

GILDART, KEITH. *Images of England through Popular Music. Class, Youth and Rock 'n' Roll, 1955–1976*. Palgrave MacMillan, Basingstoke [etc.] 2013. ix, 209 pp. £55.00; \$85.00. doi:10.1017/S0020859014000273

Keith Gildart's *Images of England* places popular music centre-stage in its exploration of class, youth, and social change between the mid-1950s and mid-1970s. Popular music is defined as American rock and roll and rhythm and blues because these soundscapes most profoundly influenced the collective and personal identities of young people. They permeated the everyday lives of individuals like the "Lemon Drop Kid", a young Lancashire miner from Wigan, whose vivid memories as a performer and consumer of rock and roll preface the book and whose photograph, playing in a band in Bolton in the early 1960s, is on its front cover. Gildart evokes popular music as both a personal escape for the likes of the "Lemon Drop Kid" and a signpost of new social and cultural directions, which in affirming a sense of locality and class identity also contests the "myth" of classless youth and the notion that postwar affluence weakened class-consciousness.

Popular and theoretical accounts tend to dominate studies of popular music in the postwar period and *Images of England* is a welcome addition to a small but growing literature by social historians. It aims to historicize theoretical approaches pioneered by the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), whose emphases on culture and music as sites of working-class struggle and resistance inform the book's detailed empirical studies. Gildart utilizes Edward Thompson's notion of "history from below", and Raymond Williams's conception of a "structure of feeling" (i.e. the shared experiences, perceptions, and values of a particular time, place, and generation) to explore how these new cultural experiences confirmed and contested a particular sense of class identity and place. He sees certain "influential", "emblematic" (pp. 2, 4) performers as expressing a long-established autodidact tradition – a small number of "organic intellectuals", working-class writers, performers, and artists whose music informed a "structure of feeling" through shared cultural experiences which both confirmed and challenged the class and place identities of working-class audiences. Performers like Pete Townshend, Ray Davies, David Bowie, and John Lydon (Johnny Rotten) emerged as important channels for the everyday experiences of working-class youth, through music and lyrics which provided significant critiques of the changing condition of England.

Youth culture developed new spatial locations in the 1950s and 1960s, when coffee bars and clubs were what in anthropology is named liminal meeting places, i.e. places of transitional stages in rites of passage where the young could transgress social and cultural conventions. English popular music also mediated ethnic and racial relationships, absorbing American influences yet becoming more distinctive of itself through the influence of West Indian and African-American styles. Northern performers such as "Georgie Fame" or Clive Powell from the Lancashire industrial town of Leigh, expressed a broader sense of identification among northern musicians with the struggles of African-American and West Indian youth, as he played alongside Jamaican ska-reggae bands in the clubs of London's Soho. Many Mods were similarly influenced by the music and cool style of West Indian migrants, and Gildart sees the Mod preoccupation with appearance as not so much a rejection of class as a sign of its "resilience" (p. 17), a means through which working-class youth in industrial communities negotiated the changing boundaries of class, race, and gender. Gildart excavates the lyrics and music of Pete Townshend and Ray Davies (The Kinks), to reveal how they contested assumptions that affluence and postwar consensus were eroding class distinctions, helping to define the limits of this consensus and the politics of modernization.

Images of England nuances debates about youth culture based on notions of continuities and change, as expressed in Arthur Marwick's emphasis on a cultural revolution

in the 1960s and the ensuing revisionism of historians like Dominic Sandbrook and David Fowler, both of whom have argued against such a notion. For Sandbrook the relationship between youth and popular culture has been greatly exaggerated, distorted by “the activities of a relatively small, well-educated minority, usually [...] in their teens or twenties”, who subsequently became “well-paid writers, journalists and publishers”.¹ Fowler, in turn, has seen working-class youth as “alienated by the representations of youth culture made by middle-class pop stars like Mick Jagger”.² Gildart, however, draws class back into the narrative of postwar youth, highlighting the musical role of northern working-class migrants to London like Georgie Fame, whose influence was as valuable as that of “middle-class consumers, music impresarios and entrepreneurs” (p. 61). Where Sandbrook denies the uniqueness of the Liverpool beat scene, Gildart draws a complex picture of how class, race, ethnicity, and the particularities of place affected the consumption and creation of popular music in a city scarred by poverty and racial inequality, where unemployment had not disappeared but was growing among many young workers.

The Liverpool of the Beatles was a “microcosm” of broader social and cultural changes, its rich music scene infused by a strong “affiliation to place and locality” (p. 64), cosmopolitanism, and cultural distinctiveness, and by West Indian and African-American influences which were crucial to the development of the music scene locally and in England more generally. “Beat” music was so identified with working-class youth in Liverpool that local Labour politicians attempted to harness it to highlight the city’s economic and social problems. For Gildart, the music of beat and the Beatles did not so much dissolve the barriers of class as express the shifting nature of class identities and the contradictions of class and affluence in postwar England.

Glam rock, a “maligned” (p. 151) and frequently neglected aspect of the popular music scene, is similarly used to illustrate popular music’s function in mediating cultural and social change among working-class audiences during the crisis-ridden economic and political climate of the early 1970s. Oral history testimony illustrates how the camp femininity of working-class glam rock groups challenged “dominant conceptions of masculinity, femininity and sexuality” (p. 168), and channelled influences from metropolitan gay subculture, more broadly disseminated by the “sophistication and sexual ambivalence” (p. 170) of David Bowie. High camp glitter rock, suggests Gildart, was arguably more politically and socially transgressive than punk because of its challenge to existing expectations of gender and sexuality, particularly among heterosexual working-class audiences. At the same time, *Images of England* examines punk through local responses to the Sex Pistols’ Anarchy Tour in 1976, seen through the lens of a moral panic which expressed not just a familiar media exaggeration but more profound social and political fissures. The tour, reflective of broader economic and political crisis, symbolized the fracturing of postwar consensus and disenchantment with the socialism of the postwar Labour party, as well as punk’s oppositional critique of the political and cultural scene – a medium through which working-class youth interpreted the frustrations of their own lives.

Gildart is clearly aware of the need to draw girls and young women into his story. Contemporary magazines are used to tease out young women’s responses to the Mod scene in areas outside London, and to glam rock. He plausibly suggests that class and feminist influences were more visible in teen magazines such as *Jackie* than Angela McRobbie has acknowledged in her study on *Feminism and Youth Culture* (Basingstoke, 1991). What receives little consideration in Gildart’s analysis, however, are the implications of

1. Dominic Sandbrook, *White Heat: A History of Britain in the Swinging Sixties* (London, 2007), p. xvii.

2. David Fowler, *Youth Culture in Modern Britain, c.1920–c.1970: From Ivory Tower to Global Movement – A New History* (London, 2008), p. 198.

the supremely masculine nature of the popular music cultures of the period. For the young men whom he describes, involvement was a “ritual of resistance”. For young women, it reinforced male expectations of female sexual availability, as both Diane Railton and Helen Davies have observed.³ Gottlieb and Wald have argued that “women punk rockers emerged out of a decade of male rock experiments with gender”, but where these experiments liberated the expression of masculinity, female punks who adopted the well-established male trope of rebellion faced considerable obstacles: Punk women contested postwar youth culture’s assumptions of female compliance and ornamental roles but acceptance was often based on having to deal with the misogynist attitudes of some male punks.⁴ Young women in *Images of England* are certainly seen as active participants in popular music culture but, as in the class-based youth studies of the postwar period, such as those by the CCCS, their voices are subdued, at the edges of the argument, girlfriends favoured with “Walls ice creams, toffees and bottles of Schweppes minerals” (p. 24). The nature of their engagement with popular music as self-affirmation and resistance to the feminine awaits more sustained attention.

This book has many strengths, benefiting from Gildart’s familiarity with the politics and trade unionism of the manufacturing industries, particularly coal mining. His personal passion for rock and roll is complemented by archive sources and personal testimonies which draw out the intensity of working-class young people’s engagement with the sounds and images of America, particularly in the industrial towns of England’s North West and West Midlands. The book conveys the power of popular music in memory and is very good at capturing the creativity and exuberance of working-class identification with it and the capacity of its “oppositional soundscapes” (p. 11) to critique economic and industrial change. Grounded in empirical research, *Images of England* gives expression to the lives and voices of those most affected by popular music and illustrates its richness as a source through which to explore the social history of postwar Britain, a seam of evidence which on the basis of this suggestive work is far from exhausted.

Melanie Tebbutt

Department of History, Politics and Philosophy, Manchester Metropolitan University
Geoffrey Manton Building, Rosamond Street West, Manchester M15 6LL, United Kingdom
E-mail: M.Tebbutt@mmu.ac.uk

3. Diane Railton, “The Gendered Carnival of Pop”, *Popular Music*, 20 (2001), pp. 321–331; Helen Davies, “All Rock and Roll is Homosocial: The Representation of Women in the British Rock Music Press”, *Popular Music*, 20 (2001), pp. 310–319.

4. Joanne Gottlieb and Gayle Wald, “Smells like Teen Spirit: Riot Grrrls, Revolution and Women in Independent Rock”, in Andrew Ross and Tricia Rose (eds), *Microphone Friends: Youth Music and Youth Culture* (London [etc.], 1994).