.²

Youth worker, teacher and local councillor Mahamed Hashi, a black male from South London awarded an honorary doctorate for his services to his community, recalls how he is stopped and searched by police regularly, in one case simply because he

² See, ‘As a black police officer, I know the Met is still institutionally racist’, Anonymous police officer, *The Guardian*, theguardian.com, June 15, 2020, [last accessed on August 19, 2020].

‘looks young and is driving an expensive car.’³ Although Form 696 was scrapped in 2017, Hashi makes an important observation about drill music, explaining that

when we look at drill music, the phenomenon of the music, and when we really listen to the drill music, and we really take in the information, and the expression of these young people that have gone through some really horrifying experiences, we turn around and say we need to ban it and get rid of it. I feel like the only people that listen to it are the police. They’re not listening to it to create some sort of social change or impact. They’re listening to it to actually enforce the law.⁴

Like the Paramount Dance Hall, where black males were harassed outside by police and at Club Eleven, where white women were accused of having the potential to become drug addicts because they associated with black males at bebop clubs, the degree of historical continuity from the post-war years to the present day that links music, race and popular culture to criminality is a cause for concern. As Hashi says, drill music is critical art, a reflection of the social, economic and environmental conditions of society and the shared experiences of the people that create it. And as pertinent as ever, both bebop and drill emerged at a time when economic austerity was the driving political force, enabling young people to at least share a sense of identity, community and purpose in harsh circumstances that impact them severely.

³ Mahamed Hashi, ‘Change through Engagement’, *BBC Sounds*, bbc.co.uk [last accessed on August 19, 2020].

⁴ Ibid.

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Discography

The links to music tracks given here offer a taste of the bebop sounds from the era.

These tunes have not been analysed in the thesis, though most have been referenced.

The aim is simply to give some idea of the music that was being played in the Soho clubs:

Charlie Parker, *Groovin' High* (Musicraft, 1945):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oslMFOeFoLI>

Dizzy Gillespie, *That's Earl, Brother* (Musicraft, 1946):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yplh5xc2tRs>

Dizzy Gillespie, *Cubano be, Cubano-bop* (1948, re-released on Soul Note, 1982)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4c0z9jZ3h2k>

Esquire Five, *Lady be Good* (Esquire Records, unknown):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4F1OACkJb8w>

Esquire Five, *What is this Thing Called Love* (Esquire Records, unknown):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rJr9FZSdO5g>

Esquire Five: *Boppin' at Esquire* (Esquire Records, 1948)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=soCnVKXGgfE>

Esquire Five: *Idabop* (Esquire Records, 1948):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fzWELNSa300>

Joe Harriott, *Summertime* (Melodisc, 1954):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IvoP-Zs9ku4>