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# **‘How Belfast got the blues’: Towards an alternative history**

**Noel McLaughlin and Joanna Braniff**

## **Introduction**

In popular music terms, Belfast of the early-to-mid 1960s was an important city of the United Kingdom and Ireland. But the social and cultural optimism of which the period is associated was cruelly dashed against the sharp edges of the new decade in late 1969 as Northern Ireland (and particularly its urban centres of Belfast and Derry), infamously, descended into the full-blown internecine sectarian violence when ‘the Troubles’ began in earnest. The outbreak of a very peculiar civil war on England’s doorstep would cement the region’s reputation for decades thereafter, with Northern Ireland offering to the world its own very particular version of the day the dream, the music, and the decade died. In local lore, this leaves sixties’ Belfast remembered as something of a halcyon period, marked by a self-confidence and a burgeoning positive cultural identity, one in which popular music played a vital part.<sup>1</sup>

1964 was a pivotal year for Belfast. The Rolling Stones played on 31 July and started a riot; the band’s set having to be radically curtailed in an over-capacity, ‘pre-health and safety’ Ulster Hall (see McKenzie 1964; *News Letter* reporter 1964). The event caused such a stir that it was reported internationally across the Atlantic in the *Chicago Tribune* the following day. ‘Concert Stops as Teenagers Riot in Belfast’, ran the headline, with the reporter going on to detail the, by-now customary, scenes of carnage the Stones had become associated with; and also highlighting a local venue hosting over twice its official capacity in the contemporary legislative context (*Chicago Tribune* 1964).<sup>2</sup>

Significantly, and to underscore the city’s importance, the following year in November, the band made the strategic decision to return with cameras - with all the extra expense and logistical issues this incurred - to make their debut cinema film, Peter Whitehead’s little-seen *Charlie is My Darling* (1965).<sup>3</sup> What is interesting is that the Stones and Whitehead decided to set the film in Ireland (in Dublin and Belfast), with the director’s cinéma vérité style creating ample space in the narrative for location shots of Belfast as a place eerily familiar, yet

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<sup>1</sup> For useful discussions on Belfast and Northern Ireland’s music scene in the decade see O’Halloran (2006) and McLaughlin and McLoone (2012 ch. 2) and Smyth (2005 ch. 1). For an analysis of the politics of 1960s Northern Ireland, see Bew and Patterson (1985). There are related interesting histories on broadcasting and cinema, which although not exclusively focused on the 1960s, examine the period in detail, such as Hill (2006) and Cathcart (1984). For an in-depth focus on the cultural politics of Northern Ireland in the decade see the special section of the peer-reviewed journal, *The Sixties* (Bosi and Prince 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Note that even by July 1964, the American press perception is that Belfast is an Irish city, not a British one. This is important not only politically, but also in terms of consumer market territories.

<sup>3</sup> Marooned in a complex legal limbo for many years, this film is strangely under-written about in academic scholarship; a surprising fact given that all the major bands/artists were following the Beatles’ lead and commissioning films. It was eventually released on DVD in 2012, albeit in a reconstituted form.

unsettlingly different.<sup>4</sup> However, the real star of the film is the audience at Belfast's ABC cinema, which is featured in lingering reaction shots in a heady mix of cultural bewilderment and adoration at the spectacle of the band in live performance.<sup>5</sup>

### **'We gotta get into this place'**

The decision to return to Belfast in 1965 was surely based on what the Stones (and their management team) had experienced there the year before. While similar scenes of riotous enthusiasm at the band's performances had occurred almost everywhere they played (and were widely reported with the requisite moral outrage), it was the *otherness* of Belfast, and Northern Ireland's residual conservatism (Belfast and Ireland's apparent 'primitivism' to the Stones' 'modernity') that may have attracted the group in cinematic terms. *Charlie is My Darling*, in this regard, is replete with very specific images: horses and carts in the streets; the presence of a member of the clergy in the audience; and a young male in the front row, weeping uncontrollably, in one of Whitehead's long, unbroken takes, 'the boy's preconceptions about everything' in Victor Coelho's words, 'being systematically dismantled' (Coelho 2011: 179).

The response of the Belfast audience in 1965, therefore, did not break the trend, and resulted in front-page 'public order' news (Nixon 1965). This was, after all, a time when popular music - beat, R'n'B and blues - were little covered in the mainstream press. As with the Beatles earlier appearance in 1963, the Stones' debut concert played a pivotal role in folding Belfast into the broader burgeoning beat scene narrative. Indeed, these two visits by the group in 1964 and 1965 were to be, if anything, more important to the city's scene than their Merseyside rivals; with the Stones' appropriation of the blues forming the most influential template for local bands.

To set the scene for what follows, it marks the fact that this contentious capital and trade port was both a vibrant rhythm and blues city *and* a place apart with a distinctive identity. It was also one with an audience that evidently 'got' the blues, was increasingly 'plugged-into' a rapidly-internationalizing British-led 'beat' culture and possessed, an albeit small, yet enthusiastic beat group scene. The majority of these groups, like Whitehead's rarely-screened film, are barely known outside of their locale, having been eclipsed by the 'big bang' moment, and our second, and more important reason, for claiming 1964 as the pivotal year. This is the moment when the city bequeathed Them and Van Morrison to national and international renown, and furnished Belfast (and Northern Ireland) with a prominent presence - performing representatives, as it were - in the broader 'British Invasion' movement (as well as inaugurating Morrison's long-standing international career). Thus, the spring and summer of 1964 is celebrated in the current context, over five decades later, as the city's seminal popular musical event.

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<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of *Charlie is My Darling* and its production history, see Coelho (2011).

<sup>5</sup> Dublin out-does Belfast in terms of audience reaction, offering the perverse spectacle of the Stones being beaten-up by stage-invading male fans, evidently uncertain about how to deal with their idols and what they signified. It is, therefore, a very particular instance of the local and the global/periphery and centre meeting, and perhaps, an early example of a specifically Irish rock 'n' roll 'crisis in masculinity'.

In recent years, one significant aspect of academic approaches to popular music history has been the focus on exploring city-based scenes and questioning the role of heritage initiatives in both appropriating, and shaping, popular musical narratives. Analysing the formation, and ideological implications, of these dominant discourses - and their capacity to organize experience - has been a key aspect of much of this work, which is often driven by an attendant desire to uncover counter-histories and/or to understand the dynamic between the city (local) and the broader socio-political and economic forces within which local scenes exist. As Lashua, Cohen and Schofield have argued: ‘such constructions of both the “character” and “sound” of a city are most successful when they remain largely invisible, acting to shape common knowledge by focusing attention on some histories, places and musical styles while overlooking others’ (Lashua, Cohen and Schofield 2010: 142).

In a similar vein, this article seeks to do two things. Firstly, it considers what often stands as *the* foundational moment in the city’s popular music history, and Irish rock more broadly: the ‘big bang’ moment of 1964 we have just referred to - the emergence of Van Morrison and Them and the accompanying ‘legend’ of the group’s residency at the Maritime Hotel. It is our contention that the existing history of this period is in no sense neutral and we seek to revisit the dominant narrative, open-up its ideological implications and extend aspects of the discussion. Secondly, after revisiting this ‘well-known’ story, we consider a little-documented aspect of Belfast’s popular music history, one which may both inform and problematize the existing account, thus challenging the established canon, and the accepted chronology, in significant ways. As Roberta Freund Schwartz has argued, echoing Lashua et al., often missing from discussions of how UK cities like Belfast got the blues, ‘is how the music was received, and how, by 1963, it had filtered down to a small but significant segment of the 16–25 age group’ (Schwartz 2007: x).

### **The birth of Belfast beat: ‘A’ story of Them?**

From the perspective of a broader rock narrative, Belfast in early 1964 is the story of Them, Van Morrison, and the Maritime. This is the momentous occasion when the city (and then the rest of Ireland) ‘got the blues’ and achieved international popular musical recognition and rock credibility. It also marks the period, when symbolically at least, the Irish showband was dethroned, and its first music-based youth subculture was born.<sup>6</sup> As a result, it is arguably, the most mythologized point in the region’s music history (with Belfast punk – due to its articulation to the troubles - a close runner-up). For example, regarding heritage initiatives in the contemporary context: the interior walls of the ‘Oh Yeah!’ Centre, Belfast’s dedicated music history/performance space in the ‘bohemian’ Cathedral Quarter, are covered in large photographic information panels. These have a canonical function, illustrating significant

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<sup>6</sup> The showband was a specifically Irish phenomenon. They dominated the Irish popular music scene and were regarded as derivative and parochial by the ‘authentic’ blues-based rock culture that followed. In attitude, beat groups were often vehemently anti-showband. While the beat scene of 1964 was to symbolically overthrow the showband, the form and the culture in no sense died-out and continued for several years. For illuminating discussions of the showband, see Smyth (2005: 9-30) and McLaughlin and McLoone (2012: 20-41).

moments in the city and Northern Ireland's popular music history and are, unsurprisingly, dominated by Them and Morrison in this period. Furthermore, adjacent to the site where the, now-demolished, Maritime once stood, a wall is emblazoned with an, albeit unusual, example of the customary blue plaque; as it commemorates a building, not an individual, and a building which no longer exists.<sup>7</sup>

As Belfast and Ireland's most revered and enduring popular music artist, Morrison has been the subject of several high-profile biographies (Collis 1996; Hage 2009; Heylin 2004; Hinton 1997; Marcus 2010; Rogan 1984, 2005; Turner 1993; Yorke 1975).<sup>8</sup> These accounts are often forensic in documenting the minutiae of the events surrounding this formative moment in his career – both Clinton Heylin and Johnny Rogan (in his second biography) devote a number of chapters to 1964 alone - and as a result they simultaneously yield significant insights *and* construct an orthodox narrative. These writings do, however, have the virtue of the inclusion of original interviews with key protagonists and of providing texture, if at times controversially so; opening-up the local scene to a broader readership and, paradoxically, creating discourse about it that otherwise wouldn't exist. In a vital sense, it took an internationally successful 'product' of Belfast's beat culture to turn a forensic spotlight onto the city and the period, with the inevitable disputes over ownership of the story, ideas and songs that have accompanied it. However, the individualistic impulse inherent in the form – making its subject the centre of the story - displaces and renders irrelevant other, more collective, ways of approaching the Belfast of the period.

Thus, the spring and summer of that year is the most officially-documented part of the story of Belfast's music scene in the decade. This is the brief period when Them formed, decided upon and perfected a distinctive repertoire, and took up residency in the Maritime. After this, as is widely known, they decamped to London after signing to the Belfast-born, but internationally powerful, music entrepreneur Phil Solomon and his management company, Hyde Park Music. Solomon, significantly, owned the group's recordings, which he licensed to Decca, the major label which - just as importantly - his family had a longstanding financial investment in (at one point they were reported to be majority stake-holders) (Rogan 2005: 92; see also Murphy 2015).

Regarding this hallowed moment in Belfast's popular musical folklore, the first point of interest is just how short the timeframe was. Them's 'legendary' residency at the club could have resulted in no more than seventeen appearances; bookended by their Friday 17 April debut and by the first Friday in August. On the first weekend in July, the band was in London for their first Decca recording session, and their residency at the blues club that helped forge their reputation was over (with original promoters, 'the three Js', literally, locked out).<sup>9</sup> While the group would

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<sup>7</sup> The Maritime was demolished before its heritage capital was recognized.

<sup>8</sup> As Marcus has bluntly put it, 'Van Morrison is as intense and imaginative a performer as any to have emerged in the wake of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones' (Marcus 2010: 4).

<sup>9</sup> As Gerry McKervey (one of the 'Three Js') has recalled, Them 'were whisked off away to London. The rhythm & blues club ran one more night. We turned up the next night and there were two policemen on the door and the manager of the hotel who said, "I'm sorry. I've got a booking".... That was us out of the Maritime as well' (Heylin 2004: 86).

continue with their Friday sessions at the Maritime under new promoters until early August (and were playing elsewhere across the city in this period), it is nonetheless a short ‘magnesium flash’ in the overall history of the Belfast beat scene, and an exceedingly brief period in which to ‘print a legend’. If one was being generous it was a product of the more general restless energy of the times, with this truncated residency – eight weeks before signing, and seventeen in total - a fraction of the number of appearances made by the Beatles at the Cavern. As Heylin wryly, but euphemistically, observes, when it comes to the events in the spring of 1964, ‘the truth is one curdled mess of memories... the speed at which everything happened – from rehearsal room to record contract inside three months – may account for much of the blur’ (Heylin 2004: 59). Indeed, this simultaneous compression and elongation of time, alongside the biography’s individualistic focus, has an obfuscating effect. Amplified by Morrison’s later success as a solo artist, and compounded by its heritage capital in the present, the dominant narrative, retrospectively, makes the period of ‘Them’s coming’ seem longer, bigger, and more momentous than it could have been historically.

Other accounts have sought to approach the subject beyond Them and Morrison. For example, Northern Ireland music writers Colin Harper and Trevor Hodgett (2005) comprehensively document and profile the majority of beat groups playing across the city. While admirable, there is little delineation of context, whether musical or political, the groups were circulating in. Despite the egalitarianism, they, like Darragh O’Halloran (2006) in a similar survey, do little to challenge the overall story: that Them and the Maritime is the originating - and hence most significant - moment in the overall story. It is, on a superficial level, an easy myth to debunk: a cursory perusal of entertainments’ listings across the Belfast press reveals that beat groups inspired by the likes of the Stones and the Animals were playing in the city’s few beat venues before Them’s formation (and long after they departed).<sup>10</sup> Again, like the biography, these accounts prefer an individualistic focus over and above socio-economic forces; but despite a widening of the aperture, Them’s godfather status remains intact. Morrison has, of course, been very protective of the Maritime legacy, imbuing this brief period with mystical and talismanic properties, claiming that ‘Them lived and died as a group on the stage of the Maritime’ (Yorke 1975: 24), that ‘it was never captured on tape’, and that ‘we ran the place, the whole show’ (ibid: 29), thus locating himself at the centre of the story. This renders the period as a live entity that could only have been witnessed (like the Sex Pistols at the 100 Club in September 1976) by a relatively small number of people; creating a rare artwork of sorts - a paradigm case of

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<sup>10</sup> There is a veritable list of groups comprising the scene, some of which were active before Them: the Alleykatz, the Aztecs, the Bats, the Few, the Idiom, Just Five, the Klan, the Luvin’ Kind, the Mad Lads, the Method, the Misfits, the Styx, the Telstars, Teddy and the Tigers, the Tremors, the Vaqueros, and the Wheels. Indeed, ‘group’ – in the main - had different connotations in the 1960s. Whereas group, say from the time of punk, had intimations of the manufactured. While there are significant exceptions to this rule, in Northern Ireland in the 1960s, ‘group’ signified autonomous and hence ‘authentic’ performing unit (an aspect heightened by the dominance of the *showband*).

commodity fetishism - a seminal moment which will necessarily remain out of reach for the majority of devotees.<sup>11</sup>

Lawrence Davies has explored the idea of the ‘godfather’ as a key recurrent organizing trope in the ‘big bang’ narrative, and the popular impression it leaves, of the emergence of the blues in Britain in the early 1960s. With regards to key bands such as the Stones, he writes: ‘we think that these “godfather” musicians were the *first* people to start listening to and performing the blues in Britain. This quite simply is not true’ (Davies 2014). The orthodox rock narrative, then, tends to elide ‘first’ with ‘most important’. This is clearly of significance as the existing dominant history obscures this timeline in favour of consolidating a coherent narrative replete with the customary key protagonists and events at its centre.

More scholarly accounts of Irish rock and popular music history have also colluded in replicating the myth about Them’s ‘godfather’ status on the scene. McLaughlin and McLoone (2012: 47), in the most complete academic survey of the Belfast beat scene to date, reproduce the dominant discourse, claiming that the group ‘provided the template for ambitious bands to follow’. They write: ‘As Them headed off for London in 1964, their place at the Maritime was taken by the likes of The Aztecs, The Mad Lads and The Wheels’ (ibid: 49), thus remaking the band and the venue’s centrality in time and space.<sup>12</sup> This is not to invoke games of ownership and a circuit of claim and counterclaim. We are merely noting a fact of history and foregrounding that broader cultural trends are greater than individuals and bands. In this sense, the beat *group*, as a form, has greater claims to be the collective author of the story. Them were, in no sense, the unique, originating phenomenon in the manner which has been claimed (the Aztecs, for example, were playing covers of English beat group singles while Morrison was still playing in showbands).<sup>13</sup> In support of this more collectivist reading, Simon Reynolds has captured some of the importance of the beat group of the early 1960s as a distinctive historically and culturally-specific entity:

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<sup>11</sup> The ‘Punk Special’ was a two-day event held at the 100 Club on 20 and 21 September 1976. The gig showcased eight bands, most of which were unsigned. The event marked a watershed for the movement and has become greatly mythologized. It is, of course, now the source of insider rock humour, as a great many writers, musicians and fans have, over the years, claimed to have ‘been there’ during the formative two-day festival. The ‘joke’ resides in the fact that the number of recorded claimants is believed to be well in excess of the actual attendance, as the event was, famously, undersubscribed.

<sup>12</sup> In fact, when the site of the Maritime received its blue plaque, it was unveiled on 17 April 2010, the anniversary of Morrison and Them’s debut, not significantly, the day the building started functioning as a dedicated beat venue a week before.

<sup>13</sup> Following the lead of Lashua et al, it would be interesting to know which bands were genuinely valued by audiences on the Belfast beat scene, and to know if any were performing their own compositions in advance of Them. With regards to popular memory outside of music writing, the Maritime is not exclusively remembered via any particular band, author or star, but more – with hindsight after the onset of the troubles – as a scene which represented the cultural and political power of what might have been. In short, and importantly, music as a practice – as a form to produce, a social occasion to attend, where fun could be had, alongside what that music symbolized – worked to create cultural and social possibilities and alternatives largely absent elsewhere in the Northern Ireland’s body-politic.

The beat group format took over as the dominant force in British pop, eclipsing the previously reigning templates of solo performer or singer plus backing band... Backing bands tended towards anonymous proficiency, versatility, doing what they were told. Beat groups were more “organic”, which meant that they could grow... the members typically had different skill levels, influences and tastes; the relatively narrow zone where these converged became the group’s distinctive sound ... The band as internally combustible creative engine heading off on a musical journey: this is the basis of British rock achievement in the sixties (Reynolds 2016: 76-77).

However, notwithstanding, They are undoubtedly the most important beat group to emerge from Belfast in the mid-1960s, but one needs to be clearer as to why. Some of this, rather obviously, resides in being the one to ‘make it’, a version of ‘our boys made good’, and to have that all-important commercially successful UK hit single – ‘Baby Please Don’t Go’ - and the first to appear on British national television. Another aspect of their local significance is attributable to being the first group to be attached to a *dedicated* rhythm and blues night, where the blues was foregrounded in promotion, and hence explicitly non-showband and ‘purist’.<sup>14</sup> The group’s initial campaign to promote the Maritime residency, famously, featured a series of adverts in the city’s most widely read newspaper, *The Belfast Telegraph*, which ran on consecutive days from 14 April to the group’s debut at the venue three days later (just eleven days after the band became Them). It began ‘WHO ARE? WHAT ARE? THEM?’ moving to ‘WHEN? AND WHERE? WILL YOU SEE THEM?’ to ‘RHYTHM AND BLUES AND THEM – WHEN?’ and built-up to the announcing the concrete arrival of the band on their debut, as ‘*Ireland’s* rhythm and blues *specialists*’ (emphasis added). The newspaper ads were also supported by a fly-posting campaign which simply stated: ‘THEM ARE COMING’.

In a local context, this campaign (similarly regarded as ‘legendary’ in the discourse) was a historically clever gimmick. It was effective in creating an enigma, and - in the story - resulted in increased audiences in the coming weeks well in excess of what the venue had experienced hitherto (although unlike other heavily-mythologized city scenes, there is a lack of photographic material of the group at the Maritime, or of crowds outside the venue, in the public domain). ‘Who’ or ‘what’, was coming to Belfast? It enforced, with a certain linguistic economy, that They were a very particular type of collective - *a Them – other*, abnormal; but also of one mind: giant ants - invoking a most famous beat quartet with an insect register - a hive, possibly even

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<sup>14</sup> This is how official discourse, from the Culture of Northern Ireland website, frames it: ‘In the early 1960s, Belfast nightlife largely consisted of a number of licensed cabaret clubs with genteel pianists and singers and an array of sedate ballrooms where smart-suited showbands pounded out cover versions of the latest top ten hits. But that all was to change in April 1964, in the aftermath of the popular music earthquake, triggered by the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, with a spartan seamen’s hostel in College Square North’. At best, this is partially correct, but it ignores the venues where beat music was regularly played before the Maritime’s dedicated night, such as Sammy Houston’s and Betty Staff’s. It also ignores the jazz and blues/jazz scenes.



communists.<sup>15</sup> More prosaically, but just as relevantly, these larger than usual press ads and more extensive marketing, promoted a lone local band. This was not the norm for the time, with club owners taking out the smaller (and considerably cheaper) spaces, which featured two-plus groups, and always under the 'bill-of-fare' of the venue, whose identity was most prominent. Perhaps more importantly, the group at the Maritime showcased their own material, intermixed with radically reworked blues and soul covers, in an extended 'jamming' and open-ended format, as distinct from the groups which predated them (who were largely performing covers of singles by successful English beat groups). In short, Them were located within, and adapting, a more foundational African American blues style, and in the new (for Belfast) format of a specialist/dedicated club.<sup>16</sup>

### **I heard the news today - oh boy!**

Therefore, Them's significance was indebted, in large part, to promotion and identity, appropriating the prior city/artist/venue nexus template established previously by the Liverpool/Beatles/Cavern connection, the London-Richmond/Stones/Crawdaddy relationship and the emerging Newcastle/Animals and Club A Go-Go scene. However, what is displayed here is not just an awareness of these pre-existing scenes, but a knowledge of how they drew upon, and invoked images of places and identity. The story of Them in their pre-signing period, reveals in-depth popular musical capital and managerial experience strategizing outside of 'on-the-ground' parameters; a popular music public-relations apparatus well in advance of, what could be termed, local ways of doing business. Whether the name, the ad campaign and the overall strategy were band-authored, or masterminded by the local promoters - 'the three Js' - as credited in the orthodox narrative, or Phil Solomon, Them were the beneficiaries of a sea-change in trends, whoever the architect.

To return to chronology once again, Them officially signed to Solomon/Decca about a month before they went to London for that first recording session. However, before signing, they recorded a demo-tape at the one-and-only Belfast recording studio - Lloyd Sound Systems at Cormac Square - while still, as the orthodoxy has it, under the patronage of the 3Js. However, this account is problematized by the fact that Solomon, and locally-based brother Mervyn, had a substantial investment in the recording facility, and which Mervyn frequented regularly.<sup>17</sup> This further truncates the already-brief timeline of some eleven appearances for the group in the

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<sup>15</sup> It is more than merely ironic, that the success of this hive 'collective', Them, with hindsight hinges on 'the gimmick' - a publicity device to be shunned by the beat groups as it was associated with the showband and light entertainment, and hence inauthentic. However, the financial outlay in promotion - fly-posting and ads in the press were well in excess of what could be returned in the Maritime's gate revenue. No other Belfast beat group was thinking in such terms with regard to publicity. When asked about this, still much talked about campaign, one beat scene luminary who would prefer to remain anonymous, averred that, 'they (the members of Them) couldn't have come up with any of that. No way'.

<sup>16</sup> Them, largely via Morrison, were drawing on the blues he had been steeped in from an early age via his father's record collection and his exposure to African American GIs in his time with the Monarchs showband in Germany. Other local beat groups were more directly influenced by the white British appropriation of the blues.

<sup>17</sup> Heylin's (2004: 515) best approximation for the Belfast demo is 11 June. The Decca session took place on 5 July.

Maritime before leaving for London and their debut recording session at Decca's studios in West Hampstead. According to the official narrative, They were signed about two months after their Maritime debut. Just enough time - or was it? - to underwrite their authenticity: to create the sense of 'paying their dues', and to be worthy of both representing, and being in advance of, their community/scene. (As with the Beatles example cited earlier, other pre-existing city beat scenes, built around the identity of a group and venue, took longer to crystallize.) In the context of this later Belfast version, there is evidence of a self-consciousness: creating a myth of authenticity and origins - of rock as art and rock as folk - which could be pressed into the active service of broader acclaim. As we've been intimating, there is a sense of the 'wisdom/hand of Phil Solomon' before They were signed, with Mervyn investing in scene-making hype, such as paying for girls in the Maritime to faint during the group's set, and having to be carried down the stairs and out of the building.<sup>18</sup>

It is, of course, difficult to verify this infrastructural support in absolute terms, but the possible involvement of the Solomon brothers in the group's development, and lead-up to their debut at the Maritime, is an aspect missing from all existing accounts (and all the biographies are incredibly vague about events in the first third of that year). However, the potential reasons for the exclusion of the Solomons from the narrative at this point are of critical interest. As we've argued, from the outset, They were formed, distinctively named, running a novel dedicated blues night, and signed exceedingly quickly. The evidence also suggests the group may have been underpinned by long-term, promotional strategies (as with the Maritime campaign) angled towards national, even international, markets.<sup>19</sup> What can be said with a degree of certainty, however, is that the complex 'kite-mark' of rock authenticity would have been easily erased with even a tiny whiff of record industry and/or corporate managerial manoeuvring. From the reverse perspective, it would be exceedingly difficult to build an 'authentic' R'n'B city-based scene if the 'corporate', and internationally-connected (and much older than the group/scene) Solomon's involvement was overt, and hence widely known to fellow musicians and beat audiences at this crucial early stage. There is a delicate balance to be negotiated here, between being 'true to your scene'/not 'selling-out', and 'making it'.

As we've seen They were greatly assisted in their ascent by sophisticated marketing strategies, venture capital and related investment, that was not the norm for Belfast beat groups

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<sup>18</sup> This is usually explained in biographical material as a stunt to impress Decca's Dick Rowe into signing the group. However, this is problematized by that fact that Rowe had heard the band earlier on tape at the local studio and had already agreed to sign them, as long as they were being backed by the Solomons. Indeed, the Solomon family were majority stakeholders in the record company (see Rogan 2005: 92 and see Murphy 2015), which suggests that strategies like this, which Rowe had seen before, don't make sense outside of localized myth-building and constructing an authentic city-based scene (Selvin 2015: 249).

<sup>19</sup> They formed out of the Gamblers, who were still functioning under that name until March 20. Morrison was still fulfilling obligations to the Golden Eagles showband up until April 10<sup>th</sup>, when They 'unofficially' debuted in the Maritime in support of the College Boys. In fact, the name change supports the notion of the band being built around a long-term strategy with future recording in mind. Billy Fury's backing band were also called the Gamblers, which wouldn't have mattered if the band had, as it were, remained a local phenomenon (this happened later with the Mad Lads, who would, after signing, become Moses K and the Prophets due to the prior band on Stax Records).

at the time.<sup>20</sup> Phil Solomon's place in our alternative history, stands as evidence of an experienced ('behind the scenes') marketer at work, with specific and in-depth understanding of how hype is created and deployed in the emerging complex connections between the Irish, UK and international music markets. The story of Them is, therefore, more complex than has been previously recognized. Success in the historical context of Belfast in early 1964 relied greatly on a prescient combination of factors. Firstly, constructing a local scene via a select group and venue in line with the existing on-trend models. Second, angling these - in a targeted, and novel fashion, towards national, even international, markets. The third aspect, especially, is of critical importance as it reveals a 'knowingness' on the part of the Solomons. The underpinning managerial edifice had to be kept hidden at this vital moment of the group's development, thus 'honouring' and working within - the emergent and powerful discourse of authenticity. And indeed here, the role of the 'legendary' local promoters - the 3Js - is as important in its presence in the discourse, as the Solomons are in their absence. As cultural insiders of/from the scene, they represent the 'organic good guys': non-corporate (solid examples of 'the enthusiast' music entrepreneur), and were of the same age demographic to the group (at a time when, as the cliché goes, anyone over 25 years of age was regarded as old). Adjudicating when it would be representationally, and commercially, expedient to publicly reveal the relationship between band, professional management and industry was not merely academic for Phil Solomon. Indeed, the most headline-grabbing indicator of industry machinations much earlier than has been acknowledged in orthodox accounts, is that the novel (and still much-talked-about in Belfast) 'THEM ARE COMING!' campaign was a flagrant pastiche/appropriation of the Beatles' promotional strategy to break America in late January/early February of 1964.<sup>21</sup>

Nonetheless, despite our questioning of this 'local myth with a global reach', and the suggestion that corporate intervention ('the older suits') was present much earlier than has been countenanced in existing accounts, this in no sense denigrates the band's achievement. Against the commonsense ideology of the rock fan, that, in Frith's words, 'the music industry is a bad thing - bad for music', more considered academic studies of rock authenticity reveal the industry's (and it is a continued paradox for rock fans), involvement in the construction of authenticity, creative autonomy, credibility and rebelliousness (Frith 1988: 11). Thus, authenticity – and its underlying tension between 'selling-out' and 'making it' - had to be taken very seriously by management, record company and related promotional wings. To reframe the question from the point-of-view of the Solomons: how does one support, develop and assist the 'organic' and 'autonomous' group in becoming a profitable form?

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<sup>20</sup> As Gil Irvine, Morrison's friend and neighbour, has recalled: 'other people were cagey with their money and wouldn't do an advertising campaign. Nobody had thought of that angle to create a hype' (Rogan 2005: 84).

<sup>21</sup> This campaign was coordinated stateside by Capitol Records, and included bumper stickers and posters proclaiming messianically, 'The Beatles Are Coming!' It is exceedingly doubtful that the local promoters would have had the requisite insider knowledge of this. If the Beatles campaign had been widely known on the Belfast beat scene, it would have not assisted Them's reputation, the quest for originality and their R'n'B credibility (see Inglis 2000).

### **From ‘Them are coming’ to Them arriving**

The release of ‘Baby Please Don’t Go’/ ‘Gloria’ in November of 1964 is the landmark record that changed, however briefly, how the world saw Belfast and, just as importantly, how Belfast saw itself. McLaughlin and McLoone encapsulate some of this mix of pride and excitement. The record is: ‘one of greatest achievements of the British R’n’B scene of the time and, by extension, one of the most significant achievements of the beat era in Ireland’ (McLaughlin and McLoone 2012: 46). It was selected as the signature theme tune of ‘the most hip programme on British television of the time’ (ibid: 47) - *Ready Steady Go* - and hence conferred on Belfast a ‘cultural cache’ that wasn’t there previously. They go on to argue: ‘for the Irish fan, especially in Belfast, the fact that Them’s single was high in the pop charts and the band themselves were on television, participating at the centre of the pop world was important. Irish Rock had not only arrived but in one fell swoop it had become the hippest new sound in town’ (ibid: 47).

However, on its initial release the as-yet-to-be landmark, record was far from a chart success, and it took leverage by Phil Solomon to persuade *Ready Steady Go*’s producer Vicki Wickham to use the track in such as capacity.<sup>22</sup> The increased national exposure culminated in the record’s ascent to tenth place in the UK chart in February 1965, after its release the previous November. It was as a result of Them’s televisually-indebted fame that Belfast rose-up the informal regional UK cities musical hierarchy: moving from the ‘provincial backwater’<sup>23</sup> many writers describe in the 1950s, to occupying the centre of an increasingly internationalizing British-led popular music culture in the mid-1960s.

Surprisingly, given the importance of the track to Belfast, there is little actual analysis of it and its ancillary materials. The assumption appears to be, locally especially, that the song is noteworthy as a self-contained musical achievement: for its expertise of delivery and the commercial success it attained - putting Belfast and Northern Irish rhythm and blues, in that hackneyed phrase, ‘on the map’. A further assumption is that it is revered as a rip-roaring take on a blues standard; a song made famous by Big Joe Williams in 1935, and for showcasing Morrison’s vocal signature. It is also celebrated for *that* riff: a guitar figure mired for years in controversy, as to whether Them’s guitarist Billy Harrison wrote and recorded it, or session player Jimmy Page to whom it has been customarily attributed. Relatively recently, this longstanding myth has been put to bed, with Page going on record to confirm that Harrison did indeed author and play the riff on this definitive recording (McLaughlin and McLoone 2012: 48).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Heylin (2004: 100-101).

<sup>23</sup> As the official Culture of Northern Ireland website puts it: ‘In the late 1950s and early 60s a torpor hung over Belfast. As Derek Mahon wrote later: “If a coathanger knocked in a wardrobe, that was a great event.”... Jazz and Rhythm and Blues were filtering into the city, and clubs such as Sammy Houston’s and The Maritime Club saw a singular Belfast culture of beat music solidify in the face of the showband epidemic in the rest of Ireland’ ([www.culturenorthernireland.org/features/literature/1960s-revival](http://www.culturenorthernireland.org/features/literature/1960s-revival)).

<sup>24</sup> Page in interview with Noel McLaughlin directly confirmed the writing and recording of the riff is Harrison. This is supported by original Them keyboardist, Eric Wrixon: ‘the world is full of witnesses who can testify that Billy Harrison had been playing (it) live exactly the way it turned out on the record’ (Heylin 2004: 97).

From the perspective of the Belfast story, however, one shouldn't be simply satisfied with knowing Harrison played the riff, important though this is. But the argument over who played it has obscured other discussions. The track is important beyond the purview of individual or national authorship. Aesthetically, it is not only one of the most memorable and highly recognized riffs in 1960s rock (Smyth 2005: 33), but it also advances the form to convey something of the urgency of modern life, the acceleration Belfast was experiencing in the period. Harrison's riff articulates the unrest, speed and impatience that characterized the city's youth culture of the early-to-mid 1960s: new social relations, new experiences, new attitudes. His guitar figure, combined with the song's faster tempo than previous versions, gives this standard a visceral quality, a momentum not present in the Williams' version or in the interpretations by John Lee Hooker and Muddy Waters. This was common practice among the young blues-influenced bands of the period. As Yardbirds' guitarist Chris Dreja described it: 'we'd bastardize the twelve bar quite badly... put in a lot of power-chording, and crescendos. It was also feeding off an audience, because they wanted that' (*How Britain Got The Blues* 2014).

In the case of Them, this type of strategy was simultaneously born out of - and also represented - the city's new rhythms, new pulse, its emerging desires. Belfast and Northern Ireland were deeply conservative with regards to religion, sexual mores and alcohol consumption and these areas were controlled by draconian legislation which differed greatly from the rest of the UK (and with regard to sexuality, still is). As Lauren Onkey succinctly puts it, in the context of the Northern Ireland of the period, 'Them's blues were a modern, and modernizing, force' (Onkey 2010: 204). Hence, what gave this area of Northern Irish music culture its political charge, was a general angst against a very specific kind of conservative regime. As John Hill has put it, 'the "modernisation" promoted by the Ulster Unionists in the 1950s and 1960s was pre-eminently economic in character', markedly, 'not accompanied by significant political and social reforms' (Hill 2006: 157).

However, to return the discussion to music, this *modernist* impulse is usually credited to groups at the centre, such as the Stones, more securely at top of the orthodox hierarchy of rock's greats. Perhaps this is not so surprising. The metropolitan centre has a long history of denigrating the achievements of the periphery, as is evident in the dispute over Harrison's riff. Indeed, this famous guitar-figures's etymology adds another layer to the song's meaning via the 'bastardization of the twelve-bar' Dreja describes. As Heylin notes, 'the riff in question is an inventive reworking of an earlier Paul Burlison riff', from 'Train Kept a-Rollin' (Heylin 2004: 97). Burlison, was an American pioneer rockabilly guitarist, and while Harrison radically reconfigures the guitar motif in question, Them's 'Baby Please Don't Go', as a sonic experience, introduces a rockabilly sensibility into the mix, and is consistent with Harrison's - pre-Them - love of Carl Perkins and Chuck Berry (Harrison 2017). 'Baby Please Don't Go', therefore, stands as a hybrid. The rockabilly/early rock 'n' roll intro, and underpinning riff, rub against the vocalist's more 'authentic' blues growl.

Moreover, Morrison's vocal - its register, phrasing and timbre - famously draws upon his immersion from an early age in his father's extensive blues collection, permitting him to inhabit

the form with a weight and a depth, his frame of reference being outside, and beyond, many of his contemporaries<sup>25</sup>. But, his vocal, via this 'record capital' is simultaneously updated and modernized by the musical context it is located within, which in turn, inflect the interpretive frame of the lyrics. Drawing on a song ostensibly about incarceration in an American penitentiary, and carrying connotations of slavery into a modern (Northern) Irish context is daring, with Morrison's snarl consolidating the cacophonous swirl of the music. It has a culturally-specific resonance too. The singer manages to wrench the song and its sentiments, consciously or subconsciously, into a new context, to 'speak to' an angry proletariat and frustrated youth, both sexually and politically, and tap into a burgeoning civil rights discourse in the Northern Irish context.<sup>26</sup> In short, Morrison's vocal - alongside Harrison's guitar - manages to draw upon, refresh and inhabit, in a manner read as 'authentic', a song that has been an enduring African American - yet highly adaptable - blues staple.<sup>27</sup>

There is an audaciousness about taking a now-established blues standard and giving it just such a reworking. It betrays a confidence, and for many blues devotees, it is now *the* version. Morrison 'barks' the words, onomatopoeically echoing the dog of the lyric; the dog he 'wants to be' (drawing out, and foregrounding, a sadomasochistic aspect, which again, may chime with local circumstances). The urgency - momentum - is matched by dynamic contrast where the music reinforces, and vies with, the voice, where the snap of the drum roll punctuates the verses, especially heightened by the drum break into the bass-led instrumental middle-eight. As a song it rises and falls dramatically: all heightened tension, moving from full-assault, to relative restraint

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<sup>25</sup> According to Marcus, the father's collection included '78s and LPs by the all-American Lead Belly... (a) vast repertoire of blues, ballads, folk songs, protest songs, work songs, party tunes that dissolved all traditions of race or place, the minstrel and bluesman Jimmie Rodgers, cowboy singers of the likes of Eddy Arnold and Gene Autry, the balladeer Woody Guthrie, the Hillbilly poet Hank Williams, the songsters Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, the gospel blues guitarist Sister Rosetta Tharpe - and later Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Little Walter, John Lee Hooker, Big Joe Williams, all of them magical names' (Marcus 2010: 2).

<sup>26</sup> Onkey (2010) reads *Them* as the embodiment of a transatlantic dialogue with African America which is ultimately an expression of, and solidarity with, the civil rights movement. She also interprets *Them*'s music as modern and hybrid, as opposed to primitivist and authentic. In support of this she argues that the Irish were so marinated in authenticity that they were looking for something else. There is a degree of idealization here. While these positions may have been available, they have to sit alongside other positionalities. In one vital sense, the beat scene articulated a more generalized rebellion against the conservative status quo. And the Northern Irish beat scene was more contradictory in its relationship to racial politics and the meaning of the blues, than Onkey allows for. It is best summed up in the opening episode of the landmark BBC social realist drama *Our Friends in the North* (1996), significantly titled, and set in, '1964'. The young friends of the series are forming a beat group. In a key scene, Geordie (Daniel Craig) enters his band mate's room, kisses his fingers and puts them to the lips of a photograph of Muddy Waters. However, this homage to the blues is, seconds later, accompanied by casually racist language in relation to African Americans. It therefore encapsulates the contradictions and complexities of the time.

<sup>27</sup> It is, of course, a song with a complex, and contested, history and authorship. It is usually credited to Big Joe Williams and the version he popularized in 1935. Onkey (2010: 205) credits the song to Papa Harvey Hull and Long Cleeve Reid in the 1920s. But, and again this is matter of some debate, among historians, it is possibly adapted from 'Long John' an old folk song from the days of slavery in the US (Herzhaft 1992). The melody is often credited to 'Alabama Bound' written by Tin Pan Alley composer Ray Henderson (Garon 2004). Charles Shaar Murray claims that Morrison and *Them* were most likely inspired by the John Lee Hooker Version, released as 'Don't Go Baby' on the album *Highway of Blues* under the alias Texas Slim in 1959 (Murray 2002: 212). Others claim Muddy Waters' version - realized as 'Turn Your Lamp Down Low' (1953) - was the influence.

(and back again). The ‘please’ of the chorus, though, doesn’t fit neatly with the vocal delivery. There is a combustible mix of defiance, desperation and need accompanying the air of threat of the voice compounded by the underlying hard staccato cadence of the working-class Belfast accent - the sense to outsiders that the city’s natives in conversation sound like they’re arguing (even when they’re not) - which all serves to further offset the ‘please’. Bert Berns’ production is also important. As Selvin puts it, unlike

the new breed of British producers such as Mickie Most or Andrew Loog Oldman... trying as hard as they could to make records that sounded American, he (Berns) instantly understood the dynamics of the five-piece combo. The instruments on the Them session were voiced and recorded like no other British records of the time, but the way these young musicians handled their instruments was a different world from New York classicists. There was no shortage of parallels between these working-class youth of Great Britain and the black recording artists on Berns’ records back in the States (Selvin 2015: 253).

As one of the first American producers to work in the UK, Berns tried ‘to make the records sounded British’ (ibid) and Them were to benefit from a sonic distinctiveness, a new ‘bespoke’ aural palette. This, altogether, points to the track being more contradictory in form and meaning than has been acknowledged hitherto.

There is more to this story of Them we’ve been exploring. To return to theme of the achievements of the periphery being overtaken by the metropolitan centre: the Rolling Stones, who so clearly bequeathed their long-haired iconography and ‘bad-boy’, ‘anti-Beatles’ image to the band, were to be reciprocally influenced by Them and, especially, their second single, and its Morrison-authored B-side ‘Gloria’. According to Gordon Thompson, in his comprehensive account of the ‘British Invasion’ studio system, Them’s single was to have a powerful effect on the Stones, and on Jagger especially; a little-reported aspect that was widely noted in production circles at the time. At one level, this is hardly surprising: all the major bands were listening very closely to one another in the competitive cacophony of the time, but it was Morrison’s delivery, where the distillation of his father’s record recollection is palpable in outward performance, that caught Jagger’s ear (and from ear into vocal performance). The ‘weight’ of Morrison’s vocal timbre, its hard cadence and aggressive rhythmic force, becomes evident in Jagger on ‘(I Can’t Get No) Satisfaction’, which enters public consciousness in mid-1965.<sup>28</sup>

As Thompson puts it:

In early 1965 with “The Last Time,” Keith Richards introduced a recurring guitar motif that serves as a rhythmic and harmonic backdrop for Jagger’s melody, with harmonies

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<sup>28</sup> ‘Satisfaction’ was released on 6 June in the US and August 20 in the UK. ‘Baby Please Don’t Go’, although released on 10th November 1964, became a chart hit in February 1965.

at the end of each line and a structure similar to “I Feel Fine.” Another significant probable influence, Them’s recording of Van Morrison’s “Gloria” ... has a parallel harmonic structure. Perhaps an even more important feature emerges with Morrison’s vocal delivery. Until early 1965, Jagger’s vocal style reflected the diversity of the Stones’ repertoire, imitating Chuck Berry, Don Covay, or Hank Snow. However, Morrison’s nasal and shouted presentation style in “Gloria” offered an authentically aggressive style of singing that Jagger soon personalized (Thompson 2008: 210-211).

Morrison’s vocal, then, owes more to the blues and an older, lesser known, tradition - with its ‘raw’ connotations, its roughness pronounced - than to British beat’s appropriation. In short, at this point, post-Them’s ‘Baby Please Don’t Go’, Jagger becomes on ‘Satisfaction’ the vocal force of the band entering their critically-acknowledged high-point. Furthermore, if one looks at the Stones’ single immediately following ‘Baby Please Don’t Go’ - ‘The Last Time’ - Jagger’s vocal is lighter and ‘poppier’, and when taken alongside the central ‘jangly’ guitar riff, the residue of the Beatles is still discernible. It is markedly slighter in texture, tone and sentiment than ‘Baby Please Don’t Go’ (with insufficient time having elapsed for Them’s influence to be incorporated). Heylin is even more explicit in describing the Stones’ debt to Them, especially the garage-band classic, ‘Gloria’: ‘...that night-prowling riff, the strutting vocals and the repressed sexual tension of the performance combined to convey a sexual menace it took the Stones another four years to approach (Heylin 2004: 76). Once again, as with the persistent rumour about Harrison’s authorship, the group from the periphery’s achievements are displaced.<sup>29</sup> As Dave Laing has argued, ‘(f)or the conservative mainstream discourse of “the centre” (in popular music, Anglo-America), a band from the periphery (be it Ireland, Australasia or Sweden) is either stereotyped by its origins, or naturalized into honorary Anglo-Americanism, in which case key features of its work may be repressed’ (Laing 2012: xiii).

### **What’s in a name...**

In addition to all of this, what is just as surprising is the scant attention given to the provenance of Them - both name and identity - and the lack of analysis of the band’s sleeve art for their breakthrough single. First, Them can be understood as a subversion of ‘The’ ... bands, the overwhelming norm of the time. As a name it is striking: awkwardly and tendentiously creating ungrammatical sentences, which in ‘feeling’ wrong, serve to get the group noticed (Smyth 2005: 30). ‘Them’ works, as a ‘strategy of differentiation’, rubbing abrasively against established procedure and the accepted/correct way of doing things; a clever linguistic way of standing out in a crowded (‘the’) marketplace. Moreover, it draws explicitly, and specifically, on the eponymous 1954 ‘schlock’ science fiction film, thus

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<sup>29</sup> Indeed, as the sixties in our retromaniacal present become a blob of generalised ‘sixties-ness’, important aspects of the timeline becomes blurred, as to who recorded what first, and why, and the historical significance of key events obscured, but being (regarded as) the first to innovate was extremely important to beat musicians at the time.



intertextually invoking the work of cult directors, such as Roger Corman. It also activates broader connotations surrounding 1950s youth-orientated B-movies: anti-establishment teen culture - fear of the future, imminent invasion, cold war paranoia and a more generalized youthful angst. When mapped onto the nascent 'modern' sectarian politics of a relatively newly-formed state,<sup>30</sup> these connotations activate a cluster of meanings which work with, and against, the thrust of the music.

Indeed, the name does not just reference, and speak to, a new teen audience in the US, it has a local resonance. 'Are you one of them?' - a version of 'us and them' - was in the Belfast context of the time, and into the troubles, a casually and frequently used local phrase to denote the 'other', whether in sectarian terms or 'queer'. The name also suggests that the group were not only possible invaders, but feared invasion, and on a number of fronts. Geographically and politically, the closest possible invasion of Northern Ireland at the time would have been from 'The South' (the Republic of Ireland). Though highly unlikely, for a huge section of the population, this was an ever-present bogeyman. In a young, unconfident and volatile state, the flames of paranoia were regularly stoked by politicians in order to shore up Unionist solidarity, constructing a community which imagined (and defined) itself as 'under siege'. It, more generally, invoked for the conservative establishment, an anxiety about a different kind of invasion, of new and progressive, attitudes. The name activates prominent already-circulating discourses such as these.

The complexities don't end here. In setting themselves up locally as at a distance from the Unionist-dominated status quo, and being vehemently against the musical conservatism of the popular showbands, the group would discover that this persona in an English context would render them vulnerable to being regarded as examples of the surly and violent Irish. This is a point picked up by Onkey: 'Them was assertively Irish - the image of them as the "Angry Young Them" certainly played on the notion of the fighting and aggressive Irishmen. In England, they were never seen as hip in the same way as British rock bands were. Irish signified a lack of cool in the United Kingdom' (Onkey 2010: 206). A degree of caution is warranted here, despite Onkey's insights. It is significant that for huge swathes of the liberal-left in England, the Irish - like African Americans - were perceived as victims of oppression (in this case, Empire), hence imbuing the Irish with an authenticity and a 'cool', and rendering the name even more complex in resonance (see McLaughlin and McLoone 2012: 1-10).

However, the intertextuality goes still further. The centrepiece of the picture sleeve of 'Baby Please Don't Go' is a photograph, in gritty black and white, of the band posed at the gates of Stormont,<sup>31</sup> Northern Ireland's parliament, with the building clearly looming on the hill in the

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<sup>30</sup> Northern Ireland was established by the partition of Ireland in 1922.

<sup>31</sup> The parliament of Northern Ireland was created under the Government of Ireland Act in 1920. It sat from 7 June 1921 to 30 March 1972, when it was suspended with the introduction of Direct Rule from Westminster. It was Unionist/Protestant controlled and based on a sense of British identity. The status quo didn't change until 1965 when

background. This bastion of Ulster Unionist hegemony and symbol of a state whose creation is contested by the large minority population, is certainly a controversial choice of image (one need only think of a similar image and location involving the Rolling Stones).<sup>32</sup> When mapped to Them's 'surly' reputation - long hair, the casual/informal beat group iconography - it appears they are storming, even abusing, the gates of power, literally (and uncharacteristically for Morrison) laughing in the face of authority, and hence consolidates their outsider status as subcultural and other. While a localized reading - that the band are at odds with the current regime - is present, this is complicated by Them's overwhelmingly unionist habitus, and the fact that, under prime minister Terence O'Neill, Northern Ireland was enjoying the most liberal period since its creation. The cover image is, moreover, not overtly aggressive. Rather, it mocks the building as a staid, if controversial, icon of the establishment, invoking a more 'universal' generational, as opposed to locally-specific or sectarian, angst. It is at once both challenging and dismissive of the Unionist-dominated establishment in a (general) way that only young people can successfully pull off and their peers can instantly identify with.<sup>33</sup>

Overall, Them's identity as just described, is rather more complex than has been countenanced, especially when one considers amongst the melange, the targeted connotations of the name, the significance of the music, the specificities of performance, and the meanings invoked by the cover art. These are transnational and transmedial: African-American; cult cinematic American; Northern and/or Irish; youth cultural and musical. Indeed, we could add another important aspect of 'British' to this ensemble, as Them, punned on 'Angry Young Men' with their debut album title. 1965's *Angry Young Them*, like the band name, has rich connotations which enhanced and fanned-out their rebellious image. The title, and source of the pun, refers to a group of working-class and lower middle-class writers/playwrights, such as John Osborne, determined to critique class society, which also latterly became associated with the 'British New Wave' films of the late 1950s and early 1960s. This influential film movement, like its writerly inheritance, was noteworthy for making visible the working class via gritty black and white location shooting in the regions, and expressing dissatisfaction, impatience, and resentment with the establishment. The movement is taken to have petered-out by 1964, but only after it had inaugurated a new archetype: 'the working-class hero' - the prototype 'angry young man' on screen. These connotations coalesced, underscored and acted as a shorthand for the band's image: rough, wilfully provincial and regional, but heroic and rebelling against the system. The sleeve notes make this explicit: the surly young Them are rebelling for the cause of authentic R'n'B. Furthermore, Them's slippery identity - Belfast/Northern Irish/Irish/British - was to be

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nationalists accepted office as the official opposition, an intended 'reward' for attempts made by Prime Minister O'Neill to end discrimination against Catholics.

<sup>32</sup> It is interesting that the Stones deploy a similar photograph on the cover of 'Satisfaction' posed on the Mall outside Buckingham Palace in central London (and significantly in colour).

<sup>33</sup> It is important to point out here, that Northern Ireland in the period was a divided society with forty percent of its population questioning the legitimacy of Stormont to various degrees, therefore adding another layer of risk, complexity and local resonance to the choice of cover. It's also worth noting that on one prominent version of the sleeve the photograph was surrounded in green, a colour associated with Irish republicanism, with a design that invokes the Irish national flag.

dominated by their Irish aspect in review and interview, involving the oscillation between Ireland/Belfast as a benign exotic place apart *and* an existing Irish imagistic repertoire (racially distinct, primitive, inferior, aggressive, yet also positively other – artistic, temperamental and oppressed). More obviously, it played on Belfast’s relative remoteness from the centre, and at a time when regional markets and identities had greater force than in the current context.

However, this last example introduces yet another layer of complexity, and brings us back to the issue of blurred timelines and the construction of the dominant narrative. This latter ‘cluster of meanings’ - the album title and its connotations, as well as the picture-sleeves - may have been conceived, and carefully orchestrated beyond the group’s purview, as the references concerned point, yet again, to the cultural capital of an older generation – namely the band’s management and/or record company. Whoever the author(s), these ‘stunts’, played a significant role in creating an identity and elevating the group above their Belfast peers and for broader audiences.

Them’s achievement, though, does after all, have a depth. From an industry perspective, if the ‘raw material’ is substandard, it has less chance of being accepted and respected, especially in the long term; and these records and the stories around them have endured for over half a century (hindsight also affords the luxury of being able to note many capital-intensive and hyped campaigns that resulted in market failure). However, much of the available evidence suggests that the group were supported and promoted by a more sophisticated managerial apparatus, strategically working in a ‘behind-the-scenes fashion’, in advance of the claims of established accounts. The goal? To forge a new, marketable city-based group/scene. This necessitated the construction of the myth of a group emerging ‘organically’ - working their way up from the grassroots - and inhabiting/representing the right cultural credentials. We’ve returned to the deployment of new (certainly for Belfast) techniques in advertising and marketing: the considerable investment in fly-posting, larger than usual newspaper ads, knowledge of pre-existing ‘insider’ industry campaigns, built as we’ve seen, around carefully and precisely targeted (and appropriated) cultural references. If you add to this, learning (yet again) from the Stones’ example in generating public order news, in tandem with a more general reputation for confrontation in the press, the image coheres. Considered alongside possible support for the recording of that initial demo-tape, the story of Them may have more far-reaching consequences with regard to the politics of popular music history than has been acknowledged hitherto. This is, of course, to venture far beyond the orthodox narrative, with its focus on individuals, the privileging of artist-led creation-myths and concomitant lack of attention to the less romantic, but no-doubt more foundational, infrastructural issues of marketing, ownership and control. The Belfast of Them might be a ‘curdled mess’, but it is one which has obscured vital aspects (the complex interplay of industry, management, and artist), but there is, eerily, a consistency in image creation, vying for attention with the force of the music.

This (invisible) master narrative has been very successful in constructing an ‘authentic’ scene which could be carried further as an identity/narrative for (inter) national consumption. Indeed, further supporting evidence underlines this: as early as mid-1963, the point when the

beat phenomenon was moving towards ‘overground’ recognition, the Solomons had been seeking out opportunities to build, and thus profit from, a new regional city-based scene (and a representative group which could become the next big thing in the fashion of the Beatles) (Selvin 2015: 221). And all things considered, it worked: for the music enthusiast, in terms of rock and pop origins, Belfast is Them and vice versa. It’s a generally accepted ‘fact’ that the group (and Van Morrison in particular) are the godfathers of the blues in Northern Ireland.

### **But what if the godfather of Northern Irish blues was a woman?**

The local story of ‘Baby Please Don’t Go’ doesn’t end here. It doesn’t even start here. A little-known fact in the orthodox narrative is that Them were not the first artists from Northern Ireland to record and release the song. Otilie Patterson, best known (for those in the contemporary context who do know of her) as lead vocalist with the Chris Barber Band, has this distinction. Her version, with blues ‘legend’ Sonny Boy Williamson (the sort of authentic black blues artist Morrison in the period had heard on record, but hadn’t yet met), was recorded in Abbey Road Studios in December 1963 and released on 27 February 1964, some nine months before Them. This earlier version’s status as a little known first in the Northern Irish context, functions as something of a leitmotif for Patterson’s career and her significance to this nascent period of Northern Irish popular music history. It may simply be coincidence, but it is interesting that two seminal Northern Irish artists - one lauded, recognized and elaborated in discourse (and the subject of numerous biographies); the other hovering on the fringes of the master narrative - released the same song in the most significant year for Belfast and Northern Irish beat.

Patterson - a figure who can legitimately claim a veritable host of (unacknowledged) ‘firsts’, such as the mantle of the first internationally commercially successful and critically acclaimed white blues singer - is, surprisingly and problematically, overlooked in the broader discourse of Irish popular music, both mainstream and academic (the one significant exception being a relatively brief profile written by Trevor Hodgett [1998; 2005]). This absence is interesting as her legacy connects, both critically and historically, in significant ways, with our ongoing analysis. Unfairly overlooked, Patterson’s career opens-up a series of important issues: about the origins of popular music and the move towards blues-derived rock; about the construction of histories and their ‘official’ assemblage; about selective memorialization and the politics of gender and authorship. The easiest way to explore this is with recourse to simple biography and here we need to change mode and revert to telling an important story little-known (as opposed to a well-known narrative reconsidered), with a pause here and there to underline the significance of this sadly peripheralized, but influential, career.

Born to Northern Irish/Latvian parents (Northern Irish father/Latvian mother) on 31 January 1932, in Comber, a small town several miles outside of Belfast, Patterson’s lineage designates her as marginal to mainstream Northern Ireland society, due to her hybrid identity (akin to Morrison - whose father was a self-professed atheist and whose mother was a Jehovah’s

witness for a brief time).<sup>34</sup> The society of Northern Ireland in this period was, of course, not ethnically diverse, dominated by the Protestant/Unionist/British majority and a large Catholic/Nationalist/Irish minority.<sup>35</sup> Her early outsider status exemplifies Simon Frith's observation that the 'dominant forms [of popular music] in all contemporary societies have originated at the social margins - among the poor, the migrant, the rootless, the "queer"' (Frith 1996: 122).

From an early age, Patterson displayed a passion for music, especially blues. In interview on a BBC Radio 4 documentary on Chris Barber (2013), she shared an anecdote from her childhood when, on a trip to Belfast with her parents, she spent all her pocket-money on *Handy's Blues Book*, in favour of the more customary request for ice cream.<sup>36</sup> A landmark moment in this childhood enthusiasm has a cinematic register, with Patterson (aged 11) imploring her parents to take her to see Bing Crosby's *Birth of the Blues* (1942); she was especially captivated by the music in the scene of the African/American funeral. Therefore, Patterson's acculturation to the blues was, like Morrison's, obsessional, formative and pre-teen; at a distance from the culture of youthful record collecting and/or adult connoisseurship, subcultural involvement and 'rebellion'. Unlike Morrison, though, she was not the beneficiary of an extensive record collection of African American musics in the family home (although her parents bought her a piano and lessons). Rather, she was to continue to spend her pocket money on blues 78s and, being over a decade Morrison's senior, purchased sheet music. This perhaps underpins the status she was to go on to achieve. As a student of the important post-war institution of the British art school, she was a beneficiary of the Education Act of 1944, and an early exemplar of the prominent musical figures that such institutions were to produce with increasing regularity a decade and a half later (Frith and Horne 1987).

Whilst attending art school in Belfast, Patterson began to hone her craft as a singer and gifted pianist, performing with her own band the Muskrat Ramblers in 1952, and before this she appeared briefly with Jimmy Compton's Jazz Band (who would end up playing in the immediate pre-beat scene Maritime, when it functioned as a jazz club). These biographical details are illuminating as they allude to a small, but influential, jazz/blues scene existing in the city at the time. There is little documentation available to interrogate the exact dynamics of this, but Patterson was certainly playing an active part in an earlier Belfast blues scene, and popularizing the form, making her a prominent blues/jazz pioneer in the city. This blues scene, unlike its

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<sup>34</sup> In interview, when asked if he was raised a Jehovah's Witness, Morrison responded: 'I wasn't raised anything. My mother went to some meetings at some point. She didn't call herself that. It was only for a couple of years. My father was an atheist. My mother was what you would describe as a freethinker. She would check things out and read about things, but she never joined anything' (Gundersen 1997). Patterson would recall overhearing her mother being referred to as 'that Russian woman'.

<sup>35</sup> These communities, especially in working class areas, were largely geographically segregated, yet living in close proximity to one another.

<sup>36</sup> William Christopher Handy, often controversially referred to as the 'Father of the Blues', was an influential American songwriter, and one of many musicians who played a distinctively American blues, and credited with giving it its contemporary form. He did not create the blues genre and was not the first to publish music, but he played a central role in popularizing the Delta blues.

better-known later one, drew on and performed an earlier female singer-dominated version of the form. Indeed, this more immediate post-war blues/jazz scene displayed the same concerns with the tension between authenticity and commercialism that marked the rock/pop, blues/showband distinction of the later beat scene. As an index of this, Patterson walked out of Compton's band after refusing to sing a song she considered to be pop. As she put it, 'it was not jazz. It was commercial (the 'c' word)' (Cassidy 2013: 37). After departing from Compton, Patterson moved to take up lead vocals in the Muskrat Ramblers, where the little surviving promotional materials announced her as the group's *blues* singer, marking a significant shift in emphasis away from jazz.

Two further points of significance regarding 'record capital' emerge from this period. Firstly, Derek Martin, her student contemporary, friend and bandmate, introduced Patterson to the records of Louis Armstrong, Jelly Roll Morton, the Chicago Three, Muggsy Spanier, Bunk Johnson and Bessie Smith. The latter, in particular, was to be a seminal influence throughout her career; and even Louis Armstrong averred: 'that women reminds me of Bessie Smith' (Cassidy 2013: 34 see also Vacher 2011 and Leigh 2011). Second, she was to be welcomed into Belfast record collector Gerry McQueen's inner circle. A procurer of rare blues records with an extensive collection, McQueen would host listening nights, and on these occasions the music would be discussed critically (with those whom he deemed to be the cognoscenti). Here, she was introduced to a different blues tradition: Robert Johnson, Leroy Carr and Big Bill Broonzy. As Cassidy puts it, paraphrasing Patterson, 'what was of special interest... is that they sang a kind of blues different from Bessie Smith, where Bessie sang songs accompanied by jazz bands, these blues artists accompanied themselves or were accompanied by guitar or piano' (Cassidy 2013: 39). In addition to introducing the Delta blues on record to Patterson, McQueen and Martin between them were to act in a manner not dissimilar to Morrison's father: furnishing the singer with an extensive repertoire of foundational and rare blues records. This alone would be of great importance to the history of Northern Irish popular music, even if, at worst, it would render Patterson a significant curio, another singer/group not to achieve broader acclaim. But she is more than a mere 'also-ran'.

According to her single (and largely self-published) biographer Ron Cassidy, Patterson became increasingly aware that the Belfast scene was too small to sustain more than a couple of blues/jazz bands and, as would become customary at the regions, set her sights on London. In fact, Patterson is best known as the regular vocalist with the Chris Barber Band from late 1954 to 1963 (thereafter singing with them intermittently right up until the 1980s). This is the period where Patterson becomes critically-celebrated and earns the mantle of first credible white blues singer (but it is important to stress that she arrived in London with a strong blues identity already intact).<sup>37</sup> Alexis Korner – often acknowledged as a father-figure in the formation of early-1960s rock culture – underwrote her importance on his BBC Radio programme, *Blues Roll On* (broadcast July 1968), 'there is no doubt that the first female British blues singer ever to achieve

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<sup>37</sup> Among her many recordings, *Chris Barber's Blues Book, Volume One* (1961) is particularly noteworthy as it is regarded by many as the first credible British blues album.

pop status was Otilie Patterson from Northern Ireland. It is largely due to Otilie and her husband Chris Barber that the rhythm and blues movement got underway here (Britain) some six years ago’.

### **The days before rock ’n’ roll**

However, this only hints at her importance. She is critically regarded by more recent blues scholars as a progenitor of UK blues and one of the first white singers - and certainly the first Irish singer - to inhabit the form convincingly. According to Schwartz, other vocalists such as Beryl Bryden and George Melly, ‘performed with revival and skiffle bands throughout the 1950s’, but significantly ‘neither convinced audiences that the blues were anything more than jazz songs with folk ancestry. The singer who did was Otilie Patterson, who introduced the new generation of blues fans to the classic repertoire’ (Schwartz 2007: 120).

Or as Melly himself put, ‘She doesn’t sound like a black imitation or someone paying homage, however sincerely, to the black soul. She sounds black’ (Melly 1984). Just as Patterson was the first Irish artist to record and release ‘Baby Please Don’t Go’, she was also the first blues artist to leave Ireland and achieve international fame; a prototype of the latter well-worn route to London and into ‘exile’. Interestingly, in early 1955, when she returned to Belfast with the Barber Band to give a concert in the Fiesta Ballroom (just two weeks after her triumphant official debut with the band at the London’s Royal Festival Hall), Patterson made the news, but not primarily for her singing talents. The press covered the concert due to overwhelming audience demand: ‘Police control blues singer crowds’ the headline in Belfast’s *The Northern Whig* ran, ‘1000 left out...inside the ballroom over 1000 - mostly teenagers - gave Miss Patterson a rousing reception’ (*Northern Whig* 1955). This is an early instance, pre-rock ’n’ roll, of a popular music concert in the city being reported due to public order issues (and another first). And, once again, this cuts-sharply against her (relative) absence from the discourse of Irish rock and popular music.<sup>38</sup>

Crucially, Barber is the subject of a significant reappraisal by contemporary popular music historians concerned with the pivotal period in Britain, from the ‘days before rock ’n’ roll’ to the arrival of a more conspicuously African American modern electric rhythm and blues, or ‘beat,’ and the so-called ‘British Invasion’. This writing points to Barber having played a much more central role in the emergence of blues-derived British rock than has been acknowledged previously. As Schwartz notes: ‘Many visits by American blues singers in the late 1950s were initiated by Chris Barber, who not only enjoyed live performances of the blues but was also eager to improve his band’s sound by working with American artists. This was especially the case after 1955, when Otilie Patterson... was added to the band’s line-up’ (Schwartz 2007: 76).

Moreover, in addition to being involved in skiffle (after all Lonnie Donegan was a member), the band’s style was beginning to pre-empt and pave the way for the younger generation. As Schwartz observes, problematizing easy separations between trad-jazz and blues,

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<sup>38</sup> And interestingly the promotional agent was Phil Solomon.

‘events were already in motion that would electrify the British blues and bring them into the mainstream of popular culture’:

Once again Chris Barber and Otilie Patterson were the catalysts. Their work with Muddy Waters ... made them fans of the urban blues style. The Barber Band had always tried to incorporate new ideas they learned from American artists ... (this) changed the band’s approach to rhythm from a rigid New Orleans two-beat to a more fluid, four-to-the-bar-feel, and Sister Rosetta Tharpe had made them aware of the triplet subdivisions at the heart of many styles of African American music. Thus, it was not surprising that the band was eager to experiment with the urban blues sound (Schwartz 2007: 125).

Hence, Patterson was more than merely the singer, and this recent research also points to Patterson and Barber reciprocally influencing the African American artists concerned. As Barber himself puts it, her role in the band made collaboration with Rosetta Tharpe, Muddy Waters, Howlin’ Wolf and Big Bill Broonzy possible.<sup>39</sup> ‘I’m very thankful to her that we got it right. We were a good jazz band, but we had to change. You’ve got to get into how you play that music’ (*When Courtney Met Chris*).

Patterson is, undoubtedly, the first European white female blues singer to win favour with African American musicians *and* African American audiences. She was invited to perform by Muddy Waters at his Chicago club, Smitty’s Corner, where she received rapturous responses. It is significant in this regard that African American audiences ‘got it’ in critical terms. This is, in no sense, to counter-idealize or essentialize, but the evidence is persuasive; she was accepted into the ‘cradle of the blues’, not sponsored or patronized, nor a side-show white for any interloping curiosity; an inverse primitive. One could devote an entire article to Patterson’s collaborations with a series of important figures in the live arena alone, from Waters, to Tharpe to Broonzy and Howlin’ Wolf.

### **Otilie’s Blues**

Just as significantly, Irish influences also emerge in the transatlantic tramlines of Patterson’s oeuvre. When questioned by Korner in that radio interview about possible connections between the blues and Irish folk/traditional music, she replied: ‘It is not so much a musical, but a temperamental and emotional similarity... such as the use of quartertones ... and the Irish also decorate their ballads with *the yarragh*. (Patterson in Korner 1968). The ‘yarragh’ is an idiomatic Irish phrase (a term introduced by Irish tenor John McCormack, which refers to a particular emotional, or numinous, quality of the singing voice).<sup>40</sup> In this respect, it is similar to Roland

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<sup>39</sup> Patterson and Barber in the United States stayed at Muddy Waters’ house and at the houses of Waters’ band as these tours weren’t lavish.

<sup>40</sup> The ‘yarragh’ refers to an indefinable quality in the voice which can move a performance from being very good to being something special..



Barthes' concept of *jouissance* and thus is concerned with rapture and bliss; an experience without a code (Middleton 1990: 255). It is interestingly an organizing principle of Marcus's *Listening to Van Morrison*, and links Morrison and Patterson in their desire to foreground this incantational quality of the voice (Marcus 2010: 8-11); although Patterson was in pursuit of this well ahead of the later generation of younger blues-based singers.

If one considers her many notebooks of lyrics and poems, as well as huge sections of her recorded work, both solo and with the Barber Band, she authored very specific and unusual blues songs, both in terms of performance and vocal address (Davies 2014).<sup>41</sup> These were often gendered and Irish. Indeed, her version of 'Baby Please Don't Go' significantly re-genders a song with the complex range of meanings referred to earlier and is possibly the only version released in the period by a woman, let alone white and/or Irish. However, the track 'Ottillie's Blues' is especially noteworthy. It is a complex hybrid of the blues and Irish vocal idioms; the latter of which she introduces to dramatic effect in the final third of the song.<sup>42</sup> The lyrics articulate Irish diasporic concerns, an in-betweenness, a yearning for a home that may no longer exist. Her distinctive Irish vocal on the last third of the song is, significantly, wordless and exemplifies the *yarragh* and experiences beyond the semantic; when words and meaning fail to match feeling. It, therefore, has the incantational quality referred to earlier, and with regard to the master narrative, pre-empts by some time, similar conspicuous hybrids of Irish and African-American musics by both Van Morrison and Sinéad O'Connor.<sup>43</sup> Unlike Patterson, both of these artists' innovations have received due critical acknowledgement.

To return to the subject of alternative histories, Hodgett's prescient article is the only mention of Patterson in the discourse of Irish/Northern Irish rock and popular music. It is an extended version of an interview/profile in 1998, published in *The Irish News* (Hodgett 1998), and meant to be a proper introduction and timely assessment of her career; an opportunity – as it were – to set the record straight. As Patterson put it to the author, 'that's why I'm agreeing to this interview because all I want is to be appreciated and recognized' (Hodgett 2005: 162). This article bears some scrutiny, as despite the author establishing from the outset Patterson's pioneering role, he doesn't follow through with this in a straightforward way, and eerily in some senses, undermines the stated aims of the piece and thus downplays her importance. Much of this is attributable, not to the author's intentions, but to the gendered bias of rock discourse and much mainstream rock writing. Worryingly, for example, there is little mention of Patterson as performer *and* author; a routine and staple legitimization of rock and blues-derived credibility. There is, similarly, little reference to, let alone analysis of, the many songs she wrote; of her solo albums and the albums and performances with Barber. Alas, it is largely devoted to Patterson's

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<sup>41</sup> The authors wish to thank Lawrence Davies for sharing his research into the Ottillie Patterson collection at the National Jazz Archive, and her numerous scrapbooks, poems and song lyrics with us. We'd also like to acknowledge his insightful blog ([allthirteenkeys.wordpress.com](http://allthirteenkeys.wordpress.com)) exploring the history of the blues.

<sup>42</sup> The only audio, or reference, to this historically resonant and important track is its airing on Alexis Korner's BBC Radio programme, *Blues Roll On*, broadcast in July 1968.

<sup>43</sup> Morrison firstly deploys this type of form on 1974's *Veedon Fleece* and O'Connor on *I Do Want What I Haven't Got* (1990).

reactions to meeting ‘real’ African-American blues ‘legends’, perversely deflecting attention away from the article’s subject. It is conceivable that if a white male artist of her standing was written about in just such a way - achievements downplayed in favour of a focus on the ‘real’ ‘legends’ - there would be some consternation. Sadly, here we have the old trope of the denigration, and under-exploration, of female creativity. This sits uneasily against the very real fact that a thoroughly historicized assessment of Patterson’s achievements could upset the entire master narrative of Irish rock/Belfast beat/UK blues scene creativity and its key players’ rhetorical ownership of the story.

However, as more dispassionate scholars do their work on the more general aspects of this history, it becomes apparent that Patterson’s career provokes reassessment of the existing British blues - and the transition from blues to blues-informed rock - narrative. If she troubles that broader narrative, she cannot help but overturn some of the core assumptions of the custodians of the Irish and Northern Irish rock and ‘beat museum’. Most troublingly, there is little in Hodgett that suggests Patterson’s intelligence (she is routinely described with neutralizing phrases such as ‘uncomplicated Irish lass’). This singer’s creative and imaginative universe is much more extensive and complex than allowed for in Hodgett’s profile. It is of little surprise, one could aver, that she wanted some of her history and creativity to be made manifest. Alas, that appears to matter little in this telling of the story: you’ll never be critically lauded, it intimates, if you’re constantly in the shadows of ‘real’ legends.

This is what may have possibly irked Patterson, prompting her to write to *The Irish News*, taking issue with the original article’s focus, with a letter that was duly published (Patterson 1998). This letter is ideologically interesting. At pains to say she doesn’t want to be seen to complain, it is a gentle plea for recognition as a creative female artist, one ahead of the orthodox narrative, a figure who had not yet formed into an archetype that could be followed through on (there is, as yet, no Joni Mitchell, Janis Joplin - let alone Patti Smith). Thus, Patterson is ‘doubly-othered’, as the post-colonial critique would have it: female creativity denigrated, trapped on the fringes of a parochial narrative. She is reduced to being a ‘didn’t you know figure’, an overlooked achievement from Northern Ireland’s periphery, only recovered in a local story - and akin, in Martin McLoone’s analysis of the fate of many Irish artists - to play Lear’s fool: left to look on as an awe-struck bystander, framed in the role of bearing witness, a supporting actor in a bigger story about the achievements of others greater than us (McLoone 1990).<sup>44</sup>

## Conclusion

In many respects, Patterson and her neglected career embodies the focus of this article: to question and challenge the orthodox history of how Belfast got the blues - to open-up a space for exploring and telling other stories - and to build an alternative and more extensive picture of this vital period of Northern Ireland’s capital city’s popular music narrative, offering a different

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<sup>44</sup> In his preface to his extended piece on Patterson, he notes her letter and expresses genuine bewilderment that she took issue with aspects of it (Hodgett 2005).

account of the way music functioned, and in relation to broader currents. Irish rock historiography has been fixated on the showband/beat group binary, and for solid reasons. This is, after all, the opposition that shaped the dynamics of the scene's participants at the time. Patterson's presence, though, represents other ways into the story. Future work might look more closely at the blues/jazz scene and its influence on the later Belfast of the beats. Simon Frith et al, have opened up how significant the jazz scene - its entrepreneurs, musicians and audiences - were in changing post-war musical dynamics in the UK (Frith, Brennan, Cloonan and Webster 2013: 9). This was also the case in Belfast, where the jazz scene was vital example for the later 'do-it-yourself' culture that is better remembered in orthodox accounts.

The blues/jazz scene, often collapsed crudely into Trad, is frequently regarded (if explored at all in mainstream rock discourse) as the music that a younger, and evidently, 'cooler' electric blues scene supplanted. As such, it is casually framed as a music of staid routines, rigidly formal in setting and approach, which the young 'invasion' musicians overthrew (and to global acclaim). If one is sceptical, seeking reasons for her occlusion, it could be claimed that in this 'generation conflict'-orientated period, Patterson (like Barber - and indeed Phil and Mervyn Solomon) didn't sport the look, the fashions of the new emerging youth scene (that she wasn't 'rock n roll' enough), belonging to an out-of-step musical generation, and hence with one foot in that older (however pioneering) culture before the group phenomenon rose to ascendancy, when, as the narrative avers, 'the kids took over.'

The actual history, however, complicates this. The young pre-Stones, blues and record-obsessed Brian Jones further connects the protagonists in this discussion. He was present at a Barber Band concert and is documented as being spellbound by Patterson's performance, inveigling his way backstage to ask the singer about her influences, and how she learned to sing like that (Schwartz 2007: 127). Like Morrison, Patterson's blues was, importantly, a modernizing force and not driven by faithful replication as is often alleged, but about adaptation, electrification, and translation - evidenced in her own writing, collaborations, her inventive live and recorded work, and in making spaces for the younger blues generation (as represented by the 'father-figure' of Korner) in the intervals of the Barber Band set.

In uniting our stories further – the one highly present, the other little-known – it is noteworthy that Morrison will namecheck all of Patterson's associates (Barber, Donegan and Long John Baldry et al), but - and we have tried to be as comprehensive and diligent as possible - we have yet to find a single public utterance by Morrison about his progenitor and compatriot (the significant exception is a brief mention of her by Morrison on *Jazz Club with Walter Love*, 'The Jazz and Blues of Sir Ivan Morrison' on BBC Radio Ulster, 10 September 2017). This is especially surprising given how pivotal she is and the historical, musical, and cultural complexity of her oeuvre. Interestingly, Morrison gave an uncharacteristically effusive interview in support of Barber and his legacy:

Chris recorded "Rock Island Line" with Lonnie Donegan. It was on a Chris Barber record and then it became a single with Donegan... He was also bringing over Sonny Terry,

Brownie McGee, Big Bill Broonzy, Muddy Waters. The whole thing had an impact. He was pioneering... This is how I got into music because the Donegan thing kicked off, that was the opening for me to do what I wanted to do at that stage. Though I was still at school (*When Courtney Met Chris* 2009).

However, Barber with characteristic generosity is exceedingly vocal in his praise for Patterson and the innovations she facilitated - which also rubs abrasively against her absence from the discourse of Irish rock and popular music. The omission is glaring, and raises many historically and ideologically significant questions.

Overall, this article has sought to provoke, and at the least enhance, critical understanding of this key period, and to further the analysis of Them, at a time when the group's identity was directly connected to the Belfast of their emergence. We have endeavoured to offer a more nuanced view of the group, and the contradictory circumstances of their achievement, than exists in the governing materials, as well as suggesting how Patterson problematizes the orthodox narrative in pertinent ways. Both artists – Them/Morrison and Patterson also reveal a series of complex cross cultural and intermedial dialogues, which are locally-specific but not quarantined to the local at the same time. The godfather archetype is, as the narrative goes, strong, in control, the epitome of creative mastery; he remains a constant presence on the scene. It's an age-old story. The much less, if invoked at all, godmother (as in fairy godmother), oversees, modestly looks after others, works her magic, leaves the proverbial glass slipper, and disappears to a 'somewhere/nowhere'. The focus then inevitably shifts to the denouement she helped facilitate - but her key involvement is rarely given credit or even mentioned again.

This article, we hope, resonates with Patterson's published letter to *The Irish News* (Patterson 1998), where she appeals with customary understatement, that it would be rewarding to be featured in some blues encyclopaedias.

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