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Benjamin Torrens

The Mediation of Reggae During its 'Golden Age' in the British Music Press

Abstract

This article examines the mediation of British reggae culture in the 1970s in *Melody Maker* and *Black Music*. In *Melody Maker*, rock critics come to terms with this new music culture in real time. *Black Music* comes into being in 1973, orienting itself around this new British reggae market. This analysis explores each publication's discursive construction of itself, its audience, and crucially, this new Jamaican form of popular music, in the context of their common ownership by IPC Magazines Ltd. The analysis of reggae in the British music press reveals the editorial and discursive strategies employed by *Melody Maker* to make sense of reggae. In this context, the reportage of reggae journalist Carl Gayle in *Black Music* provided an important counter to the dominant narratives mediating black British music culture. This article contributes to debates about black British music culture, and on the larger phenomenon of European writers addressing popular music cultures of the black Atlantic in the twentieth century.

Keywords

Reggae | Music Press | Popular Music Mediation | Melody Maker Magazine | Black Music Magazine

Introduction

This paper explores the mediation of reggae in the British music press during what many fans and historians acknowledge as the music's 'golden age' period, spanning from the tail-end of the 1960s, through the 1970s. As I demonstrate, such mediations indicate the signi icant role played by the music press in the discursive constructions of reggae music, its makers, and its audiences. There is broad consensus about the emergence of reggae from 1960s ska and rocksteady forms of Jamaican music, the increasing importance of 'roots' reggae as a form of 'black[1] Atlantic' identity in the mid 1970s, and the end of a golden age of reggae in the early 1980s.[2] Reggae scholarship constitutes a proliferating body of

work and the history of the music's development and meaningfulness in its original Jamaican context has been well documented from a cultural perspective.[3] Other contributing perspectives from the University of the West Indies include Howard's productive framework for understanding Kingston's idiosyncrasies in the mode of a production culture, and Hitchin's history of technological developments in Jamaica's scene.[4]

The story of the adoption of reggae in Britain starts with an emphasis of its use by British subcultures, especially skinheads or 'white rastas'[5], and as an 'alternative soundtrack to Britishness.'[6] Julian Henriques' pioneering study of the sound system, and the ongoing work of the Sonic Street Technologies project he leads, constitute a multi-faceted study of the consumption culture most-often associated with reggae records.[7] This project, as well as the work anthologised in *Global Reggae*, index the remarkable degree to which reggae culture and reggae scholarship have proliferated worldwide.[8]

Far less attention has been focused on the way the European music press represented reggae, as a mediation of the culture of another place, and how specialist papers and magazines made sense of a Jamaican music for Europeans. This case study of British journalists, and the publications for which they worked, provides an example of the shifting mediation of reggae for the music fans of one European nation. The study is even more interesting in revealing how fast new discourses of reggae emerged and how British magazine publishers attempted to deal with the diversity of ways reggae could be, and was, understood by its European audiences.

I show how, in *Melody Maker*, a longstanding British music publication, the emerging sound of reggae was most often constructed as 'other.' Journalists, fluent in a discourse that mediated rock-as-artform, constructed reggae as an alien music which needed explaining to its readership and against which their own music culture was reinforced. In another, then newly-established magazine, *Black Music*, a different set of questions, amounting to a powerful counter-narrative, are posed and answered. Equally interesting is that these magazines' very different ways of explaining reggae to their readers occurred despite their common ownership. IPC Magazines Ltd, who owned both titles, was then a dominant owner in an increasingly oligopolist market for weekly publications.

Melody Maker came under IPC's umbrella as a legacy music publication that, by late 1969, mostly catered to a rock audience. IPC also owned *Melody Maker*'s main competitor for rock readers, *New Musical Express*. First published in 1973, *Black Music* was an attempt by IPC to cater for a new market of black music fans in the UK, in which reggae played a large role. *Black Music* was a response by IPC's leaders to construct a readership that challenged the independent *Blues and Soul*, by

including coverage of West African and Caribbean music alongside their Western counterparts.[9] All these publications cover reggae in album/single reviews, artist profiles, and advertisements for live concerts as well as less frequent, major features on the music.

It is these major features to which this article is attentive. To do so, I draw on approaches from media studies and critical discourse analysis to begin this work of understanding reggae's construction in the pages of music periodicals. I analyse three features, two from *Melody Maker* and one from *Black Music* magazine. I follow Wall's broadly outlined approach, in asking the following questions of the discourses that operate in each piece: what is the object being constructed here? By whom? Using what discursive repertoire? And who benefits?[10] As the features I analyse often feature mediations of a Jamaican musical culture from a British perspective, this set of questions raises important ideas about ethnicity, identity, and nationality. To understand these ideas, I draw upon two key thinkers, Paul Gilroy and Stuart Hall, specifically the former's concept of the black Atlantic and the latter's 'What is this black in black popular culture?'.[11] These landmark works represent two attempts, one weighted towards historical analysis and one theoretical, at resolving the paradoxical position of the notion of race in resistance to oppression. Their approaches help us to understand how ideas and expressions of 'race' can simultaneously be an essentialist construction through which Europeans explained and justified their oppressions of other peoples and an act of re-signifying the language of an oppressor as a source of meaningfulness and resistance.

I begin by locating these two publications within a historical and organisational discussion of IPC Magazines. In so doing, I illustrate how multiple approaches to the mediation of reggae occur within a broader business practice of a media institution: the attempt to monopolise the British magazine market and segregate its audiences in line with its practice of acquiring and selling titles.

The main part of the article explores these wider issues of ownership, control and readership through the published articles commissioned by the editors, and written by journalists, employed at each publication. I focus on three major editorial features on reggae in two music periodicals published in 1969 and 1976. Of the articles featured here, the first two are taken from issues of *Melody Maker* published in 1969 and 1976. The latter, also from 1976, was featured in *Black Music*. All three features take the form of overviews of reggae culture in Britain, functioning as a kind of 'state of the art' for their different readerships.

In analysing these three instances of reggae's mediation, I illustrate the ways in which reggae was constructed as the 'other' against which rock's superiority was defined in the pages

of *Melody Maker*. I explore how this evolved in a handful of years, as the publication goes from understanding reggae as a novelty music to an important cultural force, and using Hall's insight to explain how changes in the music's form and presentation explain this new discursive iteration. I end by positing that, in this discursive plane that posits rock as the superior popular musical artform, *Black Music*'s coverage of reggae represents an important counternarrative.

IPC, *Melody Maker* and *Black Music*

International Publishing Corporation

During the time of reggae's 'golden age', a major portion of its mediation would occur under the umbrella of IPC Magazines Ltd. *Melody Maker* and its competitor *New Musical Express* were both acquired by IPC in the early 1960s, and *Black Music* would be founded by the corporation in 1973. Given its significant ownership of the British music magazine market – at one time estimated to be publishing over hundreds of magazines, three London daily newspapers, and several journals – it is useful to explore the company's history further, not just to contextualise a significant contribution to British reggae discourse by locating it within the corporate structuring and restructuring of IPC, but by exploring the link between the two.[12]

Given its significance in the British media landscape, scholarship on International Publishing Corporation, as it was originally known, remains relatively sparse. What makes IPC interesting is in its attempt to replicate the 'newspaper baron' monopolistic business model in the magazine market. Despite this, most historical treatments of IPC instead adopt the more recognisable 'great-man' and 'rise-and-fall' narratives, in this case pertaining to the monopolistic business practices of its founder, Cecil King, in particular his ownership of the *Daily Mirror* newspaper. In a well-worn story arc, King is commonly understood to have carved himself out a print media empire before falling victim to a boardroom takeover. The most notable mediation of King occurs in documentarian Adam Curtis' 'Every Day Is Like Sunday', which posits him as a pre-Murdochian newspaper mogul by emphasising IPC's ownership of the *Mirror* and King's close relationship to Harold Wilson – Britain's prime minister from 1964-1970 and again from 1974-1976, and his governorship of the Bank of England.[13] Despite casting King in such a central role in British socio-political history, such a totalised approach to media historiography actually underrepresents the scale of IPC's dominance.

To better understand the institutional and commercial landscapes in which *Melody Maker* and *Black Music* operated, the following is an attempt to chronologise IPC's corporate activity before and during the period in question: The Mirror Newspapers Limited group, under the chairmanship of Cecil King, purchased Amalgamated Press and its associated titles in 1959.[14] Within months, the AP is renamed Fleetway Publications, Ltd. In 1961, the (renamed) Mirror Group then purchased Odhams Press, which itself had previously absorbed Longacre Press, George Newnes, and the Hulton Press. It is at this point that *Melody Maker*, which was published by Odhams, comes into the ownership of IPC. Odhams is amalgamated into Fleetway, and later, in 1963, King's and the Mirror Group's publishing interests would be housed under a parent company, the International Publishing Company (IPC). The company's purchase of the *New Musical Express* occurs a year after that of *Melody Maker,* in 1962. In 1968, the company indicatively changes its name to IPC Magazines Limited.

Black Music comes into existence at the end of 1973, not as a corporate acquisition by IPC or one of its holding companies, but instead as a brand-new publication, published by IPC Specialist and Professional Press Ltd. The magazine was renamed *Black Music & Jazz Review* from April 1978, before ownership moved to the then owners of *Blues & Soul*, independent publishers Napfield Ltd, in late 1979. The magazine was retitled again in March 1981 as *BM*, relegating the *Black Music & Jazz Review* name to a strapline. In July 1984, it was incorporated into *Blues & Soul*.

IPC's long-running practice of acquiring, offloading and incorporating existing titles, and founding new ones, indicates a corporate strategy that built on segregation of markets. The key is that IPC targeted what it understood as specialist titles, of which *Melody Maker* and *Black Music* magazine were just two. Through this way of understanding IPC and its holdings, *Melody Maker* is better understood as being closer in significance to its corporate ownership to hunting magazine *Horse and Hound*, a similarly long-standing publication with connotations of prestige, than it was to *Black Music*. Such a wide-range of niche publications suggests IPC's board would have had little editorial interest in the coverage in the pages of its publications, leaving its editors and journalists more discursive space to operate as they saw fit, so long as profits were made.

Melody Maker and its audience(s)

We can apprehend the ways in which *Melody Maker* conceived of its audience and its subject matter from the very first instance of its publication. This provides a productive historical context for understanding why its later mediations of reggae would take the form they did. For Gorman, the important point about the founding of the publication is that its creator Lawrence Wright uses his

new platform as a vehicle for promoting his sheet music.[15] This is undoubtedly an important consideration, but there is far more going on discursively in *Melody Maker*'s early years than an innovative medium for advertising sheet music.

On page one of issue one of *The Melody Maker*, as it was originally titled, the publication is subtitled 'a monthly magazine for all who are directly or indirectly interested in the production of popular music'. At stake, then, are conceptions of what popular music is, its methods of production, and two groups of readers who might be 'directly or indirectly interested'. Just what *Melody Maker* constructs as popular music can be read out from its contents: it is 'lighter music' and novelty songs (as Gorman correctly asserts, often composed by Horatio Nicholls, Lawrence Wright's *nom de plume*), and it is black music – signified via articles on the banjo, on the ukelele, and on syncopation.[16] An article on the English jazz scene also constructs popular music as nationally defined; place and nation are central to *Melody Maker*'s narrative from the outset.

Anderton and Atton identify *Melody Maker*'s discursive construction amongst rock fans as both a musician's paper *and* a thinking fan's during reggae's 'golden age', and such a construction is similarly evident in this inaugural issue.[17] Those 'directly' interested in the production of popular music are popular musicians. Originally published in London's famous Denmark Street, also known as 'Tin Pan Alley', *Melody Maker* was an independent publication aimed squarely at working musicians in the entertainment world, who needed the latest sheet music, industry news, and the classifieds that would remain in the pages of the magazine for decades. Those 'indirectly' involved comprise a musically aspirant, amateur or hobbyist class of readers who want the know-how, and who come to *Melody Maker* as a tome. It is to this prospective readership that articles like "How to read music at sight" by Hubert Bath, in the same first issue, are evidently directed; working musicians would plainly have had no use for such an article.[18] The contents of this magazine, then, constitute a hierarchical discourse of popular music consumption: musicians are the authorities on music and the goal of non-musical fans should be to aspire to this level of mastery. Anyone else, the non-informed fan, should read something else. As Anderton and Atton suggest, it is the publication's historical reputation as a musician's magazine that simultaneously allowed the magazine's editors to present it as the informed fan's bible.

From its inception, then, *Melody Maker* can be said to have been about the mediation of popular music – which it understood as novelty songs and as music of black origin – to a readership of both professional musicians and aspirant pop fans. It was preoccupied with place as a defining discursive notion, particularly with how the relationship between Britain and the US fit into its discourse of

authenticity. This historical inquiry differs from most accounts of *Melody Maker,* as in Lindberg et al, who pick up the story of *Melody Maker* in the mid-1960s, and who understand the British music press in this period through the prism of Chris Welch's journalism and creative agency.[19] Such a treatment of *Melody Maker* both foregrounds and is explained by the prominence of rock in its pages from the mid-1960s onwards, at the expense of understanding how reggae sat, uneasily, side-by-side with other music cultures.[20]

Black Music and its 'musical mission'

According to Gorman, *Black Music*'s inception was green lit at the urging of its founding editor, Alan Lewis.[21] Lewis, who already held a prominent position in the IPC company as subeditor of *Melody Maker,* would have had an insider's knowledge of the publication's editorial motivations and readership. That he felt motivated to push for the publication of a new title indicates an opportunity for Lewis to exercise his journalistic agency within the established corporate strategy of IPC.

As with the above analysis of the first issue of *Melody Maker,* there are a number of insightful historical ideas that can be seen in an analysis of the editorial in the first issue of *Black Music*, published in December 1973, and it is worth quoting here at length:

> Let's get it on! Black music is the very foundation of pop culture. Where it all began. And where it's at today. Black music has given birth to blues, jazz and rock… to musicians of genius like Louis Armstrong, Billie Holiday, Charlie Parker, Chuck Berry, Ray Charles and Aretha Franklin. And black music is still setting the pace through the work of artists like Sly Stone, Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye, Thom Bell, Bob Marley, B.B. King and many others. From Harlem, New York, to Kingston, Jamaica. From London to Lagos. The music is as diverse as the people who make it. It's getting bigger and better every day and it demands a magazine to do it justice. We believe Black Music is that magazine. We aim to be expert and factual, but never boring. Exciting, but free from uncritical hero-worship. We'll use top writers and photographers on both sides of the Atlantic to bring you news, reviews and interviews on the whole scene: soul, reggae, blues, jazz, gospel and African music. And, just as important, we want to include the voice of you – the musicians and fans on the street. It's your magazine, so let's have your comments – good or bad – so that we can make our next issue even better. Together we can make Black Music the magazine the music deserves.
> Alan Lewis, Editor.[22]

Black Music constructs itself, its audience, and the relationship between the two in this manifesto-like editorial. Editor Alan Lewis promises the publication will walk the line between fandom and soulless study. His mediation of black music spans generations and the entire black Atlantic; there is a performance of the depth and breadth of knowledge of the 'true fan'. Its audience, by implication, is constructed as a similarly passionate and knowledgeable fanbase, discerning but not boring, who will share in *Black Music*'s conception of black music as a global scene, and as the foundational form of popular culture. Lewis rounds off his editorial with an explicit and urgent call for contributions from its readership, sounding the clarion call for a dialogic relationship. This is further reinforced by a picture of a microphone-in-hand at the end of the feature, signifying BM handing the microphone to the reader who finally gets their long-awaited turn to voice their opinion.

Compared to *Melody Maker*, then, with its didactic tone speaking *to* an audience, *Black Music* constructs itself as a magazine that is *of* its audience. The discourse from which the editorial is written could not function without an already established market for reggae music in Britain, a market which IPC evidently understood as distinct from its *Melody Maker* and *New Musical Express* readerships. This is the market at which *Black Music* aims itself squarely, constructing a sense of itself and its contributors as being the same as its audience, all in it together in the mission to champion black music to an extent not evident in other established publications. This, ultimately, is what distinguishes *Melody Maker* and *Black Music.* These are not two mediations of two distinct music; these are mediations – sometimes of the same music, sometimes not – for two distinct audiences and with two distinct approaches: didacticism for rock fans in the former, and dialogues with 'soulies' in the latter.

'Spotlight on reggae': mediating reggae for a readership of rock fans

On November 8th, 1969, British music weekly *Melody Maker* published 'Spotlight on reggae', a one-page feature on the music that had recently been 'invading' the British charts.[23] The feature adopts a top-down, overarching view of the British reggae scene, including a review of several recording artists. Many instances of reggae's mediation from this period adopted a similar approach, with reggae coverage in the British music press beginning in earnest following some early crossover hits in the British music charts in 1968.

That *Melody Maker*'s editors deemed it necessary to shine such a spotlight constructs a reggae scene as something that needs further illumination, and casts itself as the publication with the knowledge to do so, positioning its writers as the authority on this nascent cultural phenomenon in British society, and itself as the font of this knowledge. Indeed, as is explored below in more detail, *Melody Maker* was and is regarded as something of a 'thinking fan's' magazine in comparison to its competitors during this period. This is certainly the case in this early attempt at mediating an emerging black, Jamaican reggae culture for a British rock audience.

In their response to the question of how to make sense of this new music, the editors' solution took three forms: succinct profiles of three reggae groups – the Harry J All Stars, The Upsetters, and the Pioneers – with accompanying photographs, an article titled "Reggae – is it a new art form?" by celebrated rock journalist Chris Welch, and a cartoon of a reggae fan. I now examine each component in turn, unpicking the discursive repertoire on which *Melody Maker* drew in its early reggae mediation, beginning with the artist profiles of the three groups.

The groups *Melody Maker* selects to constitute this new musical form are significant. 'The Liquidator', 'Return of Django', and 'Long Shot', released by Harry J All Stars, The Upsetters and the Pioneers respectively, are frequently identified as three of the most important singles released in reggae's early period and responsible for the commercial success and popularity of reggae in Britain.[24] Each group is mediated through a short write-up of its biography and recent hits, and an accompanying image. The specific ways in which *Melody Maker*'s journalists attempt to make sense of these new groups, and how they are mediated to its audience, reveals an ambiguity and an awkwardness in early attempts to mediate reggae to rock fans. Also significant are the artists not selected to be here. Desmond Dekker, for example, is conspicuous by the absence of an artist profile, considering his 'Ísraelites' had reached the coveted number one position in the UK charts earlier in the year – a feat unmatched by the artists featured. Exactly why Dekker is not featured here is unclear, although the six-month gap between Dekker's success (16 April) and the publication of the article may index a degree to which the editors chose to emphasise a sense of reggae's newness.

Two of these groups – the Harry J All Stars and the Upsetters – present a particular problem for *Melody Maker*'s journalists: how to construct and mediate a production culture of reggae at a point in which its early crossover singles were often instrumentals, and yet did not feature prominent star vocalists or solo instrumentalists. A look through the other pages of this issue of *Melody Maker* reveals just how dependant the publication was on the star system in its mediation of other genres.

For example, rock is constructed as existing in a conversation between Frank Zappa and Captain Beefheart, and we are to understand jazz and blues through features on Cecil Taylor and Albert King, respectively.[25] Faced with the challenge of how to mediate a starless music to a readership that would have been accustomed to understanding popular music culture through its stars, *Melody Maker*'s solution is to make stars of the music's producers.

This approach is first evident in *Melody Maker*'s construction of Harry J All Stars, so named for their producer Harry 'J' Johnson, to whom the publication awards the honour of top spot in the featurette. The profile constructs the All Stars as a 'backing band' comprised of 'four unknown musicians.' In *Melody Maker*'s discourse, the All Stars are implied to have been corralled together by Johnson, without whose input they would languish in the obscurity of the jobbing musician. The accompanying image, however, is incongruous with such a notion. Depicted is a shot of the band performing in a live context – perhaps in their role as a backing band – in which several members including Harry J himself are not visible. It is unclear where or when this photo is taken, but its inclusion indicates an absence of professional press shots. This ad-hoc inclusion perhaps indicates a late scramble for any usable image in light of their recent success: the article mentions 'Liquidator' had entered the publication's pop chart a week prior, suggesting a recency bias as the underlying motivation for the group's prominence in the feature. *Melody Maker* both constructs this new form of music called reggae using a discourse of urgency, relevance, and novelty, and in so doing reinforces its own importance in the lives of its readers: this discourse of newness both creates and fulfils a need to be up to date with the latest releases from Jamaica.

Unlike the 'unknown musicians' that comprise the Harry J All Stars, *Melody Maker*'s journalists did know who played for producer Lee Perry's studio band, The Upsetters. However, despite the availability of this information, it is still on Perry that this construction of the Upsetters depends. Perry is signalled as the group's star producer and songwriter, fulfilling the criteria of rock journalists to point to a great man in their mediation. Similarly, Perry is the only figure on show in the accompanying image. This time, instead of a live shot of a band in action, the image that constructs the Upsetters is a press shot of Perry, indicating an intent behind Perry and his label to push him as the star persona, in a manner familiar to the readers of *Melody Maker*. Perry is also ambiguously described as someone who '*acts as* vocalist with the group'.[26] This construction of Perry as a singer who does not sing is made more confusing by the fact that the group's breakthrough record, the vanguard of what constituted a 'reggae invasion of the [British] chart,' was another instrumental

recording. This discourse also calls into question just what vocals Perry would perform live in their upcoming tour – mentioned in the profile – in his capacity as someone who 'acts as' a singer.

In its profile of The Pioneers, *Melody Maker* is on more familiar ground. The Pioneers, for *Melody Maker*, constitute a vocal trio – instrumental musicians and producers are not significant in this approach to mediating music makers. This is reflected in the accompanying image, a slick, professional photograph of the singers that looks likely to have been taken in a studio. Forming vocal groups was commonplace in the Jamaican music scene throughout its earlier ska and rocksteady periods, thanks in no small part to the influence of US groups like the Impressions, and this practice continued into the reggae period. Such groups would have been easier to conceptualise for *Melody Maker*'s journalists and fans alike. A consequence of this familiar way of conceiving of music production means that not only are the instrumental musicians who performed on 'Long Shot' unnamed, they are not part of the story at all.

Like the artist profiles, Chris Welch's article will have been familiar in tone and form to regular readers of *Melody Maker*. Ultimately, the article constructs Welch as a personality in the pages of *Melody Maker* more than it constructs reggae. The rhetorical device employed here winkingly casts Welch in the role of the high-minded musicological analyst. References to an imagined German chemist named Boghausen and to reggae as 'music concrete' or 'cement waltz' attempt to evoke a sense of reggae as emerging from the inner-city, whilst simultaneously invoking the high-minded music form. The decision to subtitle the piece "a critical appraisal by Christopher J Welch" – his name normally appears as 'Chris Welch' in other articles and single reviews –contributes to a sardonic invocation of a scholarly discourse. Admittedly, the tone of Welch's article – which would likely have obfuscated his thesis on reggae even in 1969 – makes the text difficult to analyse using conventional discourse analysis techniques. This article may well represent an earnest attempt to understand and champion reggae, but there is still a sense of ambiguity and awkwardness. This results from *Melody Maker*'s coming to terms with this new reggae phenomenon in real time – the editors did not yet know what their thesis on reggae was – but had still to conform to their readership's sense of the magazine as the authority on popular music.

Perhaps the most explicit indicator of the way in which *Melody Maker* conceived of and constructed reggae in its incubatory years can be read out from its cartoon of a reggae fan. The image depicts a solitary, young, white man, complete with buzzcut, braces and disgruntled expression. He carries a 12" vinyl record: 'Club Ska '67'.'[27] This is the stereotypical depiction of the British 'skinhead,'

and it is in stark contrast with the visual images of rock culture found throughout this issue. In its construction of rock culture, *Melody Maker* in 1969 predominantly depicts musicians, not fans. Most of them are also white and male, but their sartorial choices – long hair, beards, baggy clothing – fly in the face of the style signified by the cartoon. The image, then, constructs rock fans as much as it constructs reggae fans; reggae's fanbase are white soul boys, not sophisticated rock fans, and are satirised in the rock-dominated pages of *Melody Maker*. The parodic depiction of such a fan in this article serves to further construct reggae as something atypical of inclusion in the magazine. It is a paradoxical discursive move: *Melody Maker* champions the music in its words and satirises its fans with its images, contributing to an 'arm's length' sense of its mediation, and the ambiguity that results from a recognition of reggae culture as important but a reluctance to throw the full weight of its support behind the new music.

We can surmise, then, that for *Melody Maker*'s rock journalists and rock fan readers, reggae presents something of a new challenge in the late 1960s. *Melody Maker* attempted a comprehensive review of reggae culture – who made it and who consumed it - constructing it as a music defined by its producers and singers, made in Jamaica and consumed by white British skinheads. Crucially, that black communities in Britain consumed reggae remains absent from *Melody Maker*'s discourse. Reggae's production is constructed using essentialising and unexplained discursive tropes of black popular music as 'authentic' and 'pure.'

In so doing, *Melody Maker* also constructs itself: the didactic nature of the feature constructs the publication as the reflexive, 'thinking fan's' tome – one that will cover and even champion reggae, but that will only do so from a distance. In 1969, *Melody Maker* fashioned a conception of reggae for its rock fan readership using the materials available to its journalists (discographic information and press shots), using borrowed discursive repertoire from its mediation of rock and jazz. As I explore below, while *Melody Maker* would retain its sense of itself and of its readership, the publication's response to changing reggae culture would see a drastic change in its mediation of reggae in just a few short years.

'Inside Reggae': *Melody Maker* at the height of reggae's popularity

As has been well-documented in the histories cited above, reggae culture constituted a profoundly distinct set of music, musicians, ideas, images and fans in 1976 than it had done seven years prior.

The intervening years had seen the meteoric rise of Bob Marley and the Wailers, particularly following *Melody Maker* guitar god Eric Clapton's cover of 'I Shot the Sherriff' reaching the US Billboard's top position in 1974. The proliferation of Rastafari, and social and political discontent in Jamaica, contributed to the development of 'roots reggae,' an iteration of reggae that popularised rasta theology and worldview. 1972 saw the release of *The Harder They Come*, a crucial contribution to reggae's legitimisation in Britain. These cultural phenomena – a film depicting reggae as at once 'from the ghetto' and as the music of the outlaw; a self-styled 'revolutionary' reggae superstar; a symbiotic discursive link with a religious movement that put repatriation to Africa at its heart – all make possible a construction of reggae in the press as a cultural form that – in the words of Stuart Hall – can 'pass the test of authenticity'.[28] This in turn explains the increased seriousness with which *Melody Maker* would mediate reggae, as I now demonstrate.

Such changes can immediately be read from the equally stark approach to *Melody Maker*'s mediation of reggae in 1976, in which Britain is now understood to have its own reggae scene, explored in a four-page feature called 'Inside reggae,' published 9 October 1976. In 1969, reggae in the pages of *Melody Maker* was constructed as a novelty music, in need of a one-page 'spotlight' feature to be comprehendible by its readership. Seven years later, it had become deemed worthy a 'four-page MM investigation into the music, politics and religion of "today's underground."' The editorial decision to devote four pages of *Melody Maker* to its mediation contributes to a construction of the reggae scene as both more populous and popular, and as a more culturally complex phenomenon requiring a broader set of considerations to comprehend sufficiently. These topics are investigated individually over six articles of various lengths and written by different journalists.[29] Tellingly, there is also a glossary of reggae keywords, as *Melody Maker* seemingly understood them, such is 'toasting', 'rockers,' 'ganja,' and 'Jah, Jahweh.'[30]

The images that accompany the dense text-based mediations reflect the topics of the articles. An image of Notting Hill Carnival in 1976, captioned 'VIOLENCE: the scene at this year's Notting Hill Carnival' intersects an article by Karl Dallas that ostensibly uses the Carnival and Junior Murvin's hit "Police and Thieves" as a narrative device to discuss what he describes as the 'politicisation of reggae.' A side-by-side image of two record shops, one in London and one in Kingston, emphasise the role of small and independent businesses in the distribution of reggae records in Robert Partridge's article "Selling reggae by the pound" – a title that makes use of a double-meaning: reggae is selling well, and the British market is part of that story. We see images of star singers, producers, and groups,

as well as a large portrait of Haile Selassie, captioned: 'Haile Selassie: Rastafarianism began with him.' Despite *Melody Maker* similarly constructing itself in this article as the font of knowledge, the mediation of reggae in the feature is worlds apart from that of the one analysed above.

Carloyn Coon, like Chris Welch, remains a celebrated figure in British rock journalism. Her piece for the feature, entitled "Prejudiced Vibrations," constructs an alternative British reggae scene than the skinhead consumption culture represented in the 1969 feature. Instead, Coon's article focuses on a production culture consisting of Jamaican-born, British-based reggae singers like Delroy Washington, and reggae bands formed in Britain like Matumbi, Aswad, and the Cimarons. The significantly increased wordcount of this and other articles in the four-page spread reflects the elevated station of reggae culture in the minds of *Melody Maker*'s editors, and provides Coon with the column inches to mediate reggae culture to more depth than had previously been possible in the publication. Similarly to Welch, the construction in her article is as much as of Coon herself as it is of reggae. Coon is cast in a position of allyship rather than as the superior specialist, however.

The article's position towards reggae culture is a sympathetic one. The granularity and reality of the hardships of being a reggae musician are frequently evoked and are given space in the feature. Rather than surveying the field from a lofty position, Coon interviews these musicians and quotes them at length on issues as wide-ranging and important as the realities of dealing with pluggers and promotors, or their colonial schooling in Jamaica.[31] Where Welch was 'in the know' thanks to his discerning ear and musical knowledge, Coon and her colleagues achieve their discursive status through an increased sense of proximity to the music they mediate, albeit still to an audience of rock fans who want to know more from within the safety of a music paper. Despite the consistent positionality *Melody Maker* imagines for itself and its audience, we get a sense from the 1976 article and from the wider feature that, for rock journalists mediating reggae culture to an audience of rock fans, reggae has become a subaltern culture that needs defending from the ignorance of the BBC and commercial radio stations, and from promotors who will not give reggae artists their fair shot.[32]

Throughout the feature there is evidently a concerted effort to incorporate a wider sociological perspective into the story of reggae, and to approach the music and musicians with more explicit empathy. But the mediation still depends on an othering of reggae musicians and reggae culture in order to do the discursive job it does, as is made obvious in statements like the following: 'Ironically, if conditions in the last few years had improved for black people in our community, had they become more integrated, reggae music might not be as alive and kicking as it is.' Coon may well have a point

here, that the realities of racist British society in the 1970s resulted in fuel for British reggae culture. But it is obvious who 'they' are, and by implication who 'we' are. That *Melody Maker* found the inclusion of a glossary a necessary choice speaks volumes to this aspect: its understanding of its readership was clearly as a group that would need help in understanding just what these reggae musicians were talking about in the first place. The publication's sense of its didactic relationship to its readership that is evident in 1969 is just as visible here, and crucially, that is still a readership that is understood as rock fans first, and reggae fans peripherally at best.

Black Music, Carl Gayle, and IPC Magazines

The pages of *Melody Maker* were dominated by coverage of rock music and rock musicians even in the 1970s 'golden age' of reggae. As I have demonstrated, black musics like reggae are present, but are cast in peripheral roles against which rock's dominance can be measured and made sense of. By contrast, *Black Music* was given over entirely to the mediation of diasporic musics of black origin, including reggae, US soul, disco, jazz and African musics. Coverage of reggae in the early years of the magazine was largely undertaken by Carl Gayle. His copy has been praised for its inclusion of patois/patwa and slang, and due to many trips to Jamaica was likened to reportage by Gorman in his history of the British music press.[33] As I now demonstrate, it is not just his proximity to Jamaican reggae culture, but what he chooses to do with this proximity, that marks Gayle's journalism out as a significant contemporaneous attempt to understand reggae as a transnational culture.

Black Music's analogue to the article by Carolyn Coon in *Melody Maker* employs a by-now familiar form. "From JA to UK – a British reggae round-up," subtitled "an in-depth survey by Carl Gayle," positions a reflective introductory article alongside a series of artist profiles and pictures, comprising an overview of the scene. In this feature, though, there is a significantly greater number of profiles, listed in alphabetical order, and each is given more column inches. Given that Gayle's editor would likely have been Alan Lewis, who had previously worked as sub-editor at *Melody Maker*, the familiarities in form between this article and the 1969 feature are unsurprising, and their differences are significant. Following the practice of its contemporary, *Black Music*'s working assumption is that British reggae artists constitute a 'scene', about which some broader points a musical expert like Gayle or Welch can extrapolate. But the form and content of those broader points in *Black Music* is distinct from those in *Melody Maker*.

What sets Gayle's mediation of reggae in *Black Music* apart is in emphasising an understanding of reggae as a transnational culture, demonstrated in the following quotation:

> British reggae is made by singers and musicians who have lost real contact with the social, economic, political and cultural influences and inspiration that provide their Jamaican based counterparts with the meat of the material with which they made their music… There's an awareness of reggae music now that there has never been before. Interest is growing fact. It is noticeable now that people who, two years ago, would not have bat an eyelid have suddenly nurtured quite esoteric tastes. But their taste is for Kingston, Jamaica, not London, England.

In Gayle's construction, it is the constantly evolving music coming out of Jamaica that signifies the target towards which reggae produced in Britain orients itself. In advocating for the British scene, inherently playing catch up to Jamaica, to develop a sound of its own, he restores a sense of agency to the people who make up Britain's reggae production culture. Coon mediates reggae in Britain with reference to its competition for airplay and viability with other popular musics, which is certainly a crucial component. But that same sense of agency is absent from a discourse in which reggae musicians remain subject to racist society and racist institutions. In Gayle's discourse, what is emphasised is a notion of the transnational and of the dialogic. It is not that Gayle's proximity to Jamaica's reggae scene equates to a truer understanding and representation of the music; it is that, in moving back and forth along the black Atlantic, Gayle chooses to emphasise that same movement within a global reggae culture, of records, of musicians, and of ideas.

Similarly, the artist profiles in *Black Music* take a subtle but meaningfully different tack than those in *Melody Maker*. For the acts and artists compiled in the 'round-up', Gayle gives us 'background', 'lineup', lists their latest and biggest hits, and provides us his professional opinion the group or artist's 'outlook' or 'prospects'. That he feels comfortable going so far as to speculate on an artist's future career – a practice that had been common in publications like *Melody Maker* – constructs not only Gayle as the man in the know, but British reggae as something to take seriously enough as to speculate on the future success of its artists. In his treatment of Gayle's journalism and role in the history of the music press, Gorman constructs a sense of the former as being ahead of the curve in spotting trends like the 'genius of Lee Perry' or the 'commercialisation of Bob Marley' before his white counterparts.[34] This capacity as a prognosticator of reggae culture is on display in the

article in question; in his advocating for British reggae musicians to develop a sound of their own, he posits Louisa Marks' hit, 'Caught you in a lie', as a model for others to follow. Those familiar with the story of Lovers Rock will know that this is exactly what happens in the dominant narration of the genre that would become known as 'Britain's contribution to reggae'.[35]

Conclusion

Melody Maker and *Black Music* represent contrasting approaches to the mediation of reggae in British music press. In *Melody Maker*, reggae goes from being a novelty music, consumed by a literal cartoon audience, to an 'authentic' cultural force worthy of serious treatment. These mediations occurred in a publication that, broadly speaking, addressed its rock fan readership in a didactic discourse. In *Black Music*, reggae sits alongside other musics of black origin, as part of a publication that constructed itself as performing an interventionist role in the British music press. Where *Melody Maker* constructed itself as the authority on music, *Black Music*'s editorship catered to an audience constructed as the ones *already* in the know. Language is a particularly illustrative point of departure – not just in the discursive sense I employ throughout this article, but also in more basic terms: the editors of *Melody Maker* in 1976 deem it necessary to include a glossary of terms for its readership; Gayle's celebrated use of patois/patwa in *Black Music* assumes his readership would understand him. The difference in mediations can be explained by the difference in audiences constructed by IPC's segregationist approach to markets in its continuing attempts to acquire and invent new titles.

Of course, this article has explored the mediation of reggae in just two periodicals, across a relatively short time span, in just one European nation. To further illuminate the myriad, complex ways in which Caribbean culture has informed European society, there is significant scope for scholarly endeavour into similar media and cultural practices in different contexts.

By way of conclusion, I posit that the discursive repertoire employed in mediations of reggae have since become ubiquitous in reggae discourse. Our broad understanding of reggae continues to be structured by the preoccupations of rock journalists in the 1970s. Reggae historiography, for example, consists mostly of biographies of its star singers (usually of Bob Marley)[36], or attempts to explain reggae through the lenses of politics and religion.[37] Such approaches have been fruitful, but as I have argued elsewhere, reggae scholarship has suffered for a lack of complementary perspectives

including those of the musicians who made it.[38] Reggae writing would benefit from a plurality of discourses to supplement the dominant notions of journalists from reggae's 'golden age' that still structure much of our understanding today.

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Endnotes

1. While I follow the convention of not capitalising 'black' or 'white', as neither is a proper noun, I recognise this important issue of debate and respect that there are many perspectives on this matter.
2. See, for instance: Stephen Davis and Peter Simon, *Reggae bloodlines: in search of the music and culture of Jamaica* (Heinemann Educational, 1979); Steve Barrow and Peter Dalton, *Reggae: the rough guide* (Penguin, 1997); Lloyd Bradley, *Bass culture: when reggae was king* (Penguin, 2001); David Katz, *Solid foundation: an oral history of reggae* (Bloomsbury, 2003).
3. See, for instance: Caroyln Cooper, *Noises in the blood: orality, gender, and the "vulgar" body of Jamaican popular culture* (Duke University Press, 1995); Carolyn Cooper, *Sound Clash* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2004); Sonjah Stanley Niaah, *Dancehall: from slave ship to ghetto* (University of Ottawa Press, 2010); Donna Hope, *Reggae from yaad: traditional and emerging themes in Jamaican popular music* (Ian Randle, 2015).
4. Dennis Howard, *The creative echo chamber: contemporary music production in Kingston Jamaica* (Ian Randle, 2016); Ray Hitchins, *Vibe Merchants: the sound creators of Jamaican popular music* (Routledge, 2014).
5. See, for instance: Dick Hebdige, "Reggae, rastas and rudies : style and the subversion of form," *Stencilled occasional papers* (1974): http://epapers.bham.ac.uk/3342/1/Hebdige_1974_SOP24.pdf; Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: the meaning of style* (New Accents, 1979); Dick Hebdige, *Cut'n'mix: culture, identity and*

Caribbean music (Methuen and Co., 1987); Simon Jones, *Black Culture, White Youth: the reggae tradition from JA to UK* (Macmillan, 1988).

6. Mykaell Riley, "Bass Culture, an alternative soundtrack to Britishness" in *Black popular music in Britain since 1945*, ed. Jon Stratton and Nabeel Zuberi (Taylor and Francis Group, 2014) 101-114.
7. Julian Henriques, *Sonic bodies: reggae sound systems, performance techniques, and ways of knowing* (Bloomsbury, 2011).
8. Carolyn Cooper, ed., *Global Reggae* (Canoe Press, 2012).
9. *Blues and Soul* is an independently published magazine, founded by music fan John Abbey. Studies into 'zine culture, as it has since been named, have often recognised the profound impact of such publications operating outside the oligopolist magazine market thanks to their platforming countercultural discourses.
10. Tim Wall, *Studying popular music culture* (Sage, 2013).
11. Paul Gilroy, *There ain't no black in the Union Jack: the cultural politics of race and nation* (University of Chicago Press, 1991); Paul Gilroy, *The black Atlantic: modernity and double consciousness* (Verso, 1993); Stuart Hall, "What is this 'black' in black popular culture?" *Social Justice* 20, no. 1 (1993): 104-114, http://www.jstor.org/stable/29766735.
12. "IPC Magazines Limited," Encyclopedia.com, accessed November 22, 2024, https://www.encyclopedia.com/books/politics-and-business-magazines/ipc-magazines-limited.
13. Adam Curtis, "*Every day is like Sunday*," directed by Adam Curtis, documentary, 2011, 44 min., 47 sec., https://thoughtmaybe.com/every-day-is-like-sunday/.
14. "IPC Magazines Limited," Encyclopedia, accessed August 12, 2024, https://www.encyclopedia.com/books/politics-and-business-magazines/ipc-magazines-limited.
15. Paul Gorman, *Totally wired: the rise and fall of the music press* (Thames & Hudson, 2022), 9.
16. Gorman, *Totally wired,* 9.
17. Chris Anderton and Christ Atton, "The absent presence of progressive rock in the British music press, 1968-1974," *Rock Music Studies* 7, no. 1 (2020): 8-22, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19401159.2019.1651521.
18. Hubert Bath "How to read music at sight by Hubert Bath," *Melody Maker*, January, 1926, 24.
19. Ulf Lindberg, Gestur Gudmundsson, Morten Michelsen, and Hans Weisethaunet, *Rock criticism from the beginning* (Peter Lang, 2005), 76-106.

20. Simon Frith argues the rockist discoursed dominate the pages of Melody Maker came into being in fan-made rock magazines of the early 1960s. See, for instance, Simon Frith, *The sociology of rock* (Constable, 1978), 143-146.
21. Gorman, *Totally Wired*, 150.
22. Alan Lewis, editorial, *Black Music*, December, 1973.
23. Chris Welch, "Spotlight on reggae," *Melody Maker*, November 8, 1969, 20.
24. Bradley, *Bass culture* (Penguin, 2001), 241-2.
25. Richard Williams, "The Beefheart Zappa Talk-in," *Melody Maker*, November 8, 1969, 24-5; Richard Williams, "For Cecil Taylor, It's just the beginning," *Melody Maker*, November 8, 1969,12; Max Jones, "Talk to the King," *Melody Maker*, November 8, 1969, 16.
26. My emphasis.
27. An LP of the same name did exist, released in the UK in April of 1967 by Island Records and manufactured by West Indies Records Limited. WIRL had famously been founded by Jamaican Prime Minister Edward Seaga, although he had sold WIRL to Byron Lee of Dragonnaires fame by the time this compilation was released. The LP compiled well-known hits from previous years like 'Guns of Navarone' by The Skatalites (1965), and more recent releases like '007 (Shanty Town)' by Desmond Dekker and the Aces (1967) and 'Dancing Mood' by Delroy Wilson (1967). The sleeve of the real LP differs greatly from that depicted in the cartoon, however.
28. Hall, "What is this 'black'": 104-114.
29. The articles, in order of appearance, are as follows: "'Burnin' and a-lootin" by Karl Dallas (subtitled "Politics"); "Selling reggae by the pound" by Robert Partridge (subtitled "Business"); "Prejudiced vibrations" by Carolyn Coon (subtitled "British scene"); "JA blues to rockers' by Chris Lane" (subtitled "Roots"); "The bass-ic heartbeat" by Karl Dallas, (subtitled "The beat"); "The Rasta connection" by Michael Watts (subtitled "Religion").
30. The following are *Melody Maker*'s definitions for 'toasting': 'DJ technique, in which he talks, or chants, over the record. Even Mick Jagger tried it on "Hot Stuff"'; 'rockers': 'A slower, heavier rhythm than reggae, in which a singular guitar (often a wah wah) chocks away on the offbeat. The Mighty Diamonds are a good example of its practitioners. Having emerged in the past year, rockers may represent the most seriously terminological threat yet to reggae. Reggae has reflected the enthusiasm of the years following independence; rockers is in tune with the currently desperate mood in Jamaica'; 'ganja': 'Hindustani word for cannabis, brought to Jamaica by the East Indians who began to settle there about a century ago. It's now

being replace by "herb" and another new phrase is "coli and ilie"; and 'Jah, Jahweh': 'In effect stands for Ras Tafari/Haile Selassie, but is actually a form of "Jehovah" used in the English Bible from 1539 to 1758'.

31. Full quotation: 'Why, I asked Franklyn Dunn, the Cimarons' bassist, was it necessary for black people to develop their sense of identity? "Because you've got to know yourself. You've got to become aware of what you are. Black people have been taught to destroy themselves and become something else. For instance, when I was in Jamaica going to school, I learned about Christopher Columbus and English history and the spinning wheel, and I don't know anything about black people. I don't know about I self. Jamaican education is essentially English. You are taught English culture utterly. You're taught to worship and think in the English philosophy. Pick up a book and all you're reading is about white. Jesus is white. At school I remember even when I draw a woman she is white with long hair. So where are you personally? The names most Jamaicans have are American names to show ownership from the slave days. You've got your freedom but you still have the chain. It is still there from the name, like a vaccination. I was taught that anything that didn't have the English system in it wasn't worthy. And if you don't fight against it even you yourself sell yourself out.'
32. The full quotation from Coon's article is as follows: 'Why can't we just flick on the radio and hear, at least once a day, one of reggae's all-time geniuses like Bob Marley wailing through a superb three minutes of, say, "No Woman No Cry"? The answer is simple. Commercial radio stations at the BBC still cling to the threadbare myth that there is no audience for reggae. It is a minority sound, they say. So they just don't play it.'
33. Gorman, *Totally wired*,151.
34. Gorman, *Totally wired*,153.
35. That Lovers Rock constitutes a distinctly British reggae is a common but contested notion. See Lisa Amanda Palmer, "'LADIES A YOUR TIME NOW!' Erotic politics, lovers' rock and resistance in the UK," *African and black diaspora* 4, no. 2 (2011): 177-192, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17528631.2011.583454.
36. Of course, there are exceptions to this, notably Bradley's comprehensive history, cited above.
37. For example, Stuart Borthwick, *Positive vibrations: politics, politricks and the story of reggae* (Reaktion, 2022).
38. Benjamin Torrens, "Natural progression," conference paper, IASPM, Newcastle, September, 2024.

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Biography

Benjamin Torrens is an AHRC funded researcher at the Birmingham Centre for Media and Cultural Studies, Birmingham City University. His research focuses on reggae production cultures in transatlantic contexts, the mediation of popular music cultures, and on popular music history and historiography. He is also a bass player and an active member of the reggae scene. e-mail: Benjamin.Torrens@mail.bcu.ac.uk.

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