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'Sweet Saturday Night': British Music Hall and the First World War

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Rupture and continuity are the bread and butter of the historian's sandwich. Neither is, generally speaking, absent from a given historical earthquake, but they may be present in many different forms. The Great War as 'great divide' has been explored in the historiography in a number of manners. For Arthur Marwick,[1] the war was 'The Deluge', and this biblical image was chosen to suggest the irrevocable social changes (sometimes positive, he felt) brought about by the conflict. For Paul Fussell,[2] the war was a moment of enduring transformation of aesthetic modes of expression: the experiences of the canonical creative minds of that generation, he claims, led to their rejecting of the old, Romantic ways of seeing the world. How far can such views of rupture extend to cultural production in its widest sense? To describe a change in 'mentalities', in 'structures of feeling', or in the *zeitgeist,* is a notoriously hazardous activity, not least because, as Alexandra Carter reminds us, 'the ideologies of any period are diverse and contested'.[3] This chapter will look at the specific case of music-hall industries and repertoires, to assess the relative weight of rupture and continuity put in motion by this first total war. That is to say, it will look at this mass activity of the working class to see what it might show us about a hypothetical 'great divide', in terms of not only Britain's musical institutions and industries, but also people's world view and cultural imagination.

For the centre of gravity of music-hall audiences was the working class, a sector of the population which has been little considered in the history of culture during the war, and in the debates about rupture and continuity. The working class in the British population at the time was more central than in most other countries—compared to France or Italy, for example, the weight of the peasantry was far less. The 1911 UK census showed that, of a working

population of fifteen and a half million, there were over a million miners, over a million textile workers, and over a million domestic servants, to name but three important segments. These groups were joined in the cheap seats at the music hall by many thousands of the low-grade shop and office workers, railway clerks, and messengers thrown up by the rapidly modernizing British industries. Music-hall managers worked hard to attract (mostly for their symbolic value) more well-off sections of the middle class, but they could not do without the working-class masses. The singers chose working-class names (Harry, Daisy, Ernie, Florrie, or Dan), often sang in working-class dialect, and put the everyday life of ordinary people into most of their songs.

This chapter looks at the most popular songs of the time, those which were known by millions of people and which could make large amounts of money, if the author and artiste managed to pinpoint that sense of what the audience wanted to hear a particular year (though no-one had the magic touch). My work over recent years has been based on the thousands of popular songs in the archives of the British Library and represents the first attempt to work on a large and representative sample of songs from the period.[4]

For song distribution at the time, there were two key conduits. Firstly, there was live performance, mostly in music halls. Considerable expansion in Edwardian times had led to there being, by 1910, sixty-three music halls in London and 254 in the rest of the country.[5] A larger hall could sell 70,000 tickets a week, and more than a million tickets were sold in London each week.[6] In the northern industrial town of Burnley, the two main music halls could seat seven thousand people a night between them—that is, more than 5% of the town's population![7] The second conduit was published sheet music, used by the many thousands of street singers and on the three million pianos which, it is estimated, existed in Britain shortly before the outbreak of the war. A music-hall hit could sell a million copies in sheet music. By 1910, seventy-five to 100,000 pianos were manufactured in Britain every year, and perhaps

25,000 were imported. These instruments were bought on hire purchase over two or three years[8]; there was, indeed, one piano for every fifteen British people. This meant almost every social layer had access to them, even if, as Cyril Ehrlich underlines, ‘a particularly important new group of consumers were the rapidly expanding white-collar workers—schoolteachers, clerks, commercial travellers, and low-level managers, earning between 150 and 300 pounds a year’.[9]

Although gramophones were becoming more common, records remained marginal to popular music distribution.[10] The best-selling hit song ‘Take Me Back to Dear old Blighty’ had sold 38,000 records by March 1917,[11] whereas it sold hundreds of thousands of copies in sheet music, and, as a pantomime hit, would have been heard by millions of people in dozens of shows. In the middle of the war, for the price of the cheapest gramophone, one could buy 220 cheap tickets for the music hall.

Thus, it is music-hall song, live and in sheet music, which is the key repertoire to study in this period, and since it is a genre which reacts to changes in social and political life with a large number of topical songs, it is here that we can search for any signs of a radical break in approach during and after the war. Other genres did not have the same link with the mass of the working class. English folk song, enthusiastically lectured about in civic halls and Mechanics’ Institutes across the country by its middle-class aficionados, and introduced to many soldiers in training camps with official army backing, was rarely susceptible to rapid change. Its songs of harvests and sowing, village fairs, the cycle of the seasons, witchcraft, and highwaymen, did not adapt to the arrival of war, and appealed little to working-class audiences in towns, or to the working-class armies of millions being built up.[12]

As for art music, working people often enjoyed it, and certainly thought they should listen to it, since it seemed to be imbued with magical respectability (as the musicians disguised themselves as bourgeois, although they were generally poorly paid,[13] and the

audience listened in silence). And indeed, workers not infrequently did listen. The cheap classical concerts, organized by town halls around the country to 'elevate' the working class, played to full houses, and continued during the war, once they had replaced the German and Austrian works in their repertoire. Lena Ashwell's concert party tours, which included Shakespearean recital, classical music, and only one or two music-hall choruses to round off the evening, were tremendously popular on the Western Front.[14] There were also many music halls which included a classical music turn in the evening's entertainment (extracts from Wagner's operas were programmed in some houses just before the outbreak of war). But, from a quantitative point of view, classical music was infinitely less present than music-hall variety in working people's lives.

Let us then examine what happened to music hall in Britain in 1914, keeping in mind that the popular music production came as a result of many different influences and forces: the size of the industry; the key movers and shakers; the demands and habits of the audiences and their everyday lives and dreams; the priorities of the theatre managers and other commercial concerns; and the skills and habits of the artistes. The entire machine was gigantic, and therefore unlikely to shift quickly: it was not dependent on any small, self-reflective artistic milieu with the power to change direction swiftly.

The Outbreak of War

The war dawned on a powerful music industry which was determined to show its respectability through voluble patriotism, but within which different actors were scrambling to position themselves in the new context, in order to ensure that the war would not harm them commercially. Whether artistes or theatre chains, songwriters or record companies, each actor was obliged to take into account this new factor in their professional lives. Theatre managers and owners were, by this time, in charge of tightly-run businesses, expected to show a healthy profit (or go to the wall), and many establishments were quoted on the stock market.

The owners and managers were also in the process of completely integrating local elites. This was no doubt why they were so obsessed with 'respectability' and the elimination of 'vulgarity': their profession had a bad reputation to shake off, partly due to its past in fairground entertainment.[15] The arrival of the war provoked fears among owners of a collapse in takings: it was not known how audiences would respond to light entertainment in dark times, so particular measures were taken to safeguard profitability. Aside from this, being part of the elite meant being enthusiastically in favour of British victory, and the theatre owners even encouraged recruitment speeches on stage (whereas the Church of England, for example, though it supported the war, refused to have recruiting speeches given by clergy from the pulpit).[16]

The singers, constantly on tour, endlessly negotiating with theatres for higher fees or more prominent billing, and quite often living a precarious existence, frequently out of work, had also both an economic and a political response to the war. From an economic point of view, they too were worried that audience numbers would collapse, resulting in unemployment. Their trade union, the Variety Artistes' Federation, negotiated with the owners' organizations a sharing scheme in which artistes accept reduced wages on a pro-rata basis to takings, in the hope that fewer theatres would close. This agreement was in fact only to last a few months: the expected collapse did not happen, and indeed within six months box office takings were higher than before. For the remaining years of the conflict, the variety theatres would be full, boosted by the presence of soldiers on leave with money to spend (there was little to spend it on in France or Egypt), and also by the rising incomes of working-class civilians due to full employment and increased job opportunities for women.

The political approach of singers and songwriters seems to have been wholly opportunistic. The music-hall singers felt themselves more showmen and women than *auteurs*, so adding a (generally amusing) 'war verse' to an existing favourite song to keep it

up to date was a common reaction to the coming of the war. Advertisements in the trade press offered to add war verses to any existing song, for a small fee.[17] The typical format of a comic music-hall song and its refrain —vague and suggestive—made this practicable.

Closely in tune with what working-class audiences wanted to sing along to, the artistes were, perhaps surprisingly, careful not to propose songs about hating or killing Germans. Other countries had fewer scruples: the French repertoire had many songs about hating Germans. The US repertoire (once the country had joined in the war) included such numbers as:

Big Chief Kill-a-Hun
Run the Hun
Bury the Hun
Old Satan Gets the Hun
Don't Quit until Every Hun is Hit
Hunting the Hun[18]

Yet the German people had been close to the English before 1914, and especially so in the popular music milieu: the 'German band' was a staple of street entertainment. This may well be the reason that, although xenophobic attitudes to Germans appeared on the music-hall stage in dramatic sketches,[19] they did not appear in sing-along numbers. It is one thing to watch a sketch, but quite another to sing along enthusiastically. A further reason may have been the inappropriateness of the expression of feelings of anger and hate in a song repertoire which was unfailingly jolly.

The priority of singers, as ever, was to offer audiences original but non-controversial songs, since successful sing-along can only be built around the consensual or the ambiguous. Hence the repertoire at the very beginning of the war could be loudly patriotic and included many recruitment songs, but the latter disappeared almost completely after the first few months. In the greatest hits collection of 1915, published by Francis and Day, the biggest of the music publishers,[20] there is not a single recruitment song, although outside the theatres, the recruitment campaign was at its height. (Its eventual weakness led to the introduction of

compulsion in the spring of 1916.) The 1914 songs about war, then, had titles such as the following:

Be a Soldier, be a Man!
Belgium Put the Kibosh up the Kaiser[21]
Boys in Khaki, Boys in Blue[22]
England Thy Name
For the Honour of Dear Old England
Good Luck, Little French Soldier Man!
Hands Off, Germany!
Jolly Good Luck to the Girl Who Loves a Soldier!
March on to Berlin!
Men of England, You Have Got to Go!
My Little Red Cross Girl
My Volunteer (He's Come from His Desk in the City)
Our Brave Colonials
Sandy Boy, My Soldier Laddy
Sister Susie's sewing Shirts for Soldiers
Soldiers of the King
The Army of Today's All Right
The Germans Are Coming, So They Say
The Homes They Leave Behind
The Kaiser's Little Walk to France
The Red Cross Nurse
They Sang 'God Save our King'[23]
Three Cheers for Little Belgium[24]
Tommy Is as Good a Man as Any Knight of Old
Waltzing Willie
Watch Me Do the Goosestep
We Didn't Want a European War
We're All Under the Same Old Flag.
Well Done Little Ones, Bravo Belgian boys
When an Irishman Goes Fighting
Won't you Join the army?
You Made Us Fight You, We Didn't Want to Do it.
You Ought to Join!
Your King and Country want you[25]

As well as general enthusiasm for war, many of these songs carried out specific and varied ideological work, useful to the war drive. The song 'They sang "God save the King"', for example, presents an Englishman, a Scotsman, a Welshman, and an Irishman joining forces to fight for the empire, and underlines the idea that to fight for Britain did not mean to love one's own constituent part of the UK any less:

'Should auld acquaintance be forgot'
The Scotsman sang with pride
'Men of Harlech, march to glory'
The gallant Welshman cried
'God save Ireland' sang a hero
With a real old Irish swing
Then every mother's son proudly held a gun
And sang 'God Save Our King!'

Other songs, such as 'Belgium Put the Kibosh up the Kaiser', attempted to reassure people that the war was going well, whereas 'We Didn't Want a European War' gave the case for Britain's involvement, and replied to those who might have felt their country could stay out of the conflict. It was 'a stirring marching song, the words of which. . . embody a declaration of belief in the righteousness of [our] cause'.[26] Otherwise, 'Our Brave Colonials' underlined that traditional British prejudices against colonial peoples should be put aside for the sake of victory.[27] The 1915 song 'John Bull's Little Khaki Coon' combined paternalistic racism with admiration for the fighting skills of African troops.

Although the necessity and the rightness of the war was the majority opinion, this was not an opinion which came out of nowhere: fierce campaigning from key intellectuals, church leaders, and trade union leaders worked at shoring up this position. Support for the cause of the empire was, for example, the automatic response of the majority of feminist leaders. The Women's Social and Political Union, under the direction of Emmeline Pankhurst, went further than the other organizations: the name of its paper was changed from *The Suffragette* to *Britannia*, and it launched a campaign to bring in military conscription for men. Millicent Fawcett, president of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, who had previously been opposed to war, changed her position once the conflict began. Another leader, Mona Granville, spoke on the platform at army recruitment rallies. Yet the importance of music-hall songs, sung by the stars who were heroes and heroines to working-class audiences, should not

be underestimated. These audiences may well have been far more receptive to the discourses of singing stars than to those of ‘posh’ bishops, feminists or writers.

Changing the Subject

The songs of the later war years often avoided mentioning the war in any way. Dixieland songs and Irish songs, dreaming of an imagined distant rural paradise which audiences were very unlikely to visit, were tremendously popular (and geographically vague: ‘Dixieland’ songs included other ‘exotic’ spaces in the United States).[28] Here are some of the popular titles:

Night-time down in Dixie
Are You from Dixie?
Back Home in Tennessee
They Call it Dixieland
Mixing in Dixie
Rock a Bye Your Baby with a Dixie Melody
When the Sun Goes Down in Dixie
They're Calling Me in Tennessee
Just Try to Picture Me Back Home in Tennessee
My Tennessee, Is That You Calling Me?
My Old Kentucky Home[29]
It's a Long Long Way to My Home in Kentucky
Down Texas Way
When It’s Honeysuckle Time in Maryland.
Off to Carolina
I Want to Go Back to Michigan
Ireland Must Be Heaven for My Mother Comes from There[30]
I’ll Be Back in Old Ireland Some Day
A Little Town in Ireland.
Come Back to Ireland and Me
I’m Coming Back to Old Kilkenny
For Killarney and You[31]

Also set far from war-bruised Britain and France, although upmarket of the music-hall scene, were the two most popular musical comedies of the war years: *Chu Chin Chow* (reaching a record 2,238 shows) and *The Maid of the Mountains* (1,325 shows). The first was a version of *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*, set in China and noted for its extravagant costumes and sets

and ‘exotic’ dancing, while the second was set among bandits in the mountains of Italy, with a message well conveyed by one of its hit songs, ‘Love Will Find a Way’.

When they did speak of war, the songs concentrated on everyday civilian frustrations and joys, or on the dream of the war ending. The hit ‘Keep the Home Fires Burning’ is emblematic of the latter category of songs, with its haunting sing-along chorus:[32]

> Keep the home fires burning,
> While your hearts are yearning,
> Though your lads are far away
> They dream of home.
> There's a silver lining
> Through the dark clouds shining,
> Turn the dark cloud inside out
> 'Til the boys come home!

Although the verses of this song declare that the families were right to send their boys to war, there is no jingoism or glorification of the conflict, and the sing-along chorus concentrates on the dream of the end of the war. Songs from the last year of the war, when referring directly to the conflict, do so in a fatalistic manner, not connected to determination for glorious victory. Here are some 1918 song titles:

> As the Boys Come Home Again
> We Must Keep Keeping On
> When the Lights Go Up and the Boys Come Back
> At the End of a Vale of Shadows
> Be a Good Little Girl While I’m Away
> Every Day Is One Day Nearer
> Priceless Percy with the One Pip Up[33]
> I Do Miss the Men
> There’s a Great Big Dugout in My Heart for You
> Keep the Trench Fires Going
> The Star that Leads Me Home

Civilian frustrations, particularly about shortages, rationing, and conscription, also appear in song lyrics during the later war years, as in the following:

> Sugar
> My Meatless Day
> Lloyd George’s Beer[34]
> In These Hard Times
> The Curfew Bell

We’ve Got to Put Up with It Now
You Must Have a Ticket for That
Coupons for Kisses
Never Mind the Food Controller, We’ll Live on Love[35]
Eat Less Bread
War Bread
On His First Day Home from Leave
Since Father Joined the Home Defence

Other songs, such as these below, dealt with anxiety about the new roles available for women:

The Ladies’ Football Club
Dance of the Fire Brigade Girls
The Lady Bus Conductor
Tilly the Typist
Since My Wife Joined the Waac
Where Are the Girls of the Old Brigade?[36]
My Little Ammunition Girl
Mother’s sitting knitting little mittens for the navy

Songs about women’s new roles especially illustrate the psychological dynamic of music-hall song. Ones unambiguously celebrating the changes in female roles, or clearly denouncing them, would be unlikely to gain a consensus in the Saturday night audience. But songs expressing anxiety about such changes, or reassuring people that women were still the same fundamentally, were common, such as in ‘Where are the Girls of the Old Brigade’:

Have you noticed what the girls are doing now
It's simply wonderful, simply wonderful
One will drive a motor, while another drives a plough
And one will chase a bullock
When she's told to milk a cow
The barmaid I used to flirt and frivol with
She's an ammunitions maker, so I hear
Quite a lady since the war, and the wages she can draw
Must be more than she can draw for drawing beer!

Chorus:
Where are the girls of the old brigade?
The girls of the once upon a time
I've been looking around
And there's only one consolation to be found
The old girl's still there, old girl, new style!
And whether it's the old girl or whether it's the new
It's the same piece of petticoat all the while.

Here we see a number of contradictions. The women's new roles are 'wonderful' yet they are also mocked in a traditional and rather vicious manner (the 'joke' about milking a bull is a very old insult). The chorus invites the audience to celebrate the idea that women remain, essentially, sexual objects ('a piece of petticoat'). The communication structure of this fascinating song is all the more complex in that it was a hit for Vesta Tilley, a woman who performed dressed as a man, and, for this song, as a faintly ridiculous military officer. Each member of the audience had considerable leeway to take from the song the viewpoint he or she wished. As long as they sang along, the theatre manager was satisfied.

In the 1918 repertoire, there was also a series of humorous, almost cynical, treatments of the war. As the government raised the age of those called up to fight, the song 'Forty-Nine and in the Army' mocked the idea that older men were in good enough shape to fight.[37]

> 49 isn't it fine
> Though I'm weakly across the chest
> And gouty about the knees
> I'm learning to shoulder arms
> But I'd rather be standing at ease!
>
> 49 and in the army.
> And soon I will be in the fighting line,
> If somebody holds me rifle,
> While I borrow a pair of steps,
> I'll be over the top and at 'em at 49!

Similarly, 'The Military Representative' portrayed a foolish and short-sighted officer on a tribunal refusing to exempt from military service a ninety-one-year-old man, and another man who was in fact already dead. For these songs too, it must be remembered that unless such sentiments had been very widespread indeed, no singer would have risked presenting them on stage for chorus singing. Such songs as 'Coupons for Kisses' used the excuse of the rationing system to produce a 'daring' song, while songs like 'Priceless Percy with His One Pip Up' and 'First I Went and Won the DCM' made fun of the arrogance of some soldiers' bragging, in a situation where the numbers of medals available was in very rapid expansion, as all stops were being pulled out to maintain morale.

Still, the vast majority of songs did not refer to the war in any way at all, and demonstrated rather a continuity with pre-war themes, concentrating on the everyday, the flirtatious, fantasy, and occasionally the politically topical. All the following songs are from 1915:

A Broken Doll[38]
Any Old Song my Mother Sings
Baa Lambs
Bread and Marmalade[39]
Dance with Your Uncle Joseph
Everybody Loves Me but the Girl I Love
Father's Got the Sack from the Waterworks
Frightened to Go to Sleep Again[40]
Here You Are Again, Miss Crinoline
I Had a Devil of a Time Last Night
I'd Like to Shake Shakespeare
If You Can't Get a Girl in the Summertime[41]
If You Want to Get On in Revue[42]
It's the Girls that Make the Seaside
Meet Me by Moonlight, Mary
My Bonnie Lassie
My Dapper Little Flapper
Pretty Patty's Proud of Her Pink Print Dress
The Bird on Nellie's Hat[43]

Themes and lyrics were not transformed by the arrival of total war. The subject of war was often avoided, and so much of war was omitted—no one sang of killing, no one sang of hate, and almost no one sang of dying or being disfigured. There is no popular song equivalent of '*Dulce et Decorum Est*'. The social context, the affective alliances mobilized,[44] and the industry itself, are not analogous to the milieus producing poetry or novels. A song had to make a Saturday night audience want to sing along after having enjoyed the elephant act, perhaps, and while looking forward to the clog-dancing competition.

In some ways, British popular song repertoire diverges dramatically from that of other countries involved in the war. France, as mentioned above, had plenty of songs about hating Germans,[45] and the joys of handling a machine gun or bayonet.[46] Other French songs of 1914-1918 illustrate questions of identity present in French society since the final decades of the

nineteenth century, including questions of national pride, national humiliation after being defeated by Germany in 1870, and the making of ‘real men’ through the rite of national military service. They also express the terrible difficulties inherent in the separation of couples and of the mutilation and death brought by the war. Amusing, tragic, moving or bawdy, ever trying to outwit the censor, the French wartime repertoire gives a rich treasure chest with which to examine people’s fears and fantasies. From infidelity to mutilation, national reconstruction to sexual impotence, few questions are not covered by the songs. Such is all in great contrast to the British repertoire, where tragic themes are universally avoided or treated very obliquely or with black humour.[47]

The reasons for this difference between British and French repertoires, while both countries were in the grips of total war, are to be found not in globalizing analyses of *zeitgeist*, but in the complex machine which is popular music production. French singers were generally working in smaller venues; singers were sometimes resident in one Parisian venue and building a faithful following who was more patient with innovation; French songwriters received royalty fees each time a song was performed, whereas British songwriters generally sold a piece (in the pub) for a one-off fee and this obliged them to put quantity before subtlety. British singers coming on stage, as the acrobats left, perhaps, had to grab attention quickly. The material machine producing the cultural product is crucial to our understanding of the repertoire.

We should remember, too, that total war came slowly. The war the British thought they were involved in in 1914 was a short, victorious one. Step by step, the government subordinated other activities to war: income taxes rose higher than they had ever been, women were told it was their patriotic duty to work in factories in far greater numbers than previously. It is perhaps not surprising that there was no sudden transformation in the nature

of the music-hall repertoire and industry. As the war dragged on, any adaptations made were made gradually.

Back to Business as Usual?

Did the end of the conflict, then, see a sharp divide? The songs of the early 1920s indicate no radical change. For a transformation of the repertoire to take place, there would have been a need either for a new generation of artistes to largely replace the previous one, or for a large number of artistes to change their attitude to the messages they wished to put across (to the extent that music-hall singers had any interest in 'message'). For a number of reasons that we will look at below, this did not happen.

One way of verifying this continuity, even if it is impressionistic, is by looking at the pre-war and post-war songs of some of the top music-hall stars. Harry Champion's 'The Old High Hat that I Was Married In'[48], recorded in 1911, is very similar in tone to 'In My Old White Spats' recorded in 1925.[49] In both cases, everyday humorous trivia and nostalgia are put across at high speed with a jaunty sing-along chorus. Maidie Scott recorded 'If the Managers Only Thought the Same as Mother' in 1912 and 'Being a Lady—I Can't' in 1919. Both these pieces presented a timid young woman worried about the opinions of her entourage, and the audience could mock her or sympathize, as they chose. Billy Merson's 1913 'The Spaniard that Blighted my Life',[50] 'Take an Old Woman's Advice' from 1911, and his 1920 'The Night I Appeared as Macbeth'[51] are similar in tone. An eccentric character wittily reflecting real human problems (jealousy and marital strife), painting caricatures in song, and strutting around larger than life on the stage: these productions remain within the music hall tradition, close to circus, rousing the crowds in large theatres without a microphone, and centred far more on theatrical ability than on trained voices or poetic depth. Ernie Mayne recorded 'Lloyd George's Beer' in 1917 and 'Our Little Garden Sub bub' in 1922, both of which mocked some new element in social life—in 1917, the reduction of the

alcohol content in beer and in 1922, the changes in housing. Numerous other examples are available. Jack Pleasants sang 'Give Me Another Small Port' in 1912 and 'It's My Bath Night Tonight' in 1922, comically transforming very everyday subjects or social types. Violet Lorraine's 'No More Stopping Out Late' of 1911 and her 'What a Little Moonlight Can Do' of 1934 give a similar impression of deep continuity, each singing of daring romantic possibilities, which are slightly naughty but never directly described.

In general, the music hall songs of the early 1920s maintained their leitmotifs from before the war: a neighbourly working-class tone, almost obligatory jollity, carefully policed flirtatiousness, and themes which included what was new in the world (new gadgets like the gramophone, new social roles such as the flapper). They concentrated on giving the audiences what they wanted: a not too expensive sing-along experience on a 'sweet Saturday night'.[52]

There were some changes, however. Firstly, there was a clear acceleration of the move towards romantic content. The 1916 song 'If You Were the Only Girl in the World' had been tremendously popular and did present something new on the music-hall stage: the loving duet.[53] This may have been because, in the horrors of wartime, public expression of emotion (even by white men)[54] was more acceptable than it had previously been. Fascinatingly, the duo who sang this piece, Violet Lorraine and George Robey, playing a revue, dressed as clownish middle-class characters, had been intending to sing the duet in a humorous tone. It was at the very last moment that Robey had the idea of 'singing it straight'.[55] Perhaps he had sensed that something had changed. A 1919 hit like 'I Want to Snuggle', advertised as 'an amorous appeal artistically jazzed'[56] might not have found its place as easily before the war. A one-page advert from Francis and Day's publishing house included this song along with twelve other titles focused on romance, including 'You Used to Want Me', 'Twas Then You Gave Me Love', 'I Wasn't Born to Be Lonesome', and 'Anywhere in the World with You'.

Although it is difficult to do statistical analyses on song themes, the presence of the emotional love relationship is clearly more pronounced than before the war.

The rise of less humorous emotional material may also have been due to ongoing changes in the economy of the music industry. Concentration of capital led to the rise of the revue, a full evening show which could go on tour as it was (in contrast with the music-hall formula of many independent fifteen-minute turns, each hired for a different length of time according to their popularity). The new show allowed artistic centralization, and the development of new features, such as troupes of dancing girls and more sophisticated special effects (revolving stages and so on). The development of the longer, artistically-centralized show meant the elimination of some of the individuality of the music-hall act, but it also meant that there was no longer the same need to 'hit the audience fast' since one had only fifteen minutes. For example, a romantic atmosphere could be built up, and a more sophisticated emotional rhythm could be imprinted on an evening's entertainment. For a while, it appeared that the old-style music-hall evening made up of various turns was being pushed by the revue into steep decline. From 1913, the London Hippodrome decided to produce only revue, and the following year the Palace followed suit.[57] In Bristol, the Empire suddenly switched to revue only in 1914. By 1917, there were thirty-two major revues touring Britain, as well as those showing in the capital.[58] In September of that year, of seventeen halls run by London Theatres of Variety, seven were presenting revues and ten traditional music hall. Moreover, those theatres which stayed with the old format often now integrated short revues, occupying half the evening.[59]

A second change which can be sensed in the post-war repertoire is that some of the entrenched cultural conservatism of music hall song was waning. Ragtime, for example, had been mercilessly mocked in many songs before the war, as seen through the following titles:

> Don't Drive Me Crazy with Your Ragtime Song (1912)
> There Ain't Gonna Be Any Ragtime (1913)

Don't Sing in Ragtime (1913)
Who Killed Ragtime? (1913)
Goodbye Mr Ragtime (1913)
That Ragtime Suffragette (1913)
John Willie's Ragtime Band (1914)[60]

Jazz had a far easier time of it after it arrived in Britain at the end of the war. Songs written about it generally have a positive tone, as in these examples:

That Blue-eyed Jazz Band
Everybody Loves a Jazz Band[61]
Ah Gotta Have Jazz
We've Got a Jazz Band Here[62]

Even though jazz could be occasionally mocked (as in 'The Hielan' Jazz' of 1924), it had, by the end of the war, become an accepted symbol of modernity. The war had certainly meant an unimaginably vast widening of experience for those who survived, and the more parochial of the music-hall themes may have seemed less attractive than before. Further work would be required to come up with a more definite analysis of this change.

A more important marker of modernity was new attitudes to women. Although songs like 'Women Haven't any Mercy on a Man' from 1919 echo the old misogynist music hall atmosphere, there is no wave of songs against suffrage in the 1920s, as the 1928 act moves into view. On a similar point, songs complaining about being dominated by one's wife are much less common in the ten years after the war than in the ten years before.

Continuity in the Music Industry?

Since live performance was at the centre of the song industry, and most performers were concerned above all with making a living, rather than developing a personal vision of societal change, the continuity of process within the industry is important to examine. The industry in 1919-1920 was changing slowly. The domination by the larger chains continued to affirm itself, and artistes were more likely than before to be members of the trade union (trade unions in general had grown considerably during the war).[63] The first editorial of 1920 in the

trade magazine *The Encore* looked back at editorials from the year 1919 and the issues they had dealt with. One discussed was the problem of the demobbed soldier who had gained some experience entertaining in the army and now wanted to turn professional after the war; established artistes were worried that there would be too many artistes on the market. A protectionist or even xenophobic spirit are evident in discussions of how to make sure German artistes did not make a comeback on the British stage (they had been very popular before the war). Working conditions, in particular the increasing demand for very late shows, were also a concern.

The general context within which the singer presented their work—fifteen or twenty-minute turns inserted between highly contrasting material—had, however, not, on the whole, changed. A representative description of part of an evening from 1920—'Tucker the singing violinist played and danced and sang, followed by a star ventriloquist, and a couple of first class and most rapid dancers with a mat'[64]—is still close to the shows of 1914, which featured such acts as 'the Welsh singing boxer', extracts from operas, animal acts, and American sharp-shooters, interspersed with the more standard singing turns.[65] This performance context thus continued to constitute a huge pressure encouraging comic content, stage stereotypes, and spectacular virtuosity, indeed almost anything able to get a reaction from the audience very quickly. Reflective, intimate, and even romantic content remained difficult (and as mentioned above, the absence of the microphone limited intimate or romantic voicing).

When did the break come?

If the war did not bring a great change, what did? It was the massive shift in the technology and modes of consumption linked to the rise of the talking movie, the filmed musical comedy, the generalization of the gramophone, and of music on radio. Famously *The Jazz Singer*, released in 1927, was the first talking movie, and a musical to boot. A year or so

later, ever more cinemas were being adapted for talking and singing movies. In 1928, such musical films as *The Singing Fool,*[66] *My Man,* and *Lights of New York* swept the world. The artistry (and the volume) of the songs in these films surpassed anything that the music hall could produce. In addition, the move towards dancing rather than sing-along as the central activity of popular music was beginning to influence the music being produced. As Ronald Pearsall points out concerning the 1920s, 'many popular songs were written with the twin demands of the gramophone record and the dance floor kept in mind'.[67] 'By the early twenties there were few fields of music untouched' by the gramophone, he adds .[68] From 1925, electrically recorded records began to be produced in Britain, which were far superior to previous recording methods, not least because the orchestra did not have to crowd round the recording horn while producing the disc. Records were still expensive products, and Elgar's second symphony on six discs cost two pounds—more than the cost of the cheapest gramophone, in the mid-twenties. Thus, by the end of the 1920s, estimates Pearsall, there were less than a hundred music halls in the whole of Great Britain.[69] It seems then that the break, from the point of view of the development of popular song, was caused by industry-specific and technological changes, not by changes in some general worldview brought about by the viciousness of total war. It seems, moreover, that the victory of a modernist vision in popular song lyrics—the breaking apart of the individual viewpoint, the rise of collage, bricolage, and multiple ambiguous voices which are difficult to position in any straightforward manner—came much later, in the 1960s, in a completely different, globalized song industry, when the Beatles' Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band or Bob Dylan's new folk explored new narrations and collections of images.

Conclusions

Why does all this have any importance? Firstly, those of us who are interested in history from below, the history of the mass of the people (who leave fewer individual records of their lives than do the elite), need to be sure we have accorded sufficient importance to what mattered to these people. And in many periods, popular song is one of their priorities. The question of the types of mediation present in popular culture between profit-making, popular consciousness, and class interest continue to provoke much debate, but carefully handled, popular song repertoires and processes allow a valuable contribution to cultural history.

For the period of the war, it is particularly important to avoid casting what people did to enjoy themselves, reassure themselves, and explore anxieties into the catch-all category of 'life on the home front': that is to say, life defined by the empire's military project as secondary to the main front. Ordinary people had many other, often more immediate priorities than seeing that the empire was on the winning side in the war. This conception fits into my wider perspective: the faded, yellowed sheet music which survives from the war years should not be used only to 'illustrate' history happening elsewhere, in grand ministerial offices or muddy trenches. Popular song is an activity which millions of people loved and insisted on finding time for, and participated enthusiastically in: It is not an illustration of history, but part of history. Although often unsophisticated, sentimental, and derivative, music hall song was a way that a generation of artistes helped their audiences mould their experience into a coherent representation, which was enjoyed collectively.

The rupture, then, did not take place with the war. The industry structures of touring individual artistes had not changed from 1910 to 1920. They weakened as revue and the dance hall rose, but they were not seriously damaged until the arrival of talking cinema and the generalization of the radio. The imaginary, jolly, flirtatious, homely world that sing-along working-class audiences wanted to inhabit on a Saturday night out was similar in 1920 to

what it was in 1910, because their lives had changed little, though there might be fewer domestic servants and more typists and shop assistants in the audience. The war was a dreadfully hard time for working-class people who lost loved ones or came back with horrific wounds. Yet it was also a time when full employment drove away the all too present spectre of hunger. Terrible trauma and deep mourning were common, but life soon got back to its—albeit fairly grim—normality. Life was (to the eye of a twenty-first century, first-world observer) unimaginably hard in wartime. Yet we rarely or never look at the lives of working-class people in the years before the war, when bitter poverty, the terror of unemployment, overcrowded housing, and very high rates of child mortality made for an existence we might also find unbearably hard. In 1910, 10% of children died before their first birthday. Industrial accidents were extremely common; tuberculosis killed tremendous numbers. And this hard life did not even have the shine of (perhaps imagined) 'heroism' which was accorded to the Tommies in wartime, and certainly has not been put under the spotlight by concerned historians. The war was not as much a rupture for working-class people as it was for more privileged social layers.

Jay Winter has written that with respect to cultural production in connection with the war years, there was relatively little difference between 'high' and 'low' culture: the universal need to express mourning brought the two together.[70] With respect to the music-hall, this is not the case, fundamentally because the material conditions which reign over production, selection, and distribution in this industry are so different than those of poetry, visual art, and even such productions as war memorials.[71]

This study of music hall shows the importance of contextualizing 'war songs'. Although there was plenty of mourning to be done in 1919, it may be that working-class layers were obliged to have many other priorities; certainly this is what is suggested by the content of popular song. These questions lead us to the debate about the status of music hall

song ('class expression or social control' as one writer put it,[72] or indeed 'mass culture' and/or 'popular culture'). Although I have not been able to cover this debate here, I do believe that song content reflected a selection of real anxieties and priorities of the ordinary people of Britain. Recently, global historians have emphasized that while the severe destruction and dislocation of societies by the First World War may have appeared to be a 'rupture' to British commentators, this was in many ways a continuation of the British nineteenth-century wars in the colonies which had already dislocated many African and Asian societies.[73] This insight might be applied to different social classes, too, and popular music, in however mediated a manner, spoke to working-class fantasy and anxiety in a way which is very much worthy of further study.

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[1] Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (London: Macmillan, 1965).

[2] Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).

[3] Alexandra Carter, *Dance and Dancers in the Victorian and Edwardian Music Hall Ballet* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 4.

[4] See John Mullen, 'The Show Must Go On' Popular Song in Britain during the First World War, (London, Routledge, 2015) ; « The Popular Music Industry in Britain in 1900 » dans *Civilisations,* Université Toulouse 1, 2014 and « Velours rouge et piquets de grève – la grève du music-hall à Londres en 1907 » dans *Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens*, N° 67, avril 2008, pp. 457-472.

[5] Peter Bailey (Ed.), *Music-Hall: The Business of Pleasure* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986), xxi. These figures no doubt omit many smaller halls, or halls only functioning at weekends.

[6] Felix Barker, *The House that Stoll Built*, (London: Frederick Muller, 1957), 27.

[7] The town possessed 126 pubs and bars.

[8] Cyril Ehrlich, *The Piano: A History* (London: J. M. Dent, 1976), 152.

[9] Cyril Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain since the Eighteenth Century: A Social History* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1985), 71.

[10] Although the gramophone was making steady headway, see Nicholas Hiley, 'Ploughboys and Soldiers: The Folk Song and the Gramophone in the British Expeditionary Force 1914-1918' *Media History*, 4, no. 1 (1998).

[11] *Phono Record,* March 1917.

[12] Hiley, 65.

[13] Jane Angell, 'Music and Charity on the British Home Front during the First World War', *Journal of Musicological Research*, 33, nos. 1-3 (2014): 186.

[14] Lena Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours* (London: Leopold Classic Library, 2017, first puiblished 1922).

[15] John Mullen 'Victorian Respectability, "Anti-social Behaviour" and the Music Hall, 1880-1900', in *Anti-social Behaviour in Britain: Victorian and Contemporary Perspectives*, edited by Sarah Pickard (Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2014).

[16] Alan Wilkinson, *The Church of England and the First World War* (London: SCM, 1996), 32.

[17] *The Encore*, August 13, 1914.

[18] Can be heard online here http://www.firstworldwar.com/audio/huntingthehun.htm [The recordings referenced in the notes are almost in every case original recordings from the war years].

[19] Mullen, *The Show Must Go On: Popular Song in Britain during the First World War* (London: Routledge, 2015), 170.

[20] *Francis and Day Annual 1915*, Francis and Day, 1915.

[21] Can be heard online here https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ckNsV4MP4nU

[22] Can be heard online here http://www.firstworldwar.com/audio/1914.htm

[23] Can be heard online here https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_oQuC4jIQRo

[24] Can be heard online here http://www.firstworldwar.com/audio/1914.htm

[25] In each year of the war there were many dozens of well-known songs. In order to communicate a feeling for the type of repertoire being distributed, lists of titles are generally the best option. In addition, listening to some of the songs is indispensable to understanding the sentiments and affect: for this reason, I have provided internet links for a number of recordings.

[26] *The Scotsman*, December 12, 1914.

[27] Anna Maguire's essay in the present collection, '"Home, Sweet Home": Music and Identity for Colonial Troops during the First World War' looks at empire and colonial identities from a non-metropolitian point of view.

[28] For a fuller account of the complex relationship between the British music hall and all things Irish, see my 'Stéréotypes et identités: Irlande et les Irlandais dans le music-hall britannique 1900-1920', *Racialisations dans l'aire anglophone*, edited by Michel Prum, (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2012).

[29] A revival of a much older song.

[30] A US recording from 1916 can be heard online here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=he9VpxiIi_g

[31] A 1911 US version can be heard here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=axEV_Qcfou0

[32] Can be heard online here: http://www.firstworldwar.com/audio/keepthehomefiresburning.htm

[33] Can be heard online here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bU2IrTIkrYA

[34] Can be heard online here: http://www.firstworldwar.com/audio/lloydgeorgesbeer.htm

[35] Can be heard online here: http://www.firstworldwar.com/audio/1917.htm

[36] The lyrics are online here: https://monologues.co.uk/musichall/Songs-W/Where-Are-Girls-Of-Old-Brigade.htm

[37] It is well to remember that the physical health of an average 49-year-old man was far inferior to what it is today.

[38] A US recording from 1916, by Al Jolson, can be heard here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Npji_-Q-sGc

[39] Can be heard online here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6o_5FogG2Vk

[40] Can be heard online here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ppGd6_jsEz8

[41] Can be heard online here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gaR6cbS7wfo

[42] Lyrics available online here: https://monologues.co.uk/musichall/Songs-I/If-You-Want-To-Get-On.htm

[43] Can be heard online here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pd9UciMK5HY

[44] Lawrence Grossberg, 'Is there a Fan in the House?: The Affective Sensibility of Fandom', in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, edited by Lisa A. Lewis (London: Routledge, 1992).

[45] One example, in which the German soldier's dog shows more humanity than the German himself, can be heard online (and the lyrics read) here: http://www.musictory.fr/musique/Jean-Baptiste+Mallet/Le+Chien+Du+Boche

[46] 'Ma p'tite Mimi', a love song to a machine gun, can be heard (and the lyrics read) here: http://www.dutempsdescerisesauxfeuillesmortes.net/paroles/ma_mitrailleuse.htm

[47] More (in English) about the French repertoire, and a comparison with repertoires from around the world can be found in Anne Simon-Carrère, 'Couples in French Popular Song and the Challenges of the Great War' *Popular Song in the First World War: An International Perspective*, edited by John Mullen (London: Routledge, 2018). The key work in French is Anne Simon-Carrère, *Chanter la Grande Guerre. Les « Poilus » et les femmes (1914-1919)* (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2014).

[48] Can be heard online here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOMF7dRgw6Y
[49] Can be heard online here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YBOi_QEGma8
[50] Can be heard online here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aFNhglageDs
[51] Can be heard online here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c8Tpv3QFS5E
[52] Colin Macinnes, Sweet Saturday Night: Pop Song 1840 to 1920 (London: Macgibbon and Kee, 1967).

[53] Can be heard online here: http://www.firstworldwar.com/audio/ifyouweretheonlygirl.htm
[54] For more details about the 'racial' aspect of expressing emotion on stage, see my 'Anti-Black Racism in British Popular Music (1880-1920),' *Revue française de civilisation britannique*, XVII, N°2 (2012).
[55] James Harding, *George Robey and the Music-Hall* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990), 86.
[56] *The Encore*, 1 May 1919 page number?.
[57] Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson, *British Music Hall* (London: Gentry books, 1974), 170.
[58] *The Era,* 3 January 1917.
[59] *The Encore,* 11 January 1917.
[60] Can be heard online here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jH5h6UKWKbo
[61] Can be heard online here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L_XhNYjcPIU
[62] Can be heard online here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qsqg69w03cY
[63] *The Encore*, 1 January 1920.
[64] *The Encore,* 5 February 5 1920.
[65] Mullen, *The Show Must Go On*, 39.
[66] A short extract can be seen here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wd7pJ_9ysSE
[67] Ronald Pearsall, *Popular Music of the Twenties* (London : David and Charles, 1976), 10.
[68] Ibid., 95.
[69] Ibid., 40.
[70] Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 227.
[71] Ibid., See especially chapter 4.
[72] Gareth Stedman Jones, 'Class Expression versus Social Control? A Critique of Recent Trends in the Social History of 'Leisure ', History Workshop No. 4 (Autumn, 1977), pp. 162-170

[73] Mishra Pankaj, 'How Colonial Violence Came Home: The Ugly Truth of the First World War', *The Guardian*, 10 November 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/news/2017/nov/10/how-colonial-violence-came-home-the-ugly-truth-of-the-first-world-war accessed 6 December 2018.