Disposable icons: pop music in Australia, 1955–63

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The name of the picture was *The Blackboard Jungle*, and the name of the song was 'Rock Around the Clock'. And the name of the singer was Bill Haley and the Comets . . . We didn't know *then* that rock'n'roll was born, but we did know that music was meant for us, and we were going to have it.[1]

It was in the cinema, not through records or the radio, that many Australians first became aware of rock'n'roll. Initially it was not so much a style of music but a single song, bursting out of *The Blackboard Jungle*'s chaotic scenes of classroom rebellion in a New York high school. This was not the first film to show youth discontent. But when it was screened in Australia during the second half of 1955, audiences perceived a connection between youth rebellion and music that had not been made in the same way in other films. As Australian teenagers danced in the cinema aisles, it was obvious that this music arose out of a musical tradition very different from that of the American 'popular' singers with whom Australians were familiar.

Not that the cultural origins of rock'n'roll were understood. The influences of white rural music and black African rhythms, which had gradually hybridised in the southern states of America, were completely foreign to Australians. Yet, in Australia, as elsewhere, *The Blackboard Jungle* suggested an image that would remain potent in the decades that followed: the as-yet-amorphous stage of life between childhood and adulthood was to be articulated through music, and in the mid-1950s this music was rock'n'roll.

Rock'n'roll was not, however, immediately popularised in Australia. For some time 'Rock Around the Clock' was to remain a solitary anthem, a vanguard with no apparent following. This was partly because the Australian mass media were relatively undeveloped. Unlike the Americans and British, Australians had yet to experience television; it was only introduced in the larger cities late in 1956; and trends in music and fashion were usually processed slowly and selectively by radio and the print media.

Nevertheless, in Australia, as elsewhere, the gyrating figure of Elvis Presley, the white truck driver who sang like a negro, fuelled a moral panic. Typical of the response was the Sydney *Sun Herald*'s comment in March 1956 that Presley 'whangs his guitar with a frenzy of a dervish and yells . . . or sings . . . like a caged orangoutang'. There was also resistance to the idea that his records should be given airplay. Bob Rogers, a dj in Brisbane at the time, recalls that when he was sent Presley's first international hit, 'Heartbreak Hotel', he refused to play it because he thought that it was 'some sort of bad musical joke' and he didn't think his conservative audience would accept it. At a national convention of djs held in Sydney during September 1956, 'radio announcers from all states applauded a recorded address by American band leader Mitch Miller attacking rock'n'roll'. But

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this did not completely eliminate airplay; the *Sun Herald* noted that 'They then went back to their radio stations and played more rock'n'roll records!' In Australia there were no equivalents to America's 'race music' stations – black radio stations that featured rock'n'roll and other musical forms frowned upon by 'white' radio. This certainly helped delay the diffusion of rock'n'roll within Australia.

Meanwhile newspapers were hoping that rock'n'roll would soon disappear. In October 1956, the *Sydney Morning Herald* described 'Rock Around the Clock' as 'a (slightly) cleaned-up version of a traditional Negro sex-song' but suggested that 'perhaps the best news for parents is that the rock'n'roll craze already seems to be dying out overseas', and that 'this debased and over-simplified form of music seems destined to go the way of most hit-parade music to oblivion'. A few months later Craig McGregor, in an article entitled 'A Voodoo Death for Rock'n'Roll', predicted that calypso music would soon eclipse rock'n'roll.

Working against this semi-censorship was Lee Gordon, an American who had moved to Sydney during September 1953. In North America he had been an entrepreneur with an erratic career in ventures that included exporting cigars from Cuba, retailing televisions and electrical appliances, and investing in theatrical productions. According to one account he was a millionaire before the age of twenty-one, having cashed in on the post-war television boom in Canada. Yet by 1953 he had lost nearly all his money. It appears that his move to Australia was made on impulse after a 'chance meeting' with an Australian used-car salesman in Toronto.

The Australia to which he came was a nation of increasing prosperity and expanding suburbia, governed by a conservative coalition that focused energies and aspirations around 'the home'. Pubs closed at six o'clock in most states, 'traditional' Sundays were maintained, and strict censorship laws 'protected' Australians from the outside world.

Gordon was soon developing ideas about importing American entertainers. In the absence of suitable venues for the large audiences he envisaged, Gordon adapted old boxing stadiums to concert use and designed a show format that normally consisted of several American entertainers featured on a single bill. These ventures were promoted as 'Big Shows', and gained Gordon a reputation as the most daring entrepreneur in Australian entertainment. Most of the shows he promoted were financially successful, though some spectacular failures in 1954 and 1955 dissipated his profits. These failures included Bob Hope, Abbott and Costello and Betty Hutton. For Bob Rogers, it was Lee Gordon 'who started the Australian show business momentum in the 1950s; he who cultivated an audience willing to pay high prices to see big names; he who introduced excitement into what had been a rather torpid scene' (1975, p. 18). In *The Johnny O'Keefe Story*, Bryden-Brown puts it more succinctly: 'Lee Gordon invented the mass audience concept of live entertainment' (1982).

If Gordon's 'hit and miss' career served as a litmus test for new trends in Australia, it was perhaps inevitable that he would be among the first to notice the emergence of a youth audience with its own distinctive tastes in entertainment. Gordon's organisation of a tour for Bill Haley and the Comets reflected his sensitivity to changes within what was regarded as a largely undifferentiated mass audience. These changes became obvious during the two tours of the American singer Johnny Ray in September 1954 and March 1955.

In 1953 the English *New Musical Express* described Johnny Ray as having 'leapt from obscurity to world-wide fame by baring his emotions in public'. Lee Gordon

was able to promote him on the strength of the fact that many Australians were familiar with his hit song 'Cry'. His concerts were remarkable less for the repertoire than the staged hysteria Ray whipped up in the generally young audiences. With his return tour, the Australian tradition of welcoming visiting celebrities at the quay was transformed into the ritual of airport greetings. 'On Johnny Ray's first tour it had been hard to sell tickets, on his second tour he was mobbed wherever he went.'[1] Not only did Gordon profit financially from this return tour – according to one source he made £171,000 in two weeks – but he realised that the tastes of young audiences were not being catered for by the existing Australian entertainment outlets.

Gordon then resolved to organise a tour by Bill Haley and the Comets. Gordon overcame the radio stations' reluctance to give rock'n'roll airplay by importing a batch of the latest rock'n'roll records from America, and then paying radio stations for airtime. The impact of this promotional campaign cannot be verified, but the tour was a sell-out; it irrevocably established the popularity of rock'n'roll and the visibility of its teenage audience. The first two shows drew an audience of 22,000 teenagers, and police found it impossible to stop couples dancing in the aisles.

Gordon's methods of marketing overseas entertainers in Australia had much in common with those of his entrepreneurial predecessors. By intentionally exploiting Australians' tendency to idolise performers from anywhere else – be that Britain, Europe or America – Gordon was continuing a well-established practice. His efforts to attract crowds by drawing attention to the foreign origins of appearing performers emulated a tactic successfully employed in the 1870s by W. S. Lyster, who popularised opera in Victoria, and more recently by both the ABC and the Tait family. Nowhere did Gordon execute this strategy better than with his promotion of the virtually unknown American singer, Crash Craddock.

Crash Craddock was working as a factory hand in North Carolina when Gordon obtained copies of an American film clip for his record 'Boom Boom Baby'. Although the record had not been a hit in America, Gordon promoted it so successfully in Australia that it spent five weeks on top of the Sydney charts before Craddock's 1960 tour. Such success clearly took Craddock by surprise. According to Oram, he was 'bewildered when he flew into Sydney airport. The overseas terminal was swarming with youngsters' (Oram 1966, p. 25). Although Craddock's return tour to Australia was 'a pitiful anti-climax', Gordon had reputedly made a profit of £200,000 from the first tour, for which Craddock received only a thousand.

Gordon's shows were no doubt a positive sign for a young Australian audience. They suggested that customs officials could not filter out those parts of 'America' that they sought to appropriate for themselves. Gordon's own flamboyant style represented an identifiable dimension of Australian perceptions of 'America'. But his decisive timing was probably more important to his success.

The most crucial aspect of the evolution of what was still an uncertain category, the period between childhood and adulthood, was the new constitution of the 'teenager' as a worker who could earn significant amounts of money and who could then become a consumer in the new mass-production economy; 'regardless of whether or not individuals became members of youth cultures, young people became visible as members of the category of youth' (Stratton 1985, p. 235).

In this respect, the two-year gap between the screening of *The Blackboard Jungle* and Bill Haley and the Comets' appearance in Australia worked to Gordon's advantage. Rising real wages meant that working-class families in particular were less reliant on the earnings of the younger members of the household. So even if

tickets to see Bill Haley cost as much as thirty shillings, young working-class bodgies such as Terry Cooke, the protagonist in William Dick's novel *A Bunch of Ratbags*, knew as soon as the concert dates were announced that they would be 'sitting in the closest seats to the stage, regardless of price. Bill was our idol, and no price was too high to pay.'

Such fervour reflected youth consumer habits that had developed ahead of Gordon's presentation of the Big Shows. The 39 per cent increase in the production of gramophone records between 1956 and 1957 was largely attributed to the increased purchasing power of young people. In the 1950s this increase was apparently strongest amongst working-class youth.

It was partly for economic reasons then that the idea of being a teenager had its strongest appeal for working-class youth: their middle-class contemporaries were more likely to be at school, still lacking the financial independence to buy the new teenage fashions. Yet the appeal of these trends, and rock'n'roll, needs more than economic explanation. Iain Chambers' *Urban Rhythms* has advanced the argument that working-class youth culture's enthusiasm for early rock'n'roll in Britain was

not simply the effect of an economic cut off point that divided teenage workers from those still at school. It clearly also involved ideological reasoning. Rare was the grammar school boy, and even rarer the girl, who could surmount the cultural barriers of their school, family and social situation and turn to the despised sounds of pop. (1985, p. 29).

These 'cultural barriers' also existed in Australia. The middle class regarded the new practices of working-class youth as deviant. Contemporary opinion at least acknowledged the possibility that such deviance could infect middle-class families: one *Sun Herald* editorial wrote that juvenile delinquency, with the bodgie its main proponent, arose not only from 'slum homes where drink-inflamed violence is rampant' but also from 'reputedly decent homes where there is now warm companionship between parents and growing up children'. Although the moral panic that had been central to the media's constitution of the bodgie had declined in the late 1950s, it received fresh impetus with the emergence of rock'n'roll dances. Front-page stories in the *Sydney Morning Herald* illustrate how concern about rock'n'roll dovetailed into existing anxieties about bodgie delinquency. Accompanying the coverage of the Melbourne Olympics, one article reported that bodgies and widgies had been prominent in Rock'n'Roll Rioting in Brisbane'. Six months later another article was headlined: 'Parents Drag Hysterical Boy from Dance Hall'. It began: 'A mother and father last week dragged their exhausted bodgie son from a rock'n'roll contest and had him charged with being an uncontrollable child. He was then hysterical and "seeing double".' A Perth senior magistrate was reported to have 'strongly attacked the rock'n'roll contest and its promoters. "This absurd damn thing is of no damn use to anybody," he said.'

In the years that followed, the police and the churches mounted a defence against the delinquency they feared would arise from rock'n'roll. Fights were common in the earliest rock'n'roll dance venues, which were typically in working-class suburbs such as Preston in Melbourne, and Paddington, Leichhardt and Balmain in Sydney. The New South Wales police became actively involved in supervising their own rock'n'roll dances: within the authoritarian walls of Police Boys' Clubs, any fights were soon broken up. In 1963 there were thirty-one such clubs around New South Wales with a membership of about 50,000, and by the early

1960s similar clubs had opened in Collingwood and other inner suburbs of Melbourne.

Churches were no less active in trying to defuse the perceived dangers of rock'n'roll. Here, however, it was not just violence that was targeted but also the teenagers' spiritual lives. As historian John Rickard has described it, the churches were endeavouring 'to reintegrate themselves into the suburban order of home and family' (1988, p. 229). The attempts to evangelise the new suburbia gained momentum from American examples, the most conspicuous being the 1959 crusade of American evangelist Billy Graham, whose open-air meetings were claimed to have drawn over three million people in Australia and New Zealand. A year later, American-inspired 'Teenage Cabarets' opened in Australia. One apparent success in this new dance-hall genre was Brisbane's West End Methodist Church, whose hall had been re-modelled by the Rev. Arthur Preston 'into a posh cabaret, complete with soft-drink bar, hamburger stall, and a games arcade', attended, it was claimed, by more than 300 teenagers on Saturday nights (*Teenagers Weekly*, 14 July, 1960). According to Preston, this not only attracted regular churchgoers but also inspired one eighteen-year-old rock'n'roll singer to become a lay preacher, switching to sacred songs with a beat and preaching on Sundays. If rock'n'roll, with its attendant evils, was imported from America, that country could also formulate the solutions to the problem.

These moves suggested that rock'n'roll was understood as a potentially dangerous watershed, both musically and socially. Rock'n'roll did, however, have points of continuity with the earlier jazz and dance-hall music. A number of jazz and dance-hall musicians joined or formed Australia's earliest rock'n'roll outfits, although they were motivated by fear of redundancy rather than by any particular enthusiasm for the new style. Their fears were well-founded: in the late 1950s venues such as Sydney's Trocadero were losing ground to suburban rock'n'roll dances. When the established dance halls responded by featuring rock'n'roll segments, seasoned dance-hall musicians were required to back up young rock-'n'roll singers. In the Trocadero's case, the result was at best an awkward synthesis of styles. At the same time other promoters were offering shows with a mixture of styles. Even the popular jazz musician Les Welsh was billed as the 'original King of Rock'n'Roll'. As late as 1964, venues such as the Circle Ballroom in Preston and the Canterbury Ballroom (both in Melbourne) featured '60/40 Dancing' on Saturday nights, when the band would play alternate brackets of traditional dance-hall numbers and Top 40 hits.

Conversely, jazz players were often essential for the new rock'n'roll groups. Amplification systems in the 1950s were usually fairly weak, and without brass instruments the music was too soft for dancing. One jazz musician who made the transition was Henri Bource. In 1954 Bource had his own 'modern jazz quartet' in Melbourne. He joined a group two years later, and went on to lead it. The Henri Bource All-Stars claim to have been the first Melbourne group to record rock'n'roll. While Bource's skills as a flautist were probably of little use to his group, his ability to play tenor saxophone made up for that. Similarly, the Penny Rockets, claiming to be Adelaide's first rock'n'roll group, featured two saxophonists.

There was continuity, too, in the practice of setting up 'house bands'. Like the older dance-hall bands, many of the early rock'n'roll outfits were instrumental house bands backing up guest vocalists, who were more professionally mobile. On the other hand, while some singers such as Johnny O'Keefe and Col Joye usually

performed with the Dee Jays and the Joy Boys respectively, their public identities as rock'n'roll performers remained separate from their bands'. This was typical of the time: when *Teenagers Weekly* featured a page of pictures of Australian singers at the end of 1960, none of them was photographed with his back-up group.

The distinction between musicians and singers was so pronounced that they couldn't even belong to the same union. While musicians joined the Musicians' Union of Australia, an Arbitration Commission Award in 1957 gave the Actors' and Announcers' Equity Association of Australia coverage of

all work to be done by actors, actresses, singers, dancers, vaudeville artists, comperes, and other performers (excepting instrumental musicians, who do not speak, sing, act or mime and who could not be classified as a variety act.

This award clearly failed to anticipate and accommodate the structure of groups in the mid-1960s, but it was not radically inappropriate for the rock'n'roll bands of the late 1950s; many of the musical acts adopted the structure, if not the style, of conventional dance-hall bands.

It was its style that defined rock'n'roll as different from other forms of popular music. Eventually the musical competence of seasoned jazz and dance-hall musicians could not transcend the differences in fashions and attitudes that gave rock'n'roll its particular cultural potency for young Australians seeking an alternative to the entertainment their parents enjoyed.

Rock'n'roll drew much of its conspicuous early following from working-class teenagers, and many of its performers, too, were working-class. There were exceptions: Johnny O'Keefe had unmistakable middle-class origins, with a father who was Mayor of Waverley in Sydney's eastern suburbs. Nevertheless, as Stratton 1985 has argued, O'Keefe 'seems to have related traditional working-class values to rock'n'roll' (Stratton 1985, p. 239). Other performers were far from pursuing working-class identification. Col Joye, O'Keefe's main rival, actively sought to keep his image and repertoire as 'respectable' as possible. As Rogers points out, Col was to develop as one of Australia's first clean-cut rock'n'rollers. It is dangerous to assume a direct relationship between class background and musical taste.

One common characteristic of most rock'n'roll performers, however, was their appropriation of 'America' as the source of their style. This 'America' was distilled, as we have seen, not only through records, radio, magazines of Hollywood films, but also, decisively, through the importation of American entertainers to Australia.

In Johnny O'Keefe's case, Lee Gordon's Big Shows were crucial to the formulation of his image as a performer. Although quick to overcome audience hostility when he first tried to appear before a Big Show crowd as Australia's 'king' of rock'n'roll, O'Keefe could hardly have been seen as 'Australian' in his musical style; most of the songs in his repertoire were written and already recorded by Americans. His initial live performances consisted of imitations of Johnny Ray, whom O'Keefe later saw at his Sydney shows. As the careers of O'Keefe and Joye progressed, they met and sometimes befriended visiting American Big Show stars: Col Joye was given pairs of shoes by Conway Twitty and Johnny Cash, and O'Keefe was particularly friendly with Bill Haley, who later sent him a rock'n'roll song to record called 'You Hit the Wrong Note, Billy-Goat'. For O'Keefe, America eventually became an icon of almost suffocating proportions: symptomatic of this was his desire to translate local success into American stardom. Lee Gordon himself was central to O'Keefe's American dream: despite Gordon's resistance, O'Keefe insisted that he become

his manager, or more specifically his own Colonel Tom Parker (Elvis Presley's manager). O'Keefe's relentless pursuit of these aspirations was partly responsible for a series of nervous breakdowns that nearly killed him.

This preoccupation with America was not peculiar to Australia. As Chambers describes it, the advent of rock'n'roll in Britain

conjured up for British audiences not the peculiarities of specific cultural realities but quite simply, to employ a Barthian neologism, 'Americanicity'. And each new male singer was launched by the British record industry as Britain's answer to Elvis. (1985, p. 38)

O'Keefe's career may have been haunted by this spectre of 'Americanicity', but this shouldn't detract from the fact that his brashness and persistence helped forge the parameters within which Australian performers could be 'stars'. He overcame one obstacle by persuading Lee Gordon that Australians could gain acceptance with Big Show audiences: Gordon at the time 'wasn't the slightest bit interested in Australian acts and had no intention of featuring them in his shows'. After wearing down Gordon's resistance, he then forced a reluctant Festival Records to accept the viability of recording Australian performers. By spreading false rumours that he had a record deal with the company, O'Keefe succeeded in converting indifference into a recording contract.

In both cases, however, O'Keefe had to accept limitations: although his performances at Big Shows were sometimes greeted with greater enthusiasm than the overseas stars', he was always described as a 'support' act when visiting performers were on the bill. In these situations O'Keefe could be simultaneously dependent and a rival: dependent because of his 'support' billing, but anxious to demonstrate that his strong local following could eclipse the popularity of the foreign attractions.

While record companies came to understand that recordings by local rock'n'roll performers could sell, it remained easier and cheaper for them to act as distributors for overseas products than to spend money and resources nurturing and recording Australians. Rogers points out that 'the majority of those early rock-oriented Australian recordings were very poor technically, artistically, in almost every way' because of 'quite primitive' production standards. 'It was common for the novelty echo chamber effects to have been recorded in an empty toilet, the only method then locally available to produce the sound. (1975, pp. 36–7)' Record companies may have accepted the idea of 'the Australian star' during the late 1950s, but they saw little reason to make technical excellence a priority and they were not concerned with encouraging innovation or originality, except with novelty performers such as Rolf Harris, who successfully exploited stereotypical ideas of 'Australiana' in 'Tie Me Kangaroo Down, Sport', a record that made the overseas charts.

The record companies' reticence was not echoed by the fans: by early 1960 both O'Keefe and Joye had number-one records on the Sydney Top 40 charts. Along with other local rock'n'roll performers they had fan clubs across Australia. They were facilitated by new 'teenage' magazines such as *Teen Topics, Teens Today* and *Fan Forum*, which were, as Rogers put it, 'like trading posts in idolatry' (ibid, p. 132). By now, established media outlets accepted 'the teenager' as a category and recognised the importance of music as a means of identification and expression. This acceptance was partly prompted by the mellowing of rock'n'roll in America: its original raw vitality had given way to smoother, sweeter sounds, a change strikingly evident in Elvis Presley's hit records and accompanied by a reconstituted, less terrifying image in his films:

The 'death' of rock'n'roll in 1958 and the rise of 'High School' is widely understood as the obvious replacement of rock'n'roll's wildness, its disturbing appeals to the body, to sexuality, by an innocuous adolescent sentimentality. (Chambers 1985, p. 40)

And although Australia, somewhat time-lagged, was still feeding off the music of rock'n'roll's heyday, the moral panic that surrounded its arrival had abated. The media were now more open to the new trends from America, and these in turn were being diffused more predictably. Writing about Australian culture in 1963, the American A. L. McLeod observed that 'in general, Australian popular music is lavishly imitative of United States models; it follows jazz, swing, calypso or whatever the current fashion is in New York or San Francisco at a few months distance'.

Lee Gordon's Big Show formula was now imitated by other entrepreneurs. Gordon himself began to fade from the local scene in the early 1960s. He faced a bankruptcy petition in April 1963 and died later that year in London. But the flow of overseas pop performers continued.

The environment in which pop music was performed and diffused in Australia during the early 1960s did not yet constitute a coherent 'music industry', even in Sydney, where the pop scene was most developed. In a number of areas there was a growing readiness to explore the potential of pop music as it became clear that the teenager was here to stay. By 1960, for instance, radio was much less concerned with trying to stop rock'n'roll and was devoting more airtime to playing music aimed at a teenage audience. Several stations were now compiling charts: Sydney's 2UE was the first to introduce a weekly Top 40 chart, in March 1958, and as in America, charts were supplemented by a list of 'predictions'. Yet perceptions of the possibilities of the nascent teenage market were still limited. In Melbourne, 3UZ had more Top 40 programmes than any other radio station but it also retained segments such as *Turf Talk*, *Community Singing*, *Storytime* and *Women's Session*.

Television was also a fairly restrained medium for the popularisation of rock-'n'roll. The ABC's *Six O'Clock Rock* programme, the most important of the early rock'n'roll television shows, served as a forum for Johnny O'Keefe, by then known as 'The Wild One', but the show's rock'n'roll content was soon diluted with jazz. Still, with its estimated audience of between 500,000 and 1,000,000, the show helped initiate middle-class, middle-aged people to rock'n'roll. Rogers suggests that:

It would be too much to claim that it was responsible for breaking down many barriers of adult intolerance toward the music and all that it represented, but by penetrating a lot of alien living-rooms through ABC television it allowed thousands of Mums and Dads at least to define the 'enemy'. (1975, p. 74)

Similarly, Channel Nine's *Bandstand* broadened rock'n'roll's audience while playing an active role in sanitising the music. The show was first telecast in Sydney during November 1958, on a budget of £50, and copied 'as closely as possible' the original American *Bandstand*. In response to complaints about its rock'n'roll content in 1960, compère Brian Henderson, whose spectacles and suit could never be associated with anything approximating youth culture, asserted that 'We see to it that nothing in the show smacks of juvenile delinquency . . . and that goes for the music we play too.' Accordingly, young people appearing in the *Bandstand* audience had to be suitably dressed: girls in fluffy organza party frocks and brightly coloured skirts and blouses, and boys dressed in well-pressed 'best' suits with freshly shaved chins and sleek hair.

Shows such as *Six O'Clock Rock* were also significant because they gave performers the opportunity to build interstate audiences at a time when local followings were not easily converted into national success. As no national rock'n'roll shows were telecast from Melbourne, performers from that city found it difficult to attract attention in Sydney: Melbourne's most popular rock'n'roll singer, Johnny Chester, did not have a hit in the Sydney charts. Intensely parochial djs and the infrequency of national tours made matters worse. Each city had its distinctive pop scene, with its own local stars and its own particular taste in pop music styles.

Melbourne teenagers at this time were polarised into 'rocker' and 'jazzer' camps, the former generally from working-class backgrounds, the latter usually middle-class teenagers who had deliberately turned to 'traditional' jazz while deriding rock'n'roll. The young people in the growing folk music scene shared a similar outlook. In Sydney this polarisation was far less pronounced, but during the early 1960s 'surf music' gained a particular prominence there. The teen magazines tended to focus on activities within a particular city: *Everybody's* 'Disc' supplement referred almost exclusively to the Sydney scene during the early 1960s, while *Young Modern*, when it was first published in 1962, was aimed solely at Adelaide's teenagers: its first editor was at the time also the president of one of Adelaide's teenage clubs.

Beginning as a small, essentially parochial paper, *Young Modern*, perhaps unwittingly, shared editorial perspectives with its predecessors – 'Teenagers' Weekly' in the *Women's Weekly*, *Teens Today* and *Teenage Topics*. While accepting the category of the 'teenager', these magazines also sought to delineate 'normal' forms of teenage behaviour. It is clear from *Young Modern* that by 1962 Adelaide's middle-class youth were identifying with music and fashion in ways that differentiated their behaviour from that of 'adults'.

Young Modern didn't just advise on the best dance venues – it was also at pains to clarify exactly what kinds of social values and behaviour were acceptable. Its feature articles and editorials dramatised fears of threat and invasion and sometimes explicitly emphasised the need for increased defence capabilities. Discussions about sexuality and alcohol condemned the 'deviant' practices that were to be emerging. Affluence and consumerism were celebrated. In 1962, readers were told that 'You ARE better off than Dad was'. It was pointed out that teenagers could now bank two or three pounds out of their average weekly wage; later that year there was an article giving advice on how to make money on the stock exchange. Lurking beneath the surface was the anxiety that an undirected teenage culture might erode traditional values, a concern specifically addressed by a May 1963 editorial entitled 'Time and Place':

Dyed hair has appeared on Adelaide streets during the past few weeks on boys and young men. It marks a trend to eccentricity in dress that is perhaps gaining too much momentum. We're all for individuality, enterprise and fashion in dress and cosmetics, for boys and girls, but there's a time and place for everything. Dyed hair on youths, which has been a familiar sight in Sydney for some time, carries certain implications there . . . not all flattering to the male image, despite the vogue for blonde surfies. Exaggerated hairdos on girls are not for daytime, neither are ultra short skirts and shaggy pullovers any more suitable for office wear than expensive 'model' frocks hung all over with dangling jewelry. Brightly colored coats and 'loud' trousers . . . make a young man seem hopelessly immature in the business world. What's worse, since the young man in the business world usually has to 'sell' himself and his talents to older, more conservative and let's face it more experienced people, unsuitable dress may blind these people to his real qualities. In the asphalt jungle, as in the primitive one, one must adjust one's protective coloration to one's needs and hazards.

Significantly, it was not the working-class 'rockers' that were being warned against the perils of youth culture, but the 'surfies', who in Adelaide at the time were generally middle-class males. The increasingly visible styles of middle-class teenagers, as well as working-class leisure pursuits, were seen as threatening conformity to adult values. Whatever the class background, the sources of youth culture were usually American in origin. By 1962 *Young Modern* was advertising both Burger King and ten-pin bowling. Auditions for the television show *Seventeeners* inspired the complaint: 'Not ANOTHER Elvis imitator . . . that makes six "Can't Help Falling in Loves" already and they're only half way through the auditions!'

The presence of Americans in Australia also continued to provide style-conscious teenagers with immediate clues to the latest trends in the United States. Certainly, the virtually automatic celebrity status Americans enjoyed was sometimes resented: one article in *Young Modern* remarked that 'It's funny how the local romeos have to take second preference with the girls when the Yanks are in town.' On that occasion American servicemen from the ship *Navasoto* had been attending the opening of Adelaide's Yale Club. Yet such disapproval was exceptional. When a visiting economics student attained local star status later that year, it was his American background that attracted attention. Though no established pop performer, Bruce Reddick rated a full-page *Young Modern* pin-up in August 1962; in the two months he had been in Adelaide he had already appeared at teenage clubs and on television.

Bruce Reddick, at nineteen, was fashion itself. He knew how to play the role of style ambassador, and presented himself as the herald of the latest trends. Reddick commented on the fact that he had been stared at for wearing an outfit that he considered conservative – white lapel-less sports jacket, red waistcoat, black tapered trousers, a white shirt and black tie with a large pearl tie pin. He went on to say: 'It appears to me that the teenagers I have seen follow the American way of dressing, but generally are just two or three years behind' (*Young Modern*, 2 August, 1962). The response to Reddick was deferential. When the new Limbo dance was shown on a local television show, Reddick was able to claim with authority that the dance originated at Waikiki Beach. The issue was beyond dispute.

Not all teenagers in Australia looked to America with the same intrigue. By the early 1960s, many British teenagers had emigrated to Australia with their families, bringing with them 'cultural baggage' that was without direct parallel in America or Australia. Teddy boys from London and 'beat music' enthusiasts from Merseyside may have remained largely invisible in Australia while Bruce Reddick danced and sang on television, and British pop stars such as Cliff Richard and Tommy Steele may have owed their Australian success to the fact that 'their style was American'. But by 1964 'America' was slipping over young Australians' horizons, and Reddick's privileged position as an icon of pop music and fashion was inherited by a much larger group of teenagers – newly arrived Liverpudlian immigrants, who were regarded as authorities on the trends announced by Beatlemania. It was Britain, not America, that was now the focus for enthusiasms in music and fashion.

Brief though it was, the Reddick interlude illustrates the dynamics of a broader pattern – the creation of the foreign icon. In this respect, the cultural aspirations of Australian teenagers took a time-tried form. Overseas performers and overseas styles were the yardstick against which local endeavours were measured. For singers such as O'Keefe, the prognosis was not as severe as it had been for those involved in Australia's first film industry, which was peremptorily snuffed out by

Hollywood. Yet Australia's early rock'n'roll performers would seldom establish themselves in their own right. Rock'n'roll had arrived in Australia pre-packaged: the interplay between black and white musical cultures that gave the music its particular resonances during its gestation in America had no equivalent in this country. The secondary status of Australian performers was not merely a reflection of promoters' and audiences' prejudices against the local product: it also reflected the fact that, in its original form, the product could not be local. For O'Keefe and his ilk, to be creative in rock'n'roll was like writing poetry in a foreign language.

Endnote

1 Terry Cooke, the protagonist in William Dick's *A Bunch of Ratbags* (Sydney: Ure Smith), 1968, p. 246.

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