

## **'Only one can rule the night': fairs and music in post-1945 Britain**

### **Abstract**

This article charts and examines the relationship between popular music and the British travelling fairground in the post-1945 years. I set out a historical trajectory of the importance of sound and noise within the fairground, and examine how music in the post-1945 years emerged as an important aspect of this wider soundscape. The complex spatial characteristics of the fairground are considered as fragmented zones with 'interiors-within-interiors' forming to facilitate certain music and sounds. This progresses to encompass and engage the subcultural explosion in British society. The fairground becomes a complex mode of musical consumption, facilitating access to music, enhancing the sound through somatic engagement and providing a temporary space for subcultures to flourish. I draw on historical materials, archival evidence and gathered testimony to look at the 1950s period of new music, then plot a course to the current phase of dance music and club culture.

Keyword: fairgrounds, subcultures, soundscape, popular music, listening

### **Introduction**

The British travelling fair holds a distinctive allure in its coming-to-be, active duration and evanescent departure. It is provided by a nomadic community who seemingly have their own separate domain of existence, bringing the fair through the dead of night with a remarkable effort of organisation to assemble an array of vehicles and wagons. By the morning light activity is always well under way; teams of staff are unfolding and unpacking structures, making it all fit together *just so*. The fair will occupy a regularized space within the urban nexus, either a continuous plot such as a greenspace or a car park, or a loose network of discrete locations within a city centre. The duration of the fair disrupts both the allocated functions of spaces (consumption, commuting, parking) and the rhythms of normality associated with those spaces (opening/closing, parking by micro-divisions of the hour). It is a temporal and spatial intervention.

The fair exists as its own discrete world; carrying a supply of goods as prizes (referred to as swag by showpeople) that cannot be purchased elsewhere, providing a magical enclosed space that allows a suspension of disbelief and a bounded amphitheatre for performance, offering a vibrant and vernacular art gallery that mixes iconography and figurative work from popular culture wrapped up in a unique visual imprint of the fairground style and colour scheme, bringing smells and tastes of food that shouldn't be eaten and inevitably only resides temporarily in the stomach, and setting off a dense cacophony of sounds and music that would not be tolerated in other spaces and circumstances. Foucault's somewhat adaptable list of heterotopias (Foucault 1984) makes reference to the carnival space, though we can classify the fair at various levels of his loose ontology; as deviation, as juxtapositional, as time-heterochronies, as 'worlds-within-worlds'.

As visitors to the fair we share an intersubjective suspension of disbelief evolving around the tensions of the phenomenal and noumenal, shifting what might be thought acceptable and everyday into the realm of the transgressive, surreal and thrilling, and pulling out the impossible and unimaginable into the realm of the sensory (or near-enough-sensory). The fairground disorients in a polysensory excess of sounds, smells, tastes, lights, visuals, rootedness, social conventions and performativity. As Toulmin (2003: 61) states, the fair is 'mysterious, dangerous, a venue in which emotions are unguarded, experiences intense, and a break from the routine of everyday life'. And finally, the magical coming-to-be of the fair is mirrored with its departure. Just as it comes from elsewhere, it departs to another elsewhere, leaving a trace of compressed rings in the grass and residual artefacts such as broken light caps, food remnants, dislodged and scattered coins and traces of packaging from cheap swag prizes that looked so tempting under the fairground lights.

Travelling fairgrounds are a worldwide phenomenon and though approximately coeval in terms of a developmental shift from acts and shows to mechanised thrills, there are distinctive factors that give fairgrounds a national flavour. This includes organising principles, rules and regulations at local and national levels including religious cultures, and specifics of the popular cultures prevalent in the country or region concerned. For example, the uniqueness of British fairgrounds is down to numerous factors: their sole organisation by an exclusive and exogenous community known as showpeople, the relatively short duration of events (compared for example with similar events in Germany and the USA), and the British celebration of pop and dance music alongside the iconographic excesses of celebrity, film and cartoon culture. These factors combine to give the spatial, social, visual, olfactory, gustatory and acoustic features of the British fairground.

In any week there are up to 150 travelling fairgrounds set up across the UK, with each event lasting anything from a single day to a couple of weeks. The fairground itself will consist of larger rides (adult rides), smaller rides (juvenile rides), side- and round-stalls offering a variety of games, supplemented by food stalls (sweet and savoury) and a smattering of hawkers selling balloons and associated swag. The fairground season traditionally runs from February 14<sup>th</sup> (St Valentine's Day marking the start of King's Lynn Mart Fair) through to November (the season ending with the charter fair at Loughborough). In recent years the start and end points of this period have been extended further, with newly established Valentine's fairs usurping the status of King's Lynn as the official start, and extended bonfire fairs pushing towards the end of November, alongside Long Eaton Chestnut Fair which falls the week after Loughborough. With the current fashion for Christmas lights switch-on events and Christmas and New Year fairs, the season is now no longer a season as such, more so a continuous occurrence.

In terms of literature sources, the earliest fairground writing consists of autohagiographic works by prominent showmen and circus proprietors utilising a tradition of self-bestowal (titles such as 'professor' or 'captain'), and this was slowly replaced by a growing body of

work produced by, and for, the nascent fairground enthusiast movement in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This work focusses on particular fairs, rides or showpeople families, setting on encyclopaedic details of fleets of lorries and family trees. A handful of more general books emerged (Dallas 1971; Starsmore 1975; Cameron 1998; Toulmin 2003), and attempts have been made to bridge across into architecture (Braithwaite 1968) and art (Weedon and Ward 1981).

### **Historical overview of noise, sound and music on the fairground**

Noise proliferates on the 19<sup>th</sup> century fairground. Dallas (1971: 3) references Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* and the stentorian character Mr Gradgrind approaching the fairground: 'He had reached the neutral ground upon the outskirts of the town, which was neither town nor country, and yet was either spoiled, when his ears were invaded by the sound of music.' The 1825 fairground at Greenwich is recalled as a 'never to be forgotten orgy of noise' (Walvin 1984: 164), whilst William Howitt's 1844 *The Rural Life of England* describes an 'unintermitted din' at Nottingham Goose Fair.

Toulmin (2003: 13) quotes from an undated scrapbook in the collection at the National Fairground Archive, describing the coming of the heavy fairground machinery in the early 1900s:

Noise, great noise, loud noise, rough noise, harsh noise, shrill noise, overall, noise. The noise of young men laughing, of old men grunting; the noise of young maidens shrieking, of old maidens sobbing; the noise of roundabouts, of steam engines, or flip-flaps, or toboggans, of sirens, of rattles, of everything and of all things. Noise! Noise! Noise!!!

Prior to recorded music the musical sound of the fairground was dominated by mechanical organs playing popular melodies and waltzes. The music from each individual organ had to compete with the other similar musical sources (homogenous cacophony) or compete with other sounds (heterogeneous cacophony). The din of Nottingham Goose Fair is disparagingly remarked upon by J.B. Priestley on his tour of England:

The brazen voices of the showmen, now made more hideous and gargantuan than ever by the amplifiers and loudspeakers, battered our hearing, which could not pluck words out of those terrifying noises. The mechanical organs blared in batteries, so closely ranged that the ear could never detect a single tune: all it heard was the endless grinding symphony. (Priestley 1934: 148)

The provision of music as a key aspect of the constellation of sound sources has shifted with social modes, cultural tastes and technical capabilities. The British fairground is now dominated by pre-recorded and amplified music, though even the mode of presentation of this sound changes constantly. Initially records were played on early systems known as panatropes, a device that has become associated with the historical fairground of the 1930s

and the need to play music at a substantial volume.<sup>1</sup> Whilst these new systems allowed pre-recorded music to be played on the fairground, with early jazz records popular, the cacophony continued: 'the old steam organ seems to have had its day, and is rapidly being replaced by loud speakers and amplifiers each shrieking a different jazz tune at the same time' (Toulmin 2003: 16). Standard record players came into use with the auto-change system allowing several records to be stacked and played in sequence, with an audible drop in revolutions per minute as the ride starts its motion due to the power for the whole machine ensemble (motion, lighting, music) being drawn from a single source. In addition, the record would jump as the ride gained speed and began to shake, leading to the utilisation of coil springs to suspend the record deck. The evolution of tapes and then CDs allowed a smoother presentation of music, with continuous mix CDs allowing a seamless soundtrack. This has now evolved to digital downloads of dance music mixes.

Speaker technology was embraced by the fairground at the earliest opportunity, with a mix of acoustic strategies such that certain speakers are positioned outward facing, with sound centrifugally amplified into the general fairground space, whilst other speakers are positioned inward facing, with sound centripetally amplified into the enclosed space of the specific ride. This necessitates a finer unpacking of the spatial dynamics of the fairground, which I develop below, but first I outline a proposed total soundscape of the fairground.

### **A proposed soundscape of the fairground**

Schafer (1994) introduces the idea of the soundscape, equating it to the perceivable acoustic environment. Truax (2000), as part of the World Soundscape Project, develops the definition as 'the totality of all sounds within a location with an emphasis on the relationship between individual's or society's perception of, understanding of and interaction with the sonic environment.' Furthermore, Cain et al (2013: 232) caution that 'the study of soundscapes is challenging because it is also necessary to consider the context of the soundscape, rather than simply evaluating its different acoustical qualities'. Soundscape studies generally evolve in an altruistic manner to identify aspects of noise or discomfort, attempting to isolate such sounds and address their possible nullification through various strategies. In contrast to this, the fairground is a deliberately noisy and complex soundscape, staking out a certain space and hijacking a set period of time, when volume, cacophony and sonic excess is legitimized and engaged.

Existing within a wider polysensory excess (vision, smell, taste, performativity, light) it is possible to mark a provisional fairground soundscape. This initially consists of an overlay between various sources of sound including music amplified through the sound systems associated with the fairground rides, the exaggerated noise of machinery such as the hiss of hydraulics and the rattle of metal against metal, a panoply of amplified special effects

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/panatrophe>

ranging from repurposed air raid sirens, horns, hooters and bells, and increasingly electronic and digital sound sample boxes, and the human voice as shouting and orchestrated screaming (from the point of view of the punters) and 'bawling' (from the showmen), constantly backgrounded by the hubbub of raised voices in excited conversation. These source sounds are then experienced in distinct translating modes - as accumulation towards homogenous cacophony (music heard with other music for example), as combination towards heterogeneous cacophony (different source sounds together) and as 'sound-in-motion' whilst being hurled in all directions on a speeding and twisting fairground ride. Finally, there is a synesthetic dimension with heavily painted fairground rides depicting figurative reproductions of pop stars and dance scenes, subculturally stylised lettering (disco and psychedelic fonts for example), and hip phrases drawn from music scenes such as northern soul and mod.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the experience of listening to music on the fairground is phenomenologically complex when considered at the level of the totality of the bounded fairground itself.<sup>3</sup>

### **Spatial concepts and implications for music**

The fairground can be interpreted as a monadological concept, such that smaller units within the fairground form enclosed zones, miniature fairgrounds-within-fairgrounds. This might be a constellation of high-octane thrill rides such as 'Scotch Corner' that has developed at Hull Fair or the individual rides.<sup>4</sup> Whilst a fairground attains a coherent whole, and is run as a wider business by a more-or-less single family united as showpeople, there is competition for custom. This involves both the progression of the rides themselves (constantly evolving technologies offering higher, faster and more intense experiences), and the presentation of those rides. If a showperson wishes to get an edge over another ride of similar type, they will utilize aspects such as superior decoration (newness of artwork, cultural immediacy of artwork, lighting, smoke effects) and – in the post-1945 era - superior sounds through better systems, more up-to-date records, and increasingly added aspects such as mc-ing and sound effects.

As a soundscape we see this monadological structure to good effect with a ride such as the Ark Speedway or Waltzer, a fast and undulating roundabout which provides an enclosed space equipped with centripetal speakers such that the music played with the ride becomes a dominant and loud sound heard in an unadulterated fashion (give or take the odd bouts of

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<sup>2</sup> Subcultural artwork on the fairground warrants its own article, as musical themes became the driving force of fairground art in the post-1945 years.

<sup>3</sup> Walker (2013) questions the assumption that we can apply an inside and outside to the fairground through a clear boundary. Even if such a boundary were in place (fluid or otherwise), the sound of the activity within the fairground quickly escapes the physical boundary of the fairground.

<sup>4</sup> Hull Fair is one of the largest and most important fairs in the UK fairground calendar, falling in early October and forming part of the 'back-end' run within the season. Over the past 30 years the Scottish showmen who present rides at the fair have striven to include white-knuckle novelty rides and so earned the moniker Scotch Corner.

screaming and shouting). The artwork on these rides has been at the forefront of involving pop culture from films and music, with slogans emblazoned across the front of its proscenium to attract custom. This will often refer to the prowess and power of its sound capabilities: 'Only one can rule the night' or 'Waltz around to the best sounds in town'. As Walker (2013: 57) surmises from his observation of the Waltzer at Loughborough Fair:

As the evening wears on the ride closes in on itself, closes itself off from its surroundings while attracting a predominantly under-18 audience with the promise (and delivery) of pseudo-transgressive hardcore techno music and a rave environment that they would not otherwise (well, legally, or with parental consent) be able to access.

Thus, as a hearing experience the monadological fairground offers music on two levels; as part of complex and always changing cacophony on the fairground itself, and as an outlay of specific music on the individual rides. This 'stripping out' of music from a proposed total soundscape of more-than music and more-than purity of transmission towards a singularity of sound (a piece of recognized music) is then immediately counteracted with a 'building up' at the level of listening and responding. DeNora (2000: 78) introduces the idea of entrainment in which we take the rhythm of the music into our bodies and respond by tapping our fingers and stamping our feet, and this activity is expanded on the Ark Speedway or Waltzer. A crowd on a ride will gather on the wooden gangways forming a circumference within the enclosure (known as gratings) to add to the atmosphere by shouting, singing, clapping, stamping and dancing. In addition, the operator of the ride will provide cues to encourage collective shouts, screams and the raising of hands.

As the quote by Walker shows, the contemporary Waltzer offers the experience of a rave-music nightclub to younger people. It is presumptive to assume that the affordance offered by the fairground ride is proof of a unidirectional simulation from the dancehall/disco/nightclub. The fairground ride, as I show above, offered an opportunity to be at what might be considered as a pop-up nightclub transfigured from the quotidian space of the city, though the enhanced atmosphere of the fairground ride (lights, sound, movement, collective energy) would have been something that pre-dated the modern nightclub. Thus, the similarity between the Waltzer and the nightclub is evolved through symbiosis and reciprocity, as opposed unidirectional influence and mimicking.

The notion of the music venue or disco as a heterotopic other space is a common trait, and here there is a synergy with the fairground. Forbes (2015: 149) describes a typical venue experience (Glasgow Apollo) as a 'concept of otherworldliness of the downtrodden environment', and the modern (post-1988) movement of accelerated dance culture experienced in raves, clubs and modern super-clubs is equally otherworldly and quasi-utopian or ludic. Malbon (1998: 280) analyses the club at a spatial level, placing an emphasis on the social practices afforded by the space of the nightclub with regard to a tribal identification and the claiming of a space, developing these ideas to explore the club as

facilitating 'spaces and experiences of identification or affective gatherings' (Malbon 1999: 46). The labyrinthine parallel between the club and the fairground is also identified by Thornton who proposes that: 'clubs offer otherworldly environments in which to escape; they act as interior havens with such presence that the dancers forget local time and place... Clubs achieve these effects with loud music, distracting interior design and lighting effects' (Thornton 1995: 21). Such interior accoutrements and their associated affects within the club can be mapped over to the enclosed circularity of the Waltzer, which pre-dated such environments.

### **Post-1945 music and British youth**

The fairground of the 1950s and 1960s on occasion provided what could be considered as a replica of, and alternative to, the official spaces of popular music consumption, with the structures of the rides such as the Waltzer and Dodgems acting as parallels of dancehalls, but allowing a younger audience access to rock'n'roll records before they were widely available and an opportunity to participate in their enjoyment. Chambers (1985: 72) details how many youth clubs would have strict rules expressing 'No Jiving, No Rock'n'Roll', emphasising the barriers that the young would face in experiencing this music. As part of my research into capturing the heritage of the British fairground,<sup>5</sup> numerous respondents impressed on me how important the fairground was in both allowing access to music and in shaping that music with unique qualities, such that the heritage of the fairground and music become intertwined. A respondent at King's Lynn Mart Fair (male, 50s) recalled how the music of his youth was hard to track down and the fairground offered a rare chance, a 'good place to hear music not heard otherwise, apart from Radio Luxembourg there was nowhere else to hear it'. This is confirmed by Hanna (1988) who summarizes his life as a teenager in search of the new sounds:

The BBC still had the ghost of its puritanical founder Lord Reith hovering over it and virtually ignored Rock and Roll completely. Radio Luxembourg played lots of it but the signal was weak and subject to constant fading and interference. The cafes and milk bars had juke boxes but usually the wick was turned down by the proprietor if we selected too many rocking discs.

Hanna, a devout music fan and fairground enthusiast, plots the growth of post-1945 music subcultures on the fairground. He witnesses the last flourishes of the organ music as 'marches, light classical overtures, Strauss waltzes and popular music hall tunes' and the early panatrophe systems playing less adventurous sounds such as 'brass band records and Jimmy Shand's Scottish accordion dance records, Winifred Atwell's jangly piano party discs, fast pop novelty songs by Guy Mitchell with their hooting French horns in the backing band'. For Hanna, rock and roll changed the picture, with Bill Haley 'played constantly on Benson's machines in the mid-1950s' and Elvis Presley who moved Haley out of the way such that his

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<sup>5</sup> PhD undertaken at the University of Sheffield as part of the White Rose College of Arts and Humanities.

records 'sounded fantastic on fairground machines, not least because of the wonderful stinging guitar playing by the great Scotty Moore'.<sup>6</sup> His enthusiastic testimony runs into the 1960s, identifying 'twilight years' between 1960 and 1963 when rock and roll had died away, only to be replaced by Motown, James Brown, funk and disco from 1965 onwards.

Certain songs become imprinted onto the fairground experience through certain rides, with Swinbank (2000: 12) recalling:

Local teenagers would hang around the steps of the Waltzer mesmerized by the flashing lights and listening to all the great records. 'Shout' by Lulu and 'It's all Over Now' by the Rolling Stones. Every record was a classic and you would think they had been recorded with the fairground in mind.

Likewise, the artist Dudley Edwards who drew inspiration from the fairground for his work as part of the London swinging sixties art scene recalls:

When Rock and Roll first came on the scene in the fifties the ONLY place you could hear Little Richard, Buddy Holly, Chuck Berry, Elvis Presley, Gene Vincent and Eddie Cochran at loud decibel levels was at the fairground and we would all dance around the edge of the Waltzers<sup>7</sup>

*World's Fair* newspaper of 28 May 1955 reports the practice of rock and roll dancing on and around a fair ride, whilst the notebooks of Jack Leeson kept at the National Fairground Archive at the University of Sheffield Library mention Dodgem tracks being used as a venue for dancing competitions as a precursor to the fair opening. Richard Hoggart, in his 1957 landmark work *Uses of Literacy*, identifies the fairground as part of his litany of aspects of attack on working class cultural standards, drawing on the demise of the carved horse as a precursor to his distrust of modernism and imported American pop culture. Fairground music is implicated here, with Hoggart bemoaning the replacement of old organs with 'bigger and louder relay systems' (Hoggart 1957: 126). However, for the visitor to the fairground, this sound was irresistible.

There is a groundswell of testimony that goes against Hoggart's cautioning. A common response was how the music is somehow elevated and enervated on the fairground, a general effect not necessarily related to a particular ride or aspect of the fairground, but the whole experience. The sound of the fairground extends the physical border of the fairground itself, and a respondent (male, 60s) impressed upon me how this sound still excites him: 'I hear the music and my adrenalin still starts pumping'. Another respondent (male, 70s) simply states how hearing '60s music, Roy Orbison' on the fairground 'made people go bananas, you got goosebumps'. The music and overarching soundscape varies whilst the fairground is open, with set patterns determined by the time of day, around the

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<sup>6</sup> The Benson family were the fairground operators local to Hanna's home county of Sussex.

<sup>7</sup> From personal email conversation.



crossing over into the evening trade as a kind of curfew when ‘the rides get a bit faster and the music gets louder’ (Lovell 1989). My research into the dense notebooks of Jack Leeson at the National Fairground Archive support Lovell’s claim that the daytime fairground of the 1950s consists of predominantly ‘happy sounding sounds from the top 10’.<sup>8</sup>

This affordance is continued in to the modern era, such that a teenager at Stamford stated that the fairground offered her ‘old club music, up to date club sounds, my music’, whilst an older respondent (male, 50s) felt that the fairground made ‘modern music sound good, creating a frenzy’.

### **Music and motion**

Listening to music on the fairground is enhanced through effects on the sound associated with rides via movement, what I consider as ‘translating modes’ that add value and experience to the music, or imprint it with a unique connection to other senses.

Experiencing sound-in-motion occurs on many rides that feature centripetal speakers and an interiorized sound experience. An enclosed round ride such as the Ark Speedway or Waltzer has up to 4 speakers mounted equidistant on the circumference of the structure (as well as a large bass speaker laid flat on the ground underneath the ride) and riders will rapidly move away (and towards) speakers in an accelerating motion whilst hearing the music predominantly with their outward facing (left, due to clockwise rotation of ride) ear. This creates a repeating doppler effect rhythm, a regular distortion of the regular tempo of the music, and marks out a sound experience that is unique to the fairground. A more frenetic doppler effect occurs on a ride such as the Twist, where a rider is put under a complex motion of rotations within rotations and charts a rapid zig-zag path within the circular arena of the ride (see figures 1 and 2).

Lovell (1989) mentions the ‘slowing down of the music when the knife was engaged to start the ride’ as part of the routing of the power supply away from lighting (which would subsequently flicker) and music, and this merging of motion and inadvertent effect on the music resurfaces in much of the testimony of fairground memories. The momentary slowing of the music signals that the ride is about to commence, and thrill through anticipation is transformed into the pure thrill of the ride, triggered by an audible glitch in the music flow.

Other rides enhance the music by allowing an ‘acting out’ of songs that either denote or connote movement that can be attained through the ride – either directly such as references to spinning around translated to the spinning movement of a Waltzer, or

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<sup>8</sup> Consulted notebooks (catalogued at 178P1.6-29) entail his observations and indexes to photographs during his visits to fairs from the 1950s onwards. Leeson was primarily interested in the technical development of fairground machinery and tended to restrict his visits to daytime hours. He noted occasionally the ‘tunes being played on the panatropes’ and these were all what I would consider within Lovell’s definition of ‘happy sounding’ I have extensively transcribed Leeson’s musical observations but have not incorporated them into this article. Prominent titles noted include Marvin Rainwater ‘Whole Lotta Woman’, Connie Francis ‘Who’s Sorry Now?’ and ‘Stupid Cupid’, The Coasters ‘Yakety Yak’ and Cliff Richard and the Drifters ‘Living Doll’.



Figure 1 – Twist ride with inward facing speakers visible

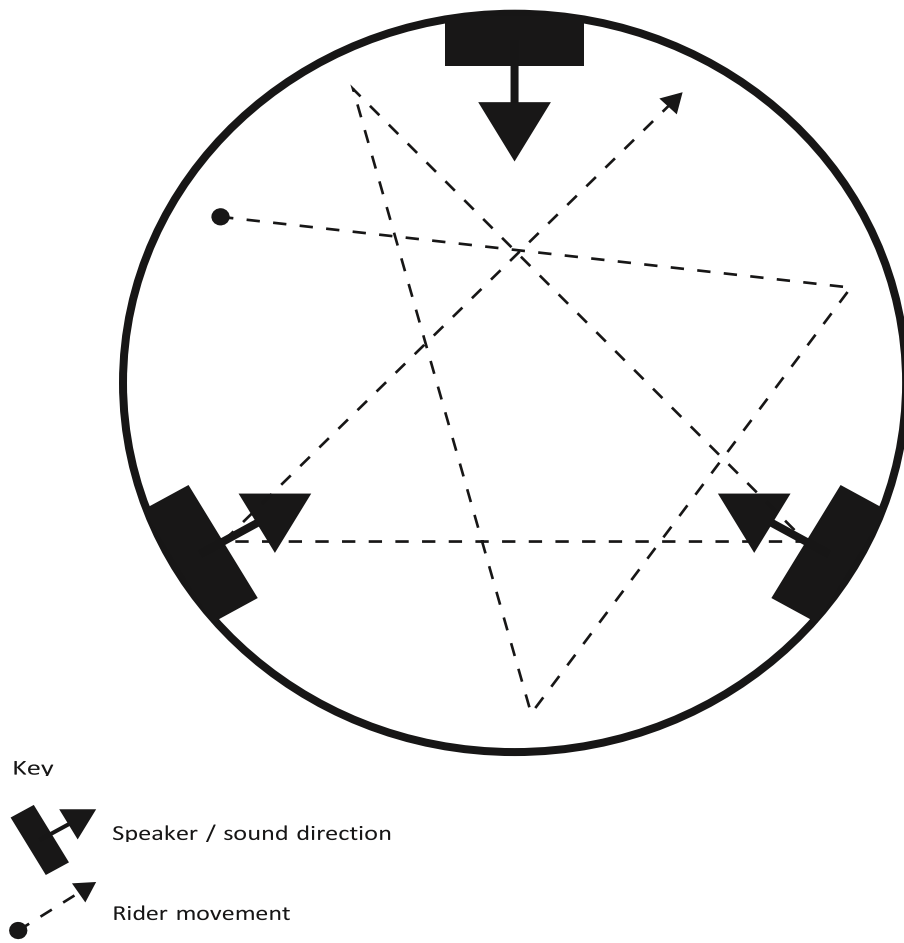


Figure 2 – motion around the Twist ride

vicariously with references to motorbikes translated to the simulative ride of the Ark Speedway. These developing nuances between ride types can be considered as a furthering of entrainment, particularly with the Ark Speedway and Waltzer. The former provides simulative motorbikes that resonate with Willis (1978: 72), who suggests homologies between rock and roll music, rhythm and riding a motorbike. The motion of the Ark Speedway merges with the expressive content of the songs (lyrics and general sounds) such that the narrative of records can be acted out by the punter on the ride. Narratives of journey suitable to sitting astride a fairground motorbike or *Easy Rider* chopper include classic finding/losing love stories, epiphanic deliverance within a scene (Northern Soul narratives about finding true destiny 'out on the floor') as well as stories of the motorbike itself (Shangri Las 'Leader of the Pack' being a good example, charting on release in 1964 but also charting on re-release in 1972 and 1976). The Ark Speedway also worked well with many glam records on the popular axis (Sweet and Mud as opposed to arty glam of Roxy Music) which played with a motorbike theme, allowing an unexpected popularity of some heavy metal records on the ride. Chambers (1985: 122) identifies 'the road as a central metaphor' in heavy metal, and a popular song played on the Ark Speedway was Hawkwind's 'Silver Machine' (1972) which also saw a quick succession of rereleasing in 1976 and 1978. The track is post-hoc claimed as proto-punk sound, with its initial situating slightly outside of both the heavy rock and over-elaborate prog genres. Early funk anthems such as Brass Construction's 'Movin'' clearly exuded a sense of journey in its lyrics, whilst another proto-punk anomaly can also be recalled here, with Chris Spedding's 'Motor Bikin'' released in 1975 and forming a hit on the fairground Speedway Ark.<sup>9</sup>

The Waltzer came to prominence with the rise of euphoric and polyrhythmic disco music, a sound that set out to challenge what Dyer (1979) called the 'disembodied eroticism' of its music contemporaries. A ride on the Waltzer involves pure abandon and a randomized (but frenetic) motion providing 'anti-structure' to the Ark Speedway's cool and linear narrative. Following Donna Summer's breathlessly structured 1977 release 'I Feel Love', the Waltzer grew in popularity to take a key role as 1990s rave and dance music resounded through the fairground.

Testimony gathered from research includes numerous examples of music matched to rides. Hanna (1988) declares that 'Jerry Lee Lewis records always sounded particularly well on Skids rides because they were very trebly. His jangling piano could always be heard over the clattering of the cars when at full speed'. This memory is forged from the cacophony of the whole experience, the Skid being an incredibly noisy ride and certain recognisable aspects of the music fighting for audible superiority. An equally strong and vivid memory is by a

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<sup>9</sup> Spedding is something of a slippery musician to place into a genre. As well as being part of the novelty band the Wombles he found most success as a much sought-after session musician. 'Motor Bikin'' was his main solo hit and he appeared as leather-clad rocker to promote the work. He would attempt various other driving themed songs such as 'Jump in my Car' and 'Truck Drivin' Man' in the immediate years to try and replicate the success. When this failed he became close to the punk movement and had connections to producing and playing sessions for the Sex Pistols.

fairground enthusiast (male, 50s) who recalls his time as a young boy and a teenager on the Yorkshire fairgrounds:

The first Waltzer I ever rode on was Michael Albert Collins' machine at Rotherham Statts in 1969. The machine was new that year and stood out because it just looked so colourful and clean. It was an amazing ride that Friday night to 'Sugar Sugar' by The Archies. 'Sugar Sugar' was playing on virtually every machine that night ... Whenever I hear 'Nutbush City Limits' by Ike & Tina Turner or 'That Lady' by The Isley Brothers I'm immediately transported back to riding Marshall Waddington's Speedway in about 1972 or 73, with the exotic blue lights around the arched bottom edge of the rounding boards flashing away, and a strobe enhancing the experience of speed. Inside the front quarterings was 'Patrons Ride At Own Risk' which made the ride that bit more exciting and dangerous. Magic really.

His later years are equally defined by rides and music:

Any proper Motown takes me back to Waltzers. A Maxwell Waltzer and pumping Motown are enough to make the hairs stand up on the back of my neck. As for the Albert Evans machine it has to be a ride on it at Hull Fair in 1985 to the sound of 'Rage Hard' by Frankie Goes To Hollywood that really stands out.

These vivid memories are complex modes of time travel; the music heard in the present takes the respondent back to the time and place of the specific ride, and furthermore, start to link aspects of the machine in terms of motion or special effects (lighting, decoration).

### **Conclusion: a subcultural reading of the fairground?**

The practice of isometrically conflating subcultural membership with being a fan and consumer of specific music genres (particular to the UK and its evolving and bifurcating post-1945 scenes) is something that flourished within academia. This initial work on subcultures came with a further embedded presence linking the subculture to various meanings around class resistance often unbeknownst to the mod, rocker or punk. Later work in post-subcultural theory such as Muggleton (2000) has challenged this 'resistance through ritual' orthodoxy where theory privileges over ethnography, however work discussing everyday appreciation of music scenes disembedded from involvement in subcultures is less prevalent. Laughey (2006) provides a good insight into music consumption and interaction in everyday life, taking a deliberate stance against the monopolisation of music consumption through subcultural theory, however this work swings towards the other extreme.

My work so far in this article has avoided shoe-horning analysis into a subcultural framework, whereby music is appreciated only through a wider set of strictures encompassing dress, hangout, argot, posture and modes of consumption, and the article

hopefully contributes to a more open critical appreciation of music. However, whilst it is possible for teenagers and other fairground audiences to enjoy both general music and genre music passionately without investing in the wider subcultural identity, there is a significant proportion of music fans who opt for wider subcultural engagement and associated set of 'rules'. I conclude this article with a consideration of how the fairground links to such subcultures.

The fairground has combined in multiple ways with the advent and bifurcative onset of post-1945 music subcultures, from the early days of rock and roll through to the hyper-granular niche-oriented club cultures of the present. The key engagement with these subcultures is generally through the music itself, with the fair looking to maximize its attraction to specific audiences. Thus, whilst a general appeal to mainstream pop would have been a possible sensible option to attract a family audience, and such a strategy is followed in the daytime, there is also evidence of fairgrounds establishing a subcultural sound to appeal to sections of the teenage market. A forward-thinking ride operator would be capable of gauging the field and alternating their music accordingly dependent upon the nature of the crowd; they would need to know the right genres to play, and the right tracks within those genres. Testimony above links the early music scenes to the fairground, with specific sounds of the time seemingly sounding better or special when played through a fairground speaker or experienced on a hurtling ride. An attraction to the fairground as a space where the musical essence of the subculture is enhanced is impossible to disarticulate from this overarching enhancement of ALL music, though subcultural youth did congregate on the fairground with purpose. Smiths' guitarist and co-songwriter Johnny Marr (2016: 27) recalls in his autobiography:

My favourite place for clothes was Wythenshawe Park Fair, which came to the neighbourhood for three days every Easter. It was a ten-minute walk from my front door and was the highlight of the year for kids from all over south Manchester, who came to find adventure and engage in all sorts of teenage activity while trying to avoid the inevitable threat of violence that could break out at any time. Every minute was action-packed, and I'd be there from when the first ride started in the morning until the last ride stopped at night. I'd hang around the Speedway and the Waltzers and take in everything. Girls would be screaming as they whizzed by, and 'Blockbuster!' and 'School's Out' would blare from the loudspeakers above the racket and commotion. There was a brand-new movement in pop music that was reclaiming the brash energy of rock'n'roll and was built on trashy guitars, tribal drums and stomping beats.

Marr's passage of speech captures much of the thrust of my article, but he introduces the quote by using the fairground as a place for displaying and viewing clothes in what is the nascent glam rock subculture. He also introduces the threat of violence associated with the fairground.

In spatial terms, the fairground operates like a festival, appropriating a bounded area and temporarily repurposing it for a hybrid mix of festivities. However, the analogy to a festival abruptly ends there, as this would suggest that the fair projects itself as a purposeful subcultural space. Whilst there are ample studies on the broader notion of city scenes in the (post)subcultural context (Cohen et al 2014; Bennett and Peterson 2004) the link between subcultures and inter-urban spaces is relatively unexplored. Gelder (2007: 3) sets out what he describes as a set of 'cultural logics' for subcultures and includes the suggestion that 'subcultures generally come together outside of the domestic sphere, away from home and family'. Whilst this statement might seem obvious, it can be extended from the designated nature of certain types of territory (cafes and bars for mods, dance halls for teds, greasy spoon cafes for rockers, the hallowed ground of the various northern soul venues) to undesignated spaces of a non-specific nature. This then combines with two further cultural logics proposed by Gelder, the notion of excessive expression and the opposition to banality of mass culture, which can be combined and extended to present a sort of territoriality, showmanship and hostility. Thus, subcultures may deliberately set against other subcultures, either by transgressing into a designated domain or by identifying a non-designated domain as a site for conflict. The most celebrated example of this is the series of staged clashes at English seaside resorts between mods and rockers, elaborated in Cohen's 1972 work studying the aetiology of moral panics. Whilst Cohen focuses on the dynamics of the media and societal structures it is interesting to consider the nature of the seaside space, whether it is a space specifically designated and claimed by either (or both) of the subcultures or whether it is simply an agreed space to enact a pantomime style battle.<sup>10</sup> Other types of general space may be claimed by subcultural groups within the city, paralleled by the tendency of modern day youth cultures to just hang out in carved out niches in malls, parks or outside certain outlets (see McCulloch et al 2006).

Can we then suggest a subcultural space of the fairground? We cannot claim this through the type of music that the fair chooses to play, in terms of the fairground itself predetermining the subcultural space in much the same way a music festival would. However, there were times when subcultural battles did break out on the fairground; Cohen lists the key battles in the mods-rockers dispute and includes Woking Fair (May 1964) as a recorded fracas, whilst the fairground industry newspaper *World's Fair* lists an outbreak of violence between teddy boys and the fair itself at Abington Park, Northampton amidst the more regular reports of trouble at seaside amusement parks.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Cohen suggests a timeline of Easter 1964 at Clacton, Whitsuntide 1964 at Brighton, Bournemouth and Margate, August 1964 at Hastings, Easter 1965 at Brighton as the key events.

<sup>11</sup> 'Showmen thrash teddy boys', *World's Fair*, 20 August 1960, p1, 'Weather and gangs mar the Easter opening', *World's Fair*, 4 April 1970, p1, refers to 'gangs of skinheads and greasers terrorising holidaymakers on the seafront and keeping the police busy'. On the whole, the policy of *World's Fair* is to avoid reporting negative stories, so it is likely that more of these subcultural clashes occurred but remained unreported

It could also be claimed, and Marr's quote supports this on a number of levels, that the fairground is traditionally a site of transgression, performativity and scopophilia (both towards the tradition of exhibited artefacts and freaks and the watching of those doing the watching) such that visual subcultures and their associated 'folk devil' practices get maximum exposure. From the Edwardian dandy and menace of the teds, the jittery speed-gobbling and style-obsessed mods, the gender-challenging glam kids, through to the staged nihilistic style culture of punk, all parading on the fairground spaces, interstices and enclosures. Subcultural exhibitionists, such as Johnny Marr, would be drawn to the fairground through the Bakhtinian sense of transgressive carnival, to put themselves on show as part of a general atmosphere that resembles a living exhibition of celebrating the theatrically subverted and apparently degraded.

The reverse angle also offers some snippets, subcultural musicians and scene-setters using the fairground as a backdrop for their own publicity. In 1960, a formative moment for the band, the Beatles were famously photographed by Astrid Kirchherr in Hamburg sitting amongst the trucks and paraphernalia of a closed Hugo Hasse funfair. This evoked a 'gaff-lad' image, a person who worked at the fair and had no roots, a person who mythically went from town to town and had the pick of the girls who attended the fair, drawing them in with acrobatic skills and a mix of engine grease and hair cream, an image later nurtured by singer David Essex in the 1973 film *That'll Be the Day*. Harrison (1998: 94) reproduces an image from *Sunday Times Colour Magazine* (2 August 1964), an early example of the first glimpses of colour in media, when popular features included subcultures and pop art. Here a pair of immaculately styled mods are depicted posing at the fairground, outside the Mummy horror show.

This brings us full circle back to fairground and its music; as pure thrill, as thrilling sound, as thrilling space, of posing, of experiencing outside the gaze of adults and authority, of glimpsing ways of experiencing music not yet available, accessible or permissible to you, but actually offering something much more exciting and unique in the here and now of the fairground.

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