Reading Production and Culture in UK Teen Girl Comics 1955 to 1960

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Abstract

In this article I explore the production of teen girl comics such as *Marilyn*, *Mirabelle*, *Roxy* and *Valentine* in the promotion of pop music and pop stars from 1955 to 1960. These comics developed alongside early pop music and consisted of serial and self-contained picture stories, beauty and pop music articles, advice columns, and horoscopes. Materiality is a key component of the importance of comics in the promotional culture in a media landscape in which pop music was difficult to access for teenage girls. I analyze the comics within their historical and cultural framework and show how early British pop stars were constructed through paradoxical discourses such as religion, consumerism, and national identity to make them safe for teen girl consumption. The promotion of these star images formed the foundation for later pop music promotion and girl fan practices.

Keywords

consumerism, fandom, fantasy, materiality, pop music, promotion, stardom, teen magazines

Introduction

Teen girl comics appeared in the mid-1950s, a pivotal moment in popular culture when the teenage girl was identified as a member of a potentially lucrative market, and American culture began to pervade British teenage music, fashion, and attitudes. They differed from better known comics such as *School Friend*, *Bunty*, and *Girl*, produced for younger female readers, because they featured romance stories, make up and fashion advice, quizzes, and pop music and they were aimed at an older female audience. Much of the content on pop music concentrated on pop stars who often appeared on comics covers, in picture stories, articles and advice pages, biographies, or stories based on stars helping fans find love. The comics included free gifts in the first issues, anniversary issues, and regularly every three months.

This article explores the ways in which pop music and stardom was promoted in these comics and the impact this had on teen girl audiences.

The first of these teen-targeted comics after World War Two was *Marilyn* (1955–1965) published by Amalgamated Press (later Fleetway), followed by *Valentine* (1957–1965) and *Roxy* (1958–1963). *Romeo* (1957–1974) and *Cherie* (1960–1963) were published by DC Thomson, *Mirabelle* (1956–1978) and *Marty* (1960–1963 by C. Arthur Pearson (later subsumed by Fleetway). At least 40 percent of teenage girls read them (Gibson 2015). The circulation for the comics varied from *Valentine*'s 407,000, *Romeo*'s 329,000, *Marilyn*'s 314,000 and *Mirabelle*'s 224,000 (Chapman 2011; Tinkler 2014. This readership may seem small compared with film and television audiences of 15 million in this era but if a comic had a turnover of 150,000 this translated into 750,000 readers (Gibson 2015). Further, comics could provide what television and film could not—continuous accessibility. I examine how and why early pop star images were constructed to hail the teen girl, what was at stake in these representations, and why comics were seminal to the dissemination of these images in what, at the time, seemed a temporary phenomenon.

From their earliest publication these comics and magazines contained articles on pop music and this expanded throughout the 1950s into the 1960s. Connie Alderson (1968) notes that by 1966, 50 percent of the comics' content was devoted to pop. My own statistics reveal a steady increase of pop content in UK girls' comics. For instance, 25 percent of Amalgamated Press's *Roxy* #1, (15 March 1958) was devoted to pop, increasing to 45 percent by 16 September 1961. Similarly, Arthur Pearson's *Mirabelle* #1, (10 September 1956) began with 9.3 percent of its pages devoted to pop music in 1956, growing to 45 percent by 14 September 1963. This was because of the identification of a lucrative teen market by advertising producers from the mid-1950s and the gradual saturation of British culture with American fashions, films, and rock 'n' roll music.

In the mid-1950s rock ‘n’ roll music arrived in Britain but, until the mid-1960s, it was difficult to access in the mass media. Pop music was exploited in films produced by independent film studios in Hollywood and British pop stars starred in cheaply produced films such as *The Tommy Steele Story* (1957) and *The Golden Disc* (1958). However, these circulated two or three times per year. There were few television shows—*Juke Box Jury* (1959–1967) and *Six Five Special* (1957–1958) on the BBC, and *Oh Boy!* (1958–1959) and *Thank Your Lucky Stars* (1961–1966) on ITV. Furthermore, in homes that had a television, the teenager was often at the mercy of adults' television interests. Pop music on BBC radio, the only legitimate radio station in Britain, was similarly sparse. It consisted of *Easy Beat* on the BBC Light Programme[1] or request shows such as *Housewife's Choice*. Teen girls could access pop music in coffee bars in larger towns where records were listened to or live music played regularly such as the *2iis* in Soho. However, the bedroom was, perhaps, the most important site where girls could listen to records, read comics and magazines and discuss stars with their friends. Comics, with their ready availability, played a central role in this promotion because they were always on hand and could be reread, loaned, borrowed, and discussed with friends.

The comic as a material object was crucial for it provided a conduit to an encounter with a star through fantasy and daydream. Anna Pellegram suggests that the "physical nature of the paper has much to do with the message it conveys" (1998: 103). This is certainly so regarding the cost and audience for the comics that fell into two types—the magazine quality and the children’s comics quality. The industrial setup along with marketing accounted for the difference. Amalgamated Press and the D.C. Thomson presses were set up to produce children’s comics and so *Romeo*, *Cherie*, *Marty*, *Marilyn*, *Roxy*, and *Valentine* printed on newsprint, were cheap (4d)[2] and looked like children’s comics with limited color and low production values (Gibson 2015). *Mirabelle*, which looked more like a magazine, was

printed on shiny paper with colored pages with the use of half tones and cost 4 1/2d when first published. Consequently, *Mirabelle* had more cultural capital. Magazine-produced comics were often favored by parents and were regarded as the bridge between the girl's comic and the woman's magazine that adult women tended to read. Nevertheless, as noted above, nearly twice as many girls favored the cheaper looking comics over the *Mirabelle*. Girls could develop new star narratives in their consumption of comics by exhibiting cut-out pictures on their bedroom walls as a shrine to their favorite star, but also, as I explain in this article, in the comics' free gifts and special offers (Lincoln 2012; McRobbie 1978). Comics told stories of the stars and the stars purportedly wrote columns giving advice, or divulged intimate details of their fellow stars' lives to their audiences. In this way comics provided intimate access to pop stars through representations and gossip. This articulates Richard Dyer's (1997) notion of the paradoxical nature of stardom as ordinary yet extraordinary and present yet absent. Stars are present in the continuous flow of information and images relating to them as real people who are knowable, but they are absent because the knowledge is constructed through representations. Thus, the pop star is inaccessible to audiences and fans, while the most minute details of their lives are known through stories, gossip, and articles. Furthermore, as this article illustrates, the pop stars in teen girl comics of the late 1950s conformed to Dyer's notion of the ordinary yet extraordinary dichotomy.

There is little written about these comics. Penny Tinkler's research (2014, 2017) discusses the comics as a means of constructing the teenage self. Alan Kidd and Melanie Tebbutt (2017) analyze advice columns in an attempt to discover more about the lifestyles and opinions of teenage girl audiences. Many studies of teen girls' comics concentrate on DC Thomson's *Jackie*, the best known of these publications, through audience effects and the values encoded in the romance comic strip (Barker 1989; McRobbie 1991). However, *Jackie* did not begin publication until 1964, the year that marked the height of Beatlemania, when

marketing pop was already well established. The late 1950s to early 1960s laid the foundations for the development of British pop and its promotion, paradigms of pop stars' career trajectories, and the subsequent explosion of creative talent in the British beat boom of the 1960s. For this research, I analyzed the content of teen girl comics from 1955 to1960, calculating the growth of pop music content and changes in address and artwork. I consulted the pop charts to identify new directions in pop music that were cross-referenced with the output of comics.[3]

America and British Pop Stars: From Rock 'n' Rollers to Clean Teens

Rock 'n' roll music arrived from America in the mid-1950s, a time that coincided with the publication of the first teen comics. The first phase of rock 'n' roll included stars such as Elvis Presley, Buddy Holly, and Bill Haley and his Comets. They appeared in the context of a moral panic over juvenile delinquency. The threat over juvenile delinquency was promoted in films, called JD films, that were produced mainly by independent film studios and purported to be true accounts of juvenile delinquency. Many pop and rock 'n' roll stars were promoted in juvenile delinquency discourse. For instance, the promotional trailer for Elvis Presley's film *Jailhouse Rock* (1957) constructed him as violent, an animal and a "tough *Blackboard Jungle* kid."

Promotional culture contributed to the taming of the sexuality and dangers posed by early rock 'n' roll stars such as Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Ritchie Valens in America, who by the end of the 1950s were either tamed or had died. The gap left by these stars was filled by so-called clean teens, good looking young white men and women, styled and promoted across several media by powerful managers, to make pop music safe for teen girl audiences. Thomas Doherty (1988) notes that clean teen promotion was "a quite literal product of the parent culture, fabricated from above, peddled down below" (221). Clean teen

stars such as Fabian, Frankie Avalon, and Pat Boone starred in films, recorded pop songs, and starred on television shows such as *American Bandstand*.

In Britain, rock 'n' roll co-existed with middle of the road comedy, novelty, pop music, trad jazz, and skiffle in the *New Musical Express* chart, the latter two inspired by American music, jazz, rhythm and blues, and country music.

Several British teen stars who emulated the American stars appeared from the late 1950s. Their names, Marty Wilde and Billy Fury for example, hinted at the dangers they posed, and, in their styling, they copied American stars' mannerisms and fashions. Cliff Richard, for instance, was said to copy Elvis's snarl and, in his early films such as *Serious Charge* (1959), he played a juvenile delinquent.[4] By the end of the 1950s he and some of the other stars had developed a clean teen profile which can be seen in films such as *The Young Ones* (1961), starring Cliff Richard, that emulated polished Hollywood productions. Part of the packaging of these teen pop stars to make them safe for teen girl audiences was in the assumption that rock 'n' roll could not last and everything would eventually revert to middle of the road entertainment.[5] An example of this assumption can be identified in an article in *Mirabelle* in which Jean Christy quizzes the stars on their secret ambitions. Skiffle king, Lonnie Donegan aimed to star in a "musical show of some kind" (9 September 1957: 10–11). The ambitions of pop stars such as Tommy Steele and Cliff Richard reflected similar aims; both starred in pantomime at the height of their rock 'n' roll careers.

It was crucial in the 1950s that these pop stars should be presented as safe products for the teen girl market. At the end of the 1950s the teenage girl's body could be regarded as a site of potential transgression. Teenage girls were encouraged to act as the moral guardians in teenage sexual behavior, restrain male sexuality, and be virgins when they got married. The teenage girl's dilemma of whether to commit to premarital sex was posed in the song "Will you Still Love Me Tomorrow" sung by The Shirelles (1960) in which sex is regarded

as fun for teenage boys but could have dire consequences for girls. Male pop stars were packaged as attractive boys next door who could be trusted with the honor of their girl fans.

Promotional Culture and British Pop Music

In analyzing promotional materials, I use the ideas of Andrew Wernick (1991) who notes that much promotion focuses on a name whether it is the star, a director, a writer, or a product, to sell a commodity. Stardom, like pop music, is based on consumerism in what he describes as the "vortex of publicity" in which promotion is never a discreet phenomenon. "Each promotional message refers us to a commodity which is itself the site of another promotion" (121). There is no starting point in the chain of advertising and it is continuously self-referential, relying on serial promotion to appeal to ever expanding audiences. In their connections with the pop media, the UK comics followed a cross media promotional model that was an integral part of American film and popular music industries. American companies promoted films and stars through television, music, and comics with companies such as Dell and Gold Key adapting films to comic format, stunts, and television.

An example of similar promotional strategies is a pop prom sponsored by *Roxy* in 1958 in which pop stars performed their latest hits. The third pop prom, promoted in *Roxy* (18 September 1960), featured Emile Ford and the Checkmates, Cliff Richard, and Adam Faith. The prom was advertised in *Marilyn* and *Valentine*, *Roxy*'s sister publications in Amalgamated Press. However, promotion did not end in comics for the advert in *Roxy* featured pictures of its organizers, "BBC backroom boys" Donald McClean and Jimmy Grant, described as "the boys behind *Saturday Club* and *Easy Beat*" (10 September 1960: 24), promoting radio and television pop music shows. So, in reflecting on the promotion for the pop prom and Wernick's notion of the continuous circulation of promotion, the star names not only promoted their latest records but, by association, their films, and their record

companies. The mention of the organizers' names also promoted *Saturday Club* and *Easy Beat*.

These intertextual practices are a feature of the development of star images which, as Richard Dyer (1997) also notes, are constructed through consumerism and "are always extensive, multi-media, intertextual" (3). What is significant in promotional strategies is how they hail their audiences through fantasy and desire, placing the teen girl in the position of access to, and the ability to interact with, the star. This provides a vicarious agency inaccessible to teenage girls elsewhere in their lives. The adoration of male stars, particularly pop stars, as Barbara Ehrenreich et al. (2003) argue in their study of Beatles fandom, enabled American girls to express their sexuality and resistance to cultural constraints placed on them in the early 1960s.

At this time, British pop music and the promotion of its stars was in the early stages. Promotion differentiated British pop stars from their more glamorous American cousins as accessible and as what were thought of as the boys-next-door. The representations of pop stardom can be compared with the ways in which the British film industry constructed home-grown female film stars in movies about World War II in which, as Antonia Lant (1991) argues, they were represented as more realistic and normal whereas the glamor of American female stars in contemporaneous films was regarded as wasteful and unpatriotic; in this way, stardom was aligned to national values and identity. In Britain, war-time rationing ended in 1953 and this, along with full employment, the increasing infiltration of American culture, and the growth of teenagers as a potentially lucrative market resulted in a different approach to the promotion of pop music and stardom based on excess, consumerism, and the sacralization of the stars.

British pop stars were constructed, like American ones, through their consumption and the ordinary/extraordinary binary but through the lens of British culture. While American

stars, like Elvis Presley, were treated with awe, they remained largely inaccessible. Home grown stars, however, were incorporated into articles and advice columns in comics and they frequently mentioned how they visited the publishing offices. Pop stars were also accessed through the uses teen girl readers of comics made of free gifts, stories, and paratextual elements, for instance, in cutting out photographs to adorn their bedroom walls, and in the comics' stories that encouraged girls to fantasize about possible encounters with the stars. Furthermore, British pop stars, like American ones, were constructed through religious discourses making them knowable, yet unknowable. Balanced against the promise of the danger of rock 'n' roll was the inaccessibility of the religious icon. Examples of the quasi-religious attitude can be seen in the ways in which fans responded to stars through collecting and displaying their images on bedroom walls like a religious shrine, and also in the frenzy of fans at live performances in which the star functions like the shaman in taking the fans to an altered state of existence (Rojek 2007).

In the rest of this article I offer examples from the comics to highlight some of the main themes of their promotion to teen girl audiences. Underpinning promotional tropes, in many cases, were elements of the ordinary/extraordinary, and of fantasy, reality, and religion. Comics evoked quasi-religious discourses and these were expressed through promotional culture and consumerism, like, for instance, information about what the stars owned, the products they endorsed, and their media output in films, television, and music. Celebrity and star culture was developing rapidly in the late 1950s along with the growth of access to media technologies like television, radio, popular music, and film. The early British pop industry used religious discourses to ensure that the emerging stars, although more accessible than American stars, had an aura of the extraordinary.

Stardom, the Sacred and Consumerism

Chris Rojek (2017) argues that the sacralization of stardom is a response to the growing secularization of society. This is a trend also noticed by Russell W. Belk et al. (1989) who identify the intrusion of the sacred into some secular practices and objects in popular culture such as sport, stardom, and music for instance, after his death, Elvis Presley's home, Graceland, was regarded as a place of pilgrimage for his fans and a sacred site. Rojek notes that rock music can evoke the sacred in the ecstasy of being carried away by the music, taking drugs, the worship, the places inhabited by, and objects associated with, the rock star, and in fans' collection and exhibition of these objects that recall reliquaries. Reflecting Dyer's (1997) notion of the star as accessible yet inaccessible, Rojek contends that the proximity of the star through cross media promotion encourages what he describes as "para-social interaction" in which "relations of intimacy [are] constructed through mass media rather than direct experience and face-to-face meetings" (170). Using Rojek's ideas to analyze teen girl comics, the star is presented as a sacred object or a manifestation of the sacred in everyday life. Sacred discourses are evoked in stars as conveyors of advice and information, in the stories told by and about them, and in the paratextual components of the comics. The stars in comics function as oracles providing advice for teenage girls and insight into other stars. This is evidenced in advice columns, beauty articles, and fashion advice purportedly written by stars. Many comics used star names to head their advice columns. *Mirabelle*'s advice column, "Ask Adam," supposedly written by Adam Faith, was penned by R. Leedon, possibly with the publishers of the comic paying the star to use his name and image. In many cases, the star's advice was promotional, whether selling records, films, fashions, or, like Alma Cogan, beauty information and fashion tips. Such promotion also developed the star brand and the star as commodity.

The elevation of the star to the sacred can also be identified in the quest, the magical donor, and the narratives. These tropes occur in two types of religious story—the biography and the quest. The biography of a saint acts as a model for detailing the self-sacrifice of the star in the service of music. Elvis Presley, for instance, is continually described as lonely and isolated. A four–part biography purportedly told by Cliff Richard in *Mirabelle* (12 September–3 October 1959) describes how he had to give up his relationship with his girlfriend, Janet, to concentrate on his music. He said, "I went home. I'd really cared for Janet, and what I had been forced to do hurt really badly . . . and yet . . . I've got to make a success of show biz!" (26 September 1959: 7). Although names have been changed in this story, it is corroborated in an article posted by Stephen Adams on 9 April 2010, in *The Telegraph Online*. In a private letter to his girlfriend, Delia Wicks, Richard, aged 21, explained, "Being a singer I'm going to have to give up many things in life . . . I have to give up one very priceless thing—the right to have any lasting relationship with any special girl." Richard also stated that his responsibilities as the sole breadwinner in the family mitigated against his carrying on a relationship (Adams 2010: n.p.).

The second type of story, the quest, has the star, distant but knowable, as the object of the quest. A two-part photographic story comic in *Mirabelle* (12 September 1959) falls into this category. It begins with Monica and Jan, *Mirabelle* staff, sent on a trip to Germany to interview Elvis Presley, at this time the king of rock 'n' roll. They progress ever nearer the star spatially and symbolically in the comic, first by sacred object, then by blood relation, and then they get to the star, himself. Their first encounter is with Albert Ackerman, a German rock 'n' roll singer whose guitar, in having been given to him by Elvis, points to the presence of the star. The story "Elvis Gave Me My Guitar," purportedly written by Albert, was published on 26 September 1959. After their encounter with Albert, they meet Elvis's father on the second page of the comic. Thanks to the comic form that allows the reader to turn to

the center pages to see the climax of the story, Monica and Jan meet Elvis. In this case the star is the prize, or holy grail, for Monica, Jan, and the reader. That this story is told through photographic discourse, rather than drawings, indicates a trace of the real in the story. Relating this to religious discourse, the guitar can be regarded as a relic which, in Medieval times, was sold as a substitute for the saint's presence, or what Baudrillard (1983) might suggest as the first level of simulation.

Materiality, Free Gifts, Engaging the Fan

Day-dreaming scenarios in which fans could fantasize their encounter with the stars were acted out in these early comics through narratives and the material aspects of the comic. In the story above, Elvis Presley was an example of this day-dreaming scenario in which Monica and Jan stand in for the typical comics' readership. *Roxy* and *TV Fun* regularly featured imaginary stories of stars' encounters with their fans. Usually the stars in these stories acted as magical beings helping their fans find love or success. This meant that fans could also imagine themselves in a relationship in the picture stories, or they could act one out.

The real, encapsulated in the material components of comics such as free gifts and special purchases, was also used to promote the stars and to make them more accessible to the fan. Free gifts were a useful means of hailing the fan. In girls' comics these might include songbooks, charms, or jewelry. A gift in the first issue of *Romeo* (27 August 1957) was the rock 'n' roll lucky wishing ring, "specially designed to fit any finger . . . Put the ring on the third finger of your right hand. Turn the ring until the initial you want to wish on is uppermost. Then wish *your* wish" (10). In this way the publisher directly addressed the fan. In this budding pop culture, a favored free gift that enabled fan intimacy and a DIY response to the star, was a transfer that could be ironed onto fan's clothing or soft furnishings. Fans could embroider their idol's names on the transfer on a pillowcase or a blouse, for instance,

where the intimacy of their relationship was enriched with creativity, so a fan could use what was considered traditional female creativity to lend cultural credibility to a newer form of girl culture.

The fan was also hailed in the *Marilyn* Screen Test series in which pop stars acted out a scene of dialogue on a record that could be purchased for one shilling and nine pence.[6] The Tommy Steele record was advertised in *Marilyn* (26 September 1959), and the record ephemera proclaimed, "You star with Tommy Steele in Marilyn's Screen Test! Screen Test is a game you'll be thrilled by. YOU play a love scene with TOMMY STEELE."

<please insert Figure 1 here>

The record story, set in Spain, where "They go in for something called romance in a very big way," promoted Tommy's latest film, *Tommy the Toreador* (Carstairs 1959). The story is predicated on a girl being on a Spanish holiday with a group of friends. Tommy, setting up the action, says,

> In the gang you went with, was a boy you liked very much. I'll play the boy and you're the girl . . . It is moonlight . . . in the distance you can hear the sea washing the shore and somewhere a guitar is playing.

The dialogue invokes the dreamlike qualities of the scenario.

> Girl: It's just a dream.
>
> Boy: No, love. You wake up from dreams.

The dialogue is light-hearted and teasing,

> Boy: We only need two things to make it perfect.
>
> Girl: Such as?
>
> Boy: Two orders of fish and chips. (n.p.)

His evocation of the traditional British fare, fish ‘n’ chips, emphasizes Tommy’s ordinariness, but crucially, his ordinariness *as a British pop star*. There is an ironic awareness of the implausibility of the situation and an anxiety that the star should not be compromised by specific promises of devotion.

The significance of the guitar occurred in a story purportedly told by Tommy Steele in *Roxy* #1 (15 March 1958). In this, like many stories told about stars on the cover story of *Roxy* up to 1961, the star acts as a magical helper who bestows boons, elevating or enriching ordinary people through music. The inciting incident is shown in the first panel when the protagonist, usually a young girl, faces a dilemma. The star intervenes to introduce her to either a boy she has never met but who ends up as her partner, or to resolve a lover’s dispute. The story is resolved with a coda from the star updating the reader about the progress of the relationship. In this first story, the strapline proclaims, “This story is told to you by Tommy Steele himself!” It begins with a splash panel set in the docks.

<please insert Figure 2 here>

In the foreground there is a closeup of Margie, a timid shy girl holding a guitar pin. The encrusted panel reads, “‘Bring me luck, Tommy,’ she said. So I gave her my lucky guitar” (1). In the background Tommy Steele waves goodbye. In a double page spread later in the comic, and in an oblique reference to his fictitious biopic, Tommy states that he decided to try his luck as a singer and his eye was caught by a little guitar brooch costing 1 shilling and 3 pence that he bought, thinking it would bring him luck. “From that day on he never left it off. His luck brightened and it seemed as if the charm was really working” (14).

Throughout the story the notion that the guitar is charmed and magical is reiterated and much of the luck relates to consumerism. Margie finds a wallet stuffed with money. When she returns it to its owner, he rewards her with £5, enough for her to buy a smart dress

for the football club dance that evening. With her friend Rene's support, Margie dances with Len Hampton, a boy she has always loved. A teddy boy steals her handbag and Margie's luck turns bad.[7] Her dress is ripped when someone stands on it and she runs from the room to laughter. Len follows her home and states that when she left all the fun went. He found her handbag on his way over; everything had gone except for the lucky guitar pin. At the end of the story, the happy lovers meet Tommy on the dock and give him the guitar pin back suggesting, "Now we'd like you to have it back . . . maybe it'll bring luck to someone else" (4).

In analyzing this story, I refer to Thierry Groensteen (2007) who claims that "the comics panel is a 'fragmentary' object part of 'a system of proliferation. It never makes up the totality of the utterance but can and must be understood as a component in a larger apparatus" (5). Groensteen suggests that the analysis of comics might be achieved by using arthrology which deals with the relationship between panels. Panels hold the story together through braiding in which certain tropes are repeated in a continuous or discontinuous series. In this story the panels change shape at dramatic moments to a zigzag. This happens half way down the right side of the page and the major incidents include Tommy's giving Margie the mascot on the first page. On the second page Margie, seeing the dress she wants to buy for the dance, is inset with an encrusted advert, "Free this week Tommy Steele's Lucky Guitar." The crisis-point of the story occurs on the third page when her dress is torn and the kiss between her and Len is on the fourth one.

The story does not end there, for as Groensteen suggests, it can be understood within a larger system and this relates to my earlier contention that comics should be considered as material objects. The promotion continues in a double page spread (14–15). On these pages a small envelope that contains a lucky little guitar is inserted. The insertion of this little mascot means that the story incorporates the reader into the plot and bestows a gift from Tommy

onto her. “Wear Tommy Steele’s Lucky Guitar and make your heart sing. Pin it on now.” Next to this, a handwritten note from Tommy himself acts as a personal endorsement. “I sincerely hope that this little guitar brings you luck. I had one just like it for years. I can definitely say that it brought me all the luck in the world . . . in the end I gave mine to a blind girl in Edinburgh last year” (14). Tommy’s kindness towards his fans and suffering people continues the religious theme that evokes the lives of the saints.

Conclusions

In the late 1950s, with fears of unwed pregnancy and sexual violence, teenage girls led more restrictive lives than did teenage boys. Much of their existence centered around bedroom spaces where they could entertain friends and pore together over comics and magazines. Promotional strategies made pop stars safe by representing them as accomplished artists and consumers while simultaneously representing them as ordinary and nice young boys as Dyer’s (1997) notion of the star as extraordinary yet ordinary suggests. The place of comics in cross media promotion was crucial to teaching girls how to behave and respond to these new types of stars. The comics of this era taught their audiences how they should feel and act towards pop stars. It might be interesting to compare British with American fan behavior with comics to identify their impact on the respective cultures.

The legacy of these comics can be found in the DIY culture they nurtured which had an impact on later youth subcultures since they encouraged fan practices that continue today although with different technologies: fans post images and make shrines, albeit on a blog rather than, or in addition to, a bedroom wall. They produce stories about the stars in social media.

The development of promotional strategies to raise awareness of early pop stars laid the foundations for the British beat and style boom of the 1960s. This enabled them to

develop middle-of-the-road career trajectories (which many retain to this day) when they were superseded by the British Beat boom in the 1960s.

Bio

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Notes

[1] The BBC Light Programme played light music and entertainment from 1945 to 1967 when it was superseded by Radio 1 and then Radio 2 that played pop music and light music respectively.

[2] This price refers to British currency before decimalization took place in February 1971. Four pence, 4d, was the equivalent of 2p in contemporary currency and 3 cents in American currency nowadays.

[3] The official pop chart in the UK was the *New Musical Express* chart begun in 1952. It followed the *American Billboard* model.

[4] Cliff Richard continually states how he is a fan of Elvis Presley. In the final part of the four-part story of his life (*Mirabelle*, 3 October 1959), he states, "I was just mad about Elvis" (8). The story ends with a homage to Elvis, "My ambition for the future? It's to meet Elvis!" (9).

[5] Even by the mid-1960s the perception of pop as short-lived had not changed. Early in their career the Beatles stated that they thought their careers might last three or four years at most.

[6] In American currency this is worth approximately 12 cents nowadays.

[7] Teddy boys were a uniquely British teenage subculture in the 1950s whose style was inspired by Edwardian fashion. They dressed in drainpipe trousers and bootlace ties, and they liked rock 'n' roll music. There were moral panics about Teddy boy criminality at this time. For more information see Hebdige (2002).