



NATIONAL RESEARCH UNIVERSITY  
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**IMAGES OF THE PAST IN BRITISH  
POPULAR MUSIC OF THE 1960S:  
'RELEVANT HISTORY' OF THE  
KINKS**

BASIC RESEARCH PROGRAM

WORKING PAPERS

SERIES: HUMANITIES  
WP BRP 104/HUM/2015

## **IMAGES OF THE PAST IN BRITISH POPULAR MUSIC OF THE 1960S: 'RELEVANT HISTORY' OF THE KINKS<sup>2</sup>**

In the late 1960s, British popular music, evolution of its aesthetic and thematic traits had some peculiarities. Light guitar-based music was flavored by English folklore and exceptional British subjects, live performances demonstrated certain theatricality, imagery of rock bands was linked to British cases becoming a peculiar way of exhibiting their 'Englishness'. As a result of new British musicians' desire to determine their own sound, they tend to rework the past and actively include national history subjects in their music. The paper analyzes the mechanisms of treatment with the past in British popular music of the late 1960s on the example of the rock band, the Kinks. Focused largely on the musical style of American blues on their first albums, since 1967 year the Kinks turned to British musical tradition rediscovering mainly music hall. Despite the fact that other British Invasion leaders, the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, also borrowed the music hall imagery, the Kinks embraced not only the external music hall style, but deeply adopted music form and subjects. An appeal to the widely recognizable tradition of the British music hall was occurring on the wave of general re-actualization of national past in England. The paper describes, firstly, particular historical subjects that became popular among the British audience in the 1960s; secondly, the format of treatment with the past, which is conditionally characterized as a 'relevant history'.

JEL Classification: Z

Keywords: popular music studies, popular culture, British popular music history, the Kinks, past, historical imagery

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<sup>2</sup> The results of the project "Urban imagery in the systems of communication (from XV to XXI century)", carried out within the framework of the Basic Research Program at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE) in 2015, are presented in this work.

## Introduction

The 1990s and early 2000s marked an increased interest in research of non-academic forms of knowledge about the past. Issues concerning the representations of the past have become a point of intense discussion in the social sciences and humanities<sup>3</sup>, especially in terms of identity politics, historical consciousness and collective memory. Along with the study of the official representations of the past in commemorations and public monuments, the packaging of history in museums and media, studies concerning the place of history in art hold a special place. Among the new objects of interest emerging from the study of the representations of the past, mass culture is an important one<sup>4</sup>. However, attention is increasingly paid to the visual arts, painting, cinema and television<sup>5</sup> *par excellence*, which, on the one hand, apparently involved in the processes of memorisation and identification, on the other hand, are easier to analyze because of their figurative and narrative nature. Specifically, ‘nostalgia cinema’ and ‘heritage cinema’<sup>6</sup> emerged in the 1990s, involving a sophisticated attempt to scrutinize historical images and their representational mechanisms.

At the same time, scholars went a step further in analyzing visual forms in music, increasingly focusing on the study of jazz, classical music and opera<sup>7</sup>. It is rather common for these musical genres and forms to appeal to the musical traditions of the past and/or represent history (specific historical themes and personalities that are usually easily read by viewer/listener). Such perspective requires going beyond ‘traditional’ disciplines of music studies, musicology and sociology of music. Concerning musicology and history, in recent years the scholars based in these fields “are engaging in similar inquiries and employing a common range of theoretical concepts”<sup>8</sup>. Grasping meaning, understanding, and learning how such experience is constructed and communicated through cultural objects and cultural practices are key-questions in the framework of *new cultural history* and *new musicology*.

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<sup>3</sup> E.g.: de Groot, J. *Consuming History: Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture*. London: Routledge, 2008; Savelieva, I., Poletayev, A. (eds.) *Phenomenon of History [Fenomen istorii]*. Moscow: HSE, 2005; Moxey, K. *Visual Time: The Image in History*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> E.g.: Landsberg, A. *Engaging the Past: Mass Culture and the Production of Historical Knowledge*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> E.g.: Hayward, S. *Cinema Studies. The Key Concepts*. London: Routledge, 2000; Gray, A., Bell, E. *History on Television*. London: Routledge, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> E.g.: Rosenstone, R.A. *Visions of the Past: the Challenge of Film to our Idea of History*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995; Rosenstone, R.A. *Revisioning History: Film and the Construction of a New Past*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995; Engelen, L., Vande Winkel, R. (eds.) *Perspectives on European Film and History*. Gent: Academia Press, 2007; Hughes-Warrington, M. (ed.) *The History on Film Reader*. London: Routledge, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Cf.: Thompson, J., Scott, D.H.T. *The East Imagined. Experienced, Remembered: Orientalist 19th-century Painting*. Dublin, Liverpool: National Gallery of Ireland, 1988; Nolchlin, L. *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-century Art and Society*. New York: Harper & Row, 1989; Lawson, C., Stowell, R. *The Historical Performance of Music: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999; Butt, J. *Playing with History: The Historical Approach to Musical Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002; Latcham, M. (ed.) *Music of the Past, Instruments and Imagination: Proceedings of the Harmoniques International Congress, Lausanne 2004*. Publikationen der Schweizerischen Musikforschenden Gesellschaft. Bern: Peter Lang, 2006; Fry, A. *Remembrance of Jazz Past: Sydney Bechet in France*. Fulcher, J.F. (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of the New Cultural History of Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 307–331; Frühauf, T., Hirsch, L.E. *Dislocated Memories: Jews, Music, and Postwar German Culture*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Fulcher, J.F. Introduction: Defining the New Cultural History of Music, its Origins, Methodologies, and Lines of Inquiry. Fulcher, J.F. (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of the New Cultural History of Music*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 3.

Meanwhile, popular music is also able to ‘use’ the past as a tool for the expression of contemporary cultural content ‘offering’ models for different options of ‘treating’ the past. There are not only specific musical genres oriented on a detailed reconstruction of historical musical forms and recreation of atmosphere of a certain historical period<sup>9</sup>, but also the very practice of representation of the past and certain historical subjects are often an important part of the artistic language of popular music groups and performers. In this regard, a number of questions arise: How are representations of the past constructed in popular music? How are statements about the past arranged, what do they represent, and what/who do they focus on? What kind of ‘history’ is constructed in popular music?

In this context, it is possible to trace the structure and provide an explanation of the representations of the past in popular music only through understanding of popular culture specifics. An initial point to make is that neither musicology nor sociology could bring a sufficient explanation to the subject; the narrow focus of these traditions does not allow seeing the majority of popular music features. The implications tend to remain at an implicit level. In many cases, if they were fully specified they would have been found to contradict other aspects of the theory in question. In this regard, the tradition of *cultural studies* provides the most efficient way of understanding popular culture and popular music. In this research, I will apply the *popular music studies approach*, but broaden the concept of popular music to include social institutions, practices and relations, where certain areas of cultural understanding are the result of a complex set of interactions between these social institutions. My intention is to transit from textual analysis (i.e. the use of scores and other texts as the primary source) to the study of social institutions and cultural practices through which popular music functions in contemporary culture: the music industry, recording methods, presentation methods and distribution of musical products, the audiences and the different ways of reception, etc.

In this research, I will draw attention to the key features of the representation practices at all levels of popular music: production, presentation and reception. This corresponds to the specifics of popular music and its multi-level accounts, the modes of its function, as well as the basic institutions of popular music (recording, distribution and audience). Therefore, the image of the past cannot be ‘read’ only at one level – it concerns the implication of all levels. The account of all components of popular music as a social phenomenon can give a complete picture of how and what kind of the past is ‘used’ in particular case.

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<sup>9</sup> It is worth mentioning here folk-rock bands that are turned directly to the themes of the past remaking and rearranging folk songs and melodies. For example, the well-known British folk singer Philip Donovan (Donovan) is focused on medieval subjects, and musicians of popular British folk band Blackmore’s Night ‘catalogues’ the past – they collect, reconstruct and rearrange Celtic, Norse and Germanic folklore using contemporary musical instruments and recreated instruments of the 13th–15th centuries.

This paper will be focused on the following questions: What was the place of history in the British popular music during the 1960s? And how was it manifested musically and visually? As an example, I will address one of the most prominent bands of the British Invasion movement, the Kinks. Specificity of the thematic content of the band's lyrics, original musical solutions, theatrical live performances brought success to the Kinks and the title of "one of the most British rock band"<sup>10</sup> in the history of the British popular music.

### **The Kinks in the context of the mid-Sixties English pop**

By the end of the 1960s, the post-war British generation eagerly embraced the American popular culture sought a new way to mark their 'Englishness'. Jon Stratton notes<sup>11</sup>, while the flooding of Britain with American popular music was not deliberate, it functioned as one element in a transformation of British society into the consumption-based culture. Imitating American musicians and adopting the basic rules of American music industry to British realities during the 1950s, British performers at the same time learned the basics of American popular music, blues and rock and roll.<sup>12</sup> British musical scene offered local variants of Elvis Presley, such as Cliff Richard, Billy Fury and Marty Wilde. As Michael Brocken argues<sup>13</sup>, influence of American musical traditions and musical industry rules on the British musical life along with a passion to the British folk music throughout the 1950s formed the basis of British popular music for the next decades. In the 1960s, the history of British popular music, the evolution of its aesthetic and thematic traits had some features. Light guitar-based music was flavored by English folklore and exceptional British subjects, live performances demonstrated certain theatricality, imagery of rock bands was linked to British cases becoming a peculiar way of exhibiting their 'Englishness'. As a result of new British musicians' desire to determine their own sound, they tend to rework the past and actively include national history subjects in their music.

The commercial success of the Beatles single 'I Want to Hold Your Hand' (1963), especially in the US market, and their subsequent US tour, which began with participation in the Ed Sullivan Show (February 9, 1964), manifested a new stage in the history of British popular music. Occurred in the mid-1960s, a new cultural phenomenon, British Invasion<sup>14</sup>, was based on skiffle craze with its 'do it yourself' attitude and included various British music styles. The new movement with its emphasized 'Englishness' led to enormous popularity of British music and

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<sup>10</sup> *New Musical Express*. 11 September 1964, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Stratton, J. Skiffle Variety and Englishness. Bennett, A., Stratton, J. (eds.) *Britpop and the English Music Tradition*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2010, pp. 27–28.

<sup>12</sup> Schwartz, R. *How Britain Got the Blues: the Transmission and Reception of American Blues Style in the United Kingdom*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007, pp. 3–5.

<sup>13</sup> Brocken, M. *The British Folk Revival, 1944–2002*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003, pp. 65–69.

<sup>14</sup> Robbins, I.A. British Invasion. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/80244/British-Invasion> (Accessed 30 July 2015).

British culture in the United States. Barry Falk notes<sup>15</sup> that the Kinks was one of the key British Invasion rock band along with the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and the Who. The decline of the British Invasion movement by 1967 prompted the formation of the British music market focused on the local audience and the British music stylistics. Matthew Gelbart points out<sup>16</sup> that a significant place in this process also belongs to the Kinks.

The band was formed in London in 1963 by brothers Ray Davies (vocals, guitar, and keyboards) and Dave Davies (guitar, vocals). The following year they were joined by bassist Pete Quaife and drummer Mick Avory. In 1964, the band signed with a major record company Pye Records, and for three years have released four studio albums, received recognition not only in Britain, but in the United States. In this paper, I want to focus on their most discussed and iconic three albums released between 1967 and 1970, which were related to the changes in the thematic and musical content of the band oeuvre: *Something Else by The Kinks* (Pye, UK, September 1967), *(The Kinks Are the) Village Green Preservation Society* (Pye, UK, November 1968), and *Arthur (Or The Decline and Fall of the British Empire)* (Pye, UK, October 1969).

Starting their musical career, the members of the Kinks, like most young British rock bands of the early 1960s, relied on stylistics and thematic of American blues and rock and roll and presented short narrative songs on love theme (such hits as ‘You Really Got Me’ and ‘All Day and All of the Night’<sup>17</sup>, which brought popularity to the band in England and the United States<sup>18</sup>). However, in the second half of the 1960s the Kinks referred to the description of contemporary English society. According to sociologist Nick Baxter-Moore, in the context of the 1960s it was a “unique contribution to popular culture, *utterly English* while every other group [except the Beatles] was aping U.S.A. counterparts”<sup>19</sup>. The Kinks changed dramatically and intensified their fascination by exclusively British subjects and stressing their ‘Englishness’ after the conflicts in the TV studio backstage in Los Angeles during their American tour in June 1965 and subsequent controversy with the American Federation of Musicians (AFM)<sup>20</sup>. The conflict with the Kinks became an apogee of the AFM dissatisfaction with the influx of British rock bands and their extreme popularity with local audiences in the US. As a result of the AFM initiative, the Kinks members declared persona non grata, and the band was banned from performing

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<sup>15</sup> Faulk, B.J. *British Rock Modernism, 1967–1977: The Story of Music Hall in Rock*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2010, p. 105.

<sup>16</sup> Gelbart, M. *Persona and Voice in the Kinks’ Songs of the Late 1960s*. *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 2003, vol. 128, no. 2, p. 226.

<sup>17</sup> Both songs are from a debut album *Kinks* (Pye, UK, October 1964).

<sup>18</sup> The song ‘You Really Got Me’ crashed the UK Single Chart and reached No 1 in September 1964, as well as No 7 in the Billboard’s United States chart. The song ‘All Day and All of the Night’ reached No 2 in the UK Single Chart in November 1964, as well as No 7 in Billboard’s United States chart. See: The Official Charts Company, 2015. Available at: <http://www.officialcharts.com/artist/11246/kinks/> (Accessed 29 July 2015); Billboard Charts, 2015. Available at: <http://www.billboard.com/charts> (Accessed 29 July 2015).

<sup>19</sup> Baxter-Moore, N. ‘This Is Where I Belong’ – Identity, Social Class, and the Nostalgic Englishness of Ray Davies and the Kinks. *Popular Music and Society*, 2006, vol. 29, no. 2, p. 146.

<sup>20</sup> American Federation of Musicians was a union of musicians from the United States and Canada, the purpose of which was to protect the copyright of musicians, providing them with social benefits and pensions, etc.

in the United States over the next four years that caused the deterioration in relations with the band label, Pye Records.

This incident forced the Kinks to reorient completely on the British music market. In the mid-1960s, the market significantly transformed – new distribution channels emerged; the number of record companies increased becoming independent of publishing houses, which were the centers of the recording industry during the 1940s and 1950s; broadcasting policy on the BBC radio and television concerning rock music essentially changed starting new pop channel, Radio One<sup>21</sup>. By 1966, the Kinks lost a substantial part of their transatlantic audience, caused problems with Pye Records. John Savage points out<sup>22</sup> that the band spent a year writing songs on a low-budget studio rental substantially without contacts with Pye, which did not confirm to release these records. As the Kinks musicians noted<sup>23</sup>, it was the reason for treating predominantly British subjects, among which historical themes occupied the central place.

The Kinks' single *Waterloo Sunset*, released in May 1967 and reached No 2 in the UK Single Chart, and the album *Something Else by the Kinks* (September 1967) were significantly different compare to the previous band's albums, lyrically shifted from love themes typical for blues to everyday and social subjects, and on the whole thematically were much more 'English'. The album included 13 songs and developed themes of the current state of the British society (songs 'Harry Rag', 'Situation Vacant', and 'Tin Soldier Man'), everyday life (such as 'End Of The Season' and 'Lazy Old Sun'), as well as memories of the personal musicians' past placed in a wider cultural context (such as 'David Watts', 'Funny Face', and 'No Return'). As Keith Gildart<sup>24</sup> argues, the Kinks re-engaged the sense of a 'lost England'. In 'Afternoon Tea', the Kinks celebrated the centrality of tea drinking to English culture and the survival of the English cafe amongst the explosion of continental coffee bars. The image of a bored London passerby was reflected in 'Waterloo Sunset'. An observant man from the crowd satirically described the contemporary British society with special attention to national subjects and traditions. Michael Kraus<sup>25</sup> notes, that 'Waterloo Sunset' repeated literary ideas of the early 20th century on the dehumanization of modern times – the narrator did not want to be a part of industrialized modern world, where "taxi light shines so bright" and "people so busy", trying to find refuge and peace in the world of nature: "As long as I gaze on Waterloo sunset / I am in paradise". Reflected in

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<sup>21</sup> Chapman, R. The 1960s Pirates: A Comparative Analysis of Radio London and Radio Caroline. *Popular Music*, 1990, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 177–178.

<sup>22</sup> Savage, J. *The Kinks – The Official Biography*. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1984, p. 75.

<sup>23</sup> The Kinks. *You Really Got Me – The Story Of The Kinks*. [London], ABC Entertainment;Voiceprint, cop 2007, DVD, fragment 00:42:16–00:43:56; *New Musical Express*. 8 April 1966. Dave Davies interviewed by Norrie Drummond; *New Musical Express*. 20 May 1967. Ray Davies interviewed by Keith Altham; *Melody Maker*. 27 May 1967. The Peter Quaipe interview.

<sup>24</sup> Gildart, K. *Images of England through Popular Music: Class, Youth and Rock'n'Roll, 1955–1976*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 136.

<sup>25</sup> Kraus, M.J. The Greatest Rock Star of the 19th Century: Ray Davies, Romanticism, and the Art of Being English. *Popular Music and Society*, 2006, vol. 29, no. 2, p. 203.

‘Autumn Almanac’<sup>26</sup>, the theme of English attachment to locality and space were presented in the sketches of everyday life of the narrator, who wanted to preserve the memory of some particular places. Ray Davies describes these changes as follows: “Popular music is simple, it should be understood by the people [...] We have addressed the issue at hand, little England, its residents so that they know themselves, feel the British”<sup>27</sup>.

However, the most notable was the change in the musical style of the Kinks. After the incident in the US, difficulties with Pye Records deprived the Kinks of support of American producer Shel Talmy, with whom the band collaborated on recording the first four albums. As a result, *Something Else by the Kinks* became the band’s first album made independently by guitarist and the band leader Ray Davies. The musical component of the album was based predominantly on the melodic bits represented in emphatic style of the late 1950s – early 1960s (that essentially allocated album of trendy psychedelic rock). Interviewing guitarist Dave Davies on the recording of ‘Waterloo Sunset’, John Savage quotes: “We spent a lot of time trying to get a different guitar sound, to get a more unique feel for the record. In the end we used a basic tape-delay echo, but it sounded new, because nobody had done this since the 1950s”<sup>28</sup>.

In the context of the unavailability of the US market, on the one hand, and the lack of ‘control’ by the record label for the recording, on the other, the band principle songwriter Ray Davies thematically turned to subjects of British history and musically to the tradition of the British music hall. Musicologists Andy Bennett and Jon Stratton comment<sup>29</sup>, that the tradition of music hall, that appeared in Victorian England and also received widespread in Edwardian times, was permanent and was actively used by variety art musicians during the first half of the 20th century. On the wave of the folk revival of the 1950s, young singers and performers styled music hall in the repertoire they sang with more ‘traditional’ items. Music hall had been ‘rediscovered’ in a different sense at the turn of the 1960s. Despite the fact that other British invasion leaders the Beatles and the Rolling Stones also borrowed the music hall imagery, the Kinks embraced not only the external music hall style, but deeply adopted music form and subjects traditionally connected with the past. Turning to the emphasized British subjects (of the past), the Kinks transformed their appearance and distribution policy. They significantly changed their stage outfits, becoming put on hats, bows, lace collars and bright suits for the concert performance, as well as turned to the theatrical stage presence manner typical for music hall performers<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> The song ‘Autumn Almanac’ was released as a single in October 1967.

<sup>27</sup> The Kinks. *You Really Got Me*..., fragment 00:42:16–00:43:56.

<sup>28</sup> Savage, J. *The Kinks – The Official Biography*..., p. 87.

<sup>29</sup> Bennett, A., Stratton, J. (eds.) *Britpop and the English Music Tradition*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2010, pp. 19–20.

<sup>30</sup> As an example, see how the band performed ‘Autumn Almanac’ on the ‘Top of the Pops’, the first national video charts broadcasted by BBC, in November 1967 [The Kinks. *The Kinks Live Kronology*. [London], The Wow Company, cop 2009. DVD, fragment 01: 14: 30-01: 17: 24] or the Kinks’ promo video filmed for the single *Sunny Afternoon* [Ibid., fragment 01: 00: 13-01: 03: 34].

The *Something Else by the Kinks* cover played upon the British national stereotypes. The sleeve included an inscription on the backside, “Welcome to Daviesland, Where all the little kinklings in the magic Kinkdom wear tiny black bowlers, rugby boots, soldier suits, drink half pints of bitter, carry cricket hats and ride in little Tube trains”. According to Ray Davies, “a British way of life suddenly became recognizable”<sup>31</sup>. It is noteworthy to note, that such an intention of the Kinks to manifest their ‘Englishness’ articulated on the British national BBC television and radio as well. Robert Colls argues<sup>32</sup>, that in the late 1960s, the BBC’s broadcast policy was transformed, highlighting typical and easily recognizable scenes of British history and culture, in order to limit the presence of American music on the British radio and television.

Despite the progress of several songs in the national chart (primarily, ‘Waterloo Sunset’ and ‘Autumn Almanac’<sup>33</sup>), album sales in the UK was not particularly successful, but music critics “appreciated its irony and sarcasm”<sup>34</sup>.

### **‘Revival’ of the Past**

In November 1968, the Kinks released their first concept album (*The Kinks Are the Village Green Preservation Society*). The main themes of the album were two interrelated concepts of memory and conservation<sup>35</sup>, as well as the adjacent dichotomy of artificial and natural<sup>36</sup>, time and timelessness<sup>37</sup>. Entirely deviating from the reproduction of blues patterns and ignoring musical style of popular psychedelic rock at that time, the Kinks dwelled on the style of the British music hall and variety show of the 1940s<sup>38</sup>. This stylistic mobility and shift towards easily ‘readable’ and recognizable musical tradition in England identified also thematic transformation of songs’ lyrics of the Kinks. Focused on the description of actual social problems, musicians represented the past as a part of this description.

The first main theme was manifested in obsession with preserving the past. The title song ‘The Village Green Preservation Society’ was abounded with references to antique English culture and typically English characters, musicians at the same time articulated ironical appeal to preserve the past (it was also repeatedly stressed by Ray Davis in the interviews<sup>39</sup>):

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<sup>31</sup> The Kinks. *You Really Got Me*..., range 00:43:56-00:45:22.

<sup>32</sup> Colls, R. *Identity of England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 302–304.

<sup>33</sup> ‘Waterloo Sunset’ reached No 2 in the UK Single Chart in May 1967, as well ‘Autumn Almanac’ reached No 3 in October 1967: The Official Charts Company, 2015. Available at: <http://www.officialcharts.com/artist/11246/kinks/> (Accessed 29 July 2015).

<sup>34</sup> Marten, N., Hudson, J. *The Kinks. Well Respected Men*. Rochester: Castle Communications plc, 1996, p. 81.

<sup>35</sup> E.g.: ‘The Village Green Preservation Society’, ‘People Take Pictures of Each Other’, ‘Picture Book’, ‘Do You Remember Walter?’, ‘All Of My Friends Were There’, ‘Village Green’, ‘Last of the Steam-Powered Trains’.

<sup>36</sup> E.g.: ‘Animal Farm’, ‘Village Green’.

<sup>37</sup> E.g.: ‘Big Sky’, ‘Sitting By the Riverside’.

<sup>38</sup> Schwartz, R. *How Britain Got the Blues*... p. 130.

<sup>39</sup> *New Musical Express*. 3 August 1968. Dave Davies interviewed by Richard Green; *New Musical Express*. 1969. Ray Davies interviewed by Richard Green; Miller, A. *The Kinks Are the Village Green Preservation Society*. London: Continuum International Publishing, 2003, p. 48.

*We are the Village Green Preservation Society  
God save Donald Duck, Vaudeville and Variety  
We are the Desperate Dan Appreciation Society  
God save strawberry jam and all the different varieties*

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*We are the Sherlock Holmes English speaking vernacular  
Help save fu Manchu, Moriarty and Dracula*

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*God save Tudor houses, antique tables and billiards  
Preserving the old ways from being abused  
Protecting the new ways for me and for you  
What more can we do.*

Philologist Barry Falk notes that the issue of preservation of the past was the basic theme of British music hall, and the past was placed “into the realm of imagination and memory [...], depicted as eternal ‘green and pleasant space’”<sup>40</sup>. The Kinks consistently reproduced this model on the album *(The Kinks Are the) Village Green Preservation Society*, proclaiming the preservation of the British traditions, language and Victorian London architecture, or referring to the beauty of British villages. It is interesting to note that the theme of the new urban development and urban planning of post-war Britain, as well as the policy of demolition of old Victorian houses, were actively discussed in the end of the 1960s, caused a wave of protest marches and information events from the British society<sup>41</sup>. In the memoirs, guitarist of the Kinks Dave Davies describes his dissatisfaction with the new architectural policy of the city government in London as follows: “When you look around now at the terrible architecture in England from the mid to late sixties, it serves as a constant reminder of how thoughtless and naive postwar Britain was. They tore down lovely Victorian town terraced houses all over London and replaced them with cold, ugly office blocks; they carved up beautiful countryside to build more roads”<sup>42</sup>. The consistent narrative on the album *(The Kinks Are the) Village Green Preservation Society* was painting pastoral images of the British countryside (as in ‘Animal Farm’); and the Village Green was depicted as a utopian public space designed to reunite man and nature as it was presented in the classic works of the English philosopher Ebenezer Howard in the end of the 19th century. In particular, this issue was reflected on the album back cover with the image of a rural landscape (the band in a grass field).

The second main theme of the album was connected with issues of memory and memoirs submitted by representing subjects from personal and national past. “*Yes people often change,*

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<sup>40</sup> Falk, B.J. *British Rock Modernism, 1967–1977: The Story of Music Hall in Rock*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2010, p. 48.

<sup>41</sup> Lupro, M.M. *Preserving the Old Ways, Protecting the New: Post-War British Urban Planning in The Kinks Are the Village Green Preservation Society*. *Popular Music and Society*, 2006, vol. 29, no. 2. pp. 190–192.

<sup>42</sup> Davies, D. *Kink, An Autobiography*. London: Boxtree Limited, Broadwall House, 1996, p. 107.

*but memories of people can remain*” – with a touch of melancholy Ray Davis sings in the song ‘Do You Remember Walter?’ constantly returning to the value of memories and indicating that the essence of present is based on the past. The songs ‘Picture Book’ and ‘People Take Pictures of Each Other’ proclaimed the appeal to the warm family memories. Performing these songs during the Kinks UK tour in 1968, Ray Davis was offering the audience to revive their memories of their own families<sup>43</sup>.

Related with memories theme of photos and photographing as a desire to capture and preserve the moment was revealed in both songs. If the song ‘Picture Book’ celebrated family photo archives and photos of happy innocent childhood (“*those days when you were happy, a long time ago*”), the song ‘People Take Pictures of Each Other’ placed a photo as a central tool for the conservation of the present and at the same time stated the inability to reconstruct the past: “*People take pictures of each other / And the moment to last them for ever*”. At the same time the past was depicted as something bygone, and its return is no longer possible and, in general, is not necessary. The past may be reminded of the greatness of bygone eras, but it is nothing more than an artifact, like a Victorian locomotive in the song ‘Last of the Steam-Powered Trains’, which “was a great symbol of progress, and now is a museum piece”<sup>44</sup>. Keith Gildart notes that the “song was written in the context of a dramatic reduction in the British railway network and the replacement of steam trains by diesel engines”<sup>45</sup> caused the closure of miles of track in the UK.

One of the main features of the album was a presentation of a song as a kind of ‘sound monologue’. Musicologist Andy Miller describes a structure of the song as a “single-minded arrangement”, where “every instrument and production nuance has been made a slave to the lyric and vocal”<sup>46</sup>. The Kinks not just referred to the music hall, but recreated it “by deliberately narrow musical range and highlighted vocal”<sup>47</sup> tinted by chorus. Musically on (*The Kinks Are the Village Green Preservation Society*) acoustic guitar occupied the same place as the electric guitar. It distinguished the album, firstly, from the previous records of the Kinks, and secondly, from loud, amplified, and already distorted sound of British blues-rock bands of the late 1960s. Jon Stratton comments, “... the Kinks parallel the music-hall tradition in several ways: they establish stage personas ... then musical presentation makes use of traditionally non-rock instruments like tubas and kazoos; they appropriate various musical structures such as ragtime and honky tonk to create different layers of music; they employ witty sly plays on words”<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>43</sup> Savage, J. *The Kinks – The Official Biography*..., p. 101.

<sup>44</sup> Jovanovic, R. *God Save The Kinks. A Biography*. London: Aurum Press, 2013, p. 150.

<sup>45</sup> Gildart, K. *Images of England through Popular Music*..., p. 140.

<sup>46</sup> Miller, A. *The Kinks Are the Village Green Preservation Society*..., p. 54.

<sup>47</sup> Jovanovic, R. *God Save The Kinks*..., p. 149.

<sup>48</sup> Stratton, J. *Englishing Popular Music in the 1960s*. Bennett, A., Stratton, J. (eds.) *Britpop and the English Music Tradition*..., p. 49.

The set of musical instruments was expanded to include brass sections changing the songs' structure. The songs were simple with catchy major-key choruses and choppy rhythm that clearly sought to reproduce the sing-a-long character of earlier music-hall song. One more feature was a usage of special music hall singing. In the song 'Picture Book', the music was interrupted at the end presenting vaudevillian crooning, with assorted "yeall yeah yeahs", "na na nas", and even a "Scooby Dooby Doo" (lifted from Sinatra's 1966 hit, 'Strangers in the Night'). Three songs that opened the album ('The Village Green Preservation Society', 'Do You Remember Walter?', 'Picture Book') were recorded without the benefits of the modern studio equipment. If musicians was forced to rent a low-budget to record *Something Else by the Kinks*, it was a conscious move in the case of *(The Kinks Are the) Village Green Preservation Society*. The songs were 'naked raw records' without any sound amplification and without using multi-tracking recording to make song close to the sound of earlier music hall.

The musical texture of the album was also woven into the insert of the British folk songs. According to musicians<sup>49</sup>, the Kinks included in their music elements of folk, focusing on the pioneers of the fifties folk revival Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger, who sought to preserve the traditions of British folk music. It should be noted that the subject of the preservation and maintenance of national traditions was especially actual in the 1960s. As Simon Featherstone notes<sup>50</sup>, the folk revival movement tightly intertwined with the revival of national dance, national cuisine and cooking, and gardening. According to Robert Colls, the music students of the 1950–1960 generation "had thrown off a musical inferiority complex foisted by European academics, only to be dazzled by the humble English folk song... Once English composers recognized the folk song as their kin, then England could be graced with a national music again"<sup>51</sup>. English folk song had become recognizable and popular among mass audience. In this context, the Kinks turned out to be one of the first English rock bands to 'catch' the new trends and managed to re-discover it in the framework of pop culture.

Giving theatrical performances, the Kinks presented a small play, played out on the stage<sup>52</sup>. The musicians' stage presence was entirely shifted from the image of the British Invasion style to music hall and variety show theatrical appearance and scenery. These new live performances substantially differed from the previous band's performances based on the tactics of communication with the audience, close contact and injection of hysteria<sup>53</sup>. New optic helped to reduce the

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<sup>49</sup> Savage, J. *The Kinks – The Official Biography...*, p. 108.

<sup>50</sup> Featherstone, S. *Englishness: Twentieth Century Popular Culture and the Forming of English Identity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009, pp. 44–45.

<sup>51</sup> Colls, R. *Identity of England...*, pp. 292–294.

<sup>52</sup> As an example, see promo video on the song 'Wonderboy' filmed for the "Top of the Pops" in 1968 (the song released as a single in April 1968): The Kinks. *A Kink is a Kink*. [London]: ABC Entertainment, cop 2008, DVD, fragment 1:19:01-1:20:40.

<sup>53</sup> For example, see the video for the song 'All Day and All of the Night' from American tour in 1965: The Kinks. *A Kink is a Kink...*, fragment 1:48:00–1:48:34.

contact with the audience and involvement in the action on the stage and, as a result, to grasp concentration on the songs' lyrics and, of course, on the musicians. For the live performances the band invited session musicians to play wind instruments, making songs sound even more theatrical<sup>54</sup>. For example, while performing the song 'The Village Green Preservation Society' on the BBC television in 1973, the band played with a symphony orchestra. At the end of the song musicians presented theme melody of the UK national anthem.<sup>55</sup> Also noteworthy that the Kinks played predominantly in cabaret dates especially in East London and North East England. Keith Gildart claims<sup>56</sup> that it was the audience of cabaret clubs (mostly working-class youth) actively had borrowed the general message of the Kinks.

*(The Kinks Are the) Village Green Preservation Society* received unanimously positive reviews from critics in both the UK and the US, although the album did not have the expected commercial success. After the release of the album in 1969 in the US and the lifting of the ban on organization of the Kinks concerts in America, the band again began to be perceived as one of the iconic English rock bands. However, the group ceased to be characterized as British Invasion leader; the Kinks were described as a band with typical "British flavor"<sup>57</sup>.

In 1967–1968, Ray Davies also worked on the BBC television, writing the music for the program "At the Eleventh Hour". Davis collaborated with playwright Julian Mitchell and was preparing a rock opera for a screen version on television. *Arthur or the Decline and Fall of the British Empire*<sup>58</sup> was to become hour music television drama to the British TV company "Granada TV", but was released by Pye Records in October 1969 as the Kinks' second concept album. *Arthur* continued the theme of developing the critical comments with regard to the current state of British society, started in the previous album, but in a more specific and cynical terms, and on the whole demonstrated a more historiographical approach. The album presented a story of World War II veteran Arthur Morgan, who along with his wife Rosa emigrated from England to Australia. Arthur tells his son about a better life in Britain, however ironically depicting modern England: social<sup>59</sup>, economical<sup>60</sup>, and political<sup>61</sup> issues (in particular, in relations with the United States regarding the Vietnam War). Arthur longed to return to the Victorian era, when

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<sup>54</sup> See different live shows performed in 1966–1968: The Kinks. *The Kinks Live Kronology*..., fragments 01:00:13–01:03:34, 01:17:26–01:19:00; The Kinks. *You Really Got Me*..., fragments 00:33:00–00:39:00, 00:39:00–00:39:00.

<sup>55</sup> The movie "The Kinks In Concert" was filmed in the BBC Television Centre on January 24, 1973. The first show on television was held March 15, 1973: The Kinks. *The Kinks In Concert (BBC), 1973*. Bootleg Zone, 2008. Available at: <http://www.bootlegzone.com/album.php?name=19730124&section=42> (Accessed 29 July 2015).

<sup>56</sup> Gildart, K. Images of England through Popular Music..., p. 139.

<sup>57</sup> Miller, A. The Kinks Are the Village Green Preservation Society..., p. 96.

<sup>58</sup> The album also received a positive assessment in England from magazines *New Musical Express*, *Disc & Music Echo*, the weekly *Melody Maker*, and the United States from journals *Fusion*, *The Village Voice* and *Rolling Stone*. *Rolling Stone* journalist Greil Marcus called *Arthur or the Decline and Fall of the British Empire* "the best album of 1969": Miller, A. The Kinks Are the Village Green Preservation Society..., p. 133.

<sup>59</sup> E.g.: 'Yes Sir, No Sir', 'Brainwashed'.

<sup>60</sup> E.g.: 'She's Bought a Hat Like Princess Marina', 'Arthur', 'Australia'.

<sup>61</sup> E.g.: 'Some Mother's Son', 'Drivin'.

Britain was still the most powerful nation. David Simonelli notes<sup>62</sup> that Ray Davies willfully laid out Arthur's sense of nostalgia to ridicule everything Victorian. For example, the song 'Victoria'<sup>63</sup> was a story about a young man pinning away for the opportunity to fight for the expansion of the empire sang in perky and satirical manner. Ray Davis specifically emphasized irony in his voice singing words "*Victoria loved them all*":

*Long ago life was clean  
Sex was bad and obscene  
And the rich were so mean  
Stately homes for the lords*

*Canada to India  
Australia to Cornwall  
Singapore to Hong Kong  
From the West to the East*

*Croquet lawns, village greens  
Victoria was my queen  
Victoria, Victoria, Victoria, Victoria*

*From the rich to the poor  
Victoria loved them all  
Victoria, Victoria, Victoria, Victoria.*

The album cover, illustrated by the British painter Bob Lawrie, contained several tabs, one of which was a picture of Queen Victoria with disproportionately large hands and a small head keeping the house of Arthur Morgan, thereby symbolizing the line "*Victoria loved them all*". An extensive promotional campaign of the album held by Pye Records in conjunction with the American label Reprise Records in 1969 also included the catchword "God Save the Kinks"<sup>64</sup> as a kind of reference to the British national anthem and play on the British cultural tradition.

Ray Davis turned to various historical subjects and personalities widely recognized by the British audience. In 'Some Mother's Son' he placed Arthur as a soldier in the trenches of the Great War; in 'Mr. Churchill Says', he quoted Prime Minister Winston Churchill' wartime speeches "Never was so much owed by so many to so few", "We shall fight on the beaches", "This was their finest hour"; in 'She's Bought A Hat Like Princess Marina', he ironically described British society through images of Duchess of Kent Princess Marina ("*She's bought a hat like Princess Marina's / To wear at all her social affairs*") and Prime Minister Robert Anthony Eden ("*He's bought a hat like Anthony Eden's / Because it makes him feel like a Lord / But he can't afford a Rolls or a Bentley / He has to buy a secondhand Ford*"). In several interviews Ray Davies noted<sup>65</sup> that he was inspired totally by a 1960s reality and common nostalgic mood in the British society. Both (*The Kinks Are the Village Green Preservation Society* and *Arthur or the Decline and Fall of the British Empire* draw attention of new US rock journalists of *Crawdaddy*

<sup>62</sup> Simonelli, D. *Working Class Heroes: Rock Music and British Society in the 1960s and 1970s*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013, p. 149.

<sup>63</sup> The single *Victoria* was released in December 1969 and reached No 33 in the UK charts: The Official Charts Company, 2014. Available at: <http://www.officialcharts.com/artist/11246/kinks/> (Accessed 29 July 2015).

<sup>64</sup> Jovanovic, R. *God Save The Kinks...*, p. 163.

<sup>65</sup> Marten, N., Hudson, J. *The Kinks. Well Respected Men*. Rochester: Castle Communications plc, 1996, p. 84; Davies, R. *The Kinks Ray Davies Talks* (interviewed by Jonathan Cott). Rolling Stone, 1969, November, 10. Available at: <http://www.kindakinks.net/misc/articles/rs69.html> (Accessed 29 July 2015).

and *MOJO Navigator*. Music critics found Ray Davis's threads of the UK interesting and in the American context "intriguingly exotic"<sup>66</sup>.

In this regard, moving away from the musical tendency of the late 1960s, the Kinks became emphatically insular British band that sang about "lost friends, draft beer, motorcyclists, wicked witches and flying cats"<sup>67</sup>. On the one hand, the Kinks were able to submit an outdated style of music hall in a new light, thereby defining their autonomy in relation to the American musical standards, and on the other hand, to begin the process of commercialization of 'Englishness' as a phenomenon – obviously British subjects helped to attract interest in the group from the American audience.

### **'Relevant history' of the Kinks**

In accordance with the above, treatment of the past in the Kinks' songs occurred on different levels: themes, music, and presentation; this new for British musical culture tendency had proved to be popular with the British audience. Referring to historical subjects and characters, as well as purely national images that were easily read by the British audience, the mid-sixties pop musicians were determined and presented their attitude to social and political challenges of modern England. Thus, the Kinks made history *actual*, i.e. an indispensable tool of their artistic language. This model of representation of the past can be described as a 'relevant history'.

The first and, as I assume, the most important part of this model is *'usage' of the past as a tool to talk about the present and the 'reinforcement' of the present*. As Andy Bennett notes<sup>68</sup>, the sketches of everyday life, feelings and fears of an ordinary person, grouped by the Kinks through the prism of the past, unmistakably let the audience to recognize post-war British society. Noteworthy, the Kinks used historical themes to create a commentary on the current social, political, and cultural situation, rather than attempting to return or go back to the past. Thus, through the 'history' of Arthur Morgan provided in *Arthur or the Decline and Fall of the British Empire* the listener perceived criticism of the modern British state: foreign policy situation, failure of social policy, crisis of British authorities, problems with inflation, taxes, housing and, overall, the massive discontent with the UK post-war status in the international arena. In the same way, *(The Kinks Are the) Village Green Preservation Society* draw pictures, mainly of current social issues. Pastoral images of the past (both national and personal/family), rural landscapes, the idea of conservation and prevention of decay and destruction were intended to be an incentive to change the status of the present time, but not called to compare 'as it was and as it

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<sup>66</sup> Miller, A. *The Kinks Are the Village Green Preservation Society*..., p. 57.

<sup>67</sup> Davies R. *X-Ray. An Unauthorized Autobiography*. Woodstock, NY: Viking/Penguin, 1994, p. 361.

<sup>68</sup> Bennett, A. *The Forgotten Decade: Rethinking the Popular Music of the 1970s*. *Popular Music History*, 2007, vol. 2, no. 1, p. 23.

became' by the model of nostalgic past. As Barry Faulk traces<sup>69</sup>, this intension was a beginning of a new musical tradition of working with the past, repeatedly adopted by the musicians of the subsequent periods in the British popular music history, such as punk band Sex Pistols in the 1970s, indie band the Smiths in the 1980s, Brit-pop band Blur in the 1990s, and retro rock revival band the Libertines in the 2000s.

Associated with the first component, *the 'usage' of the past as a symbolic resource for marking their place in the present time* is no less important characteristic of the 'relevant history' of the Kinks. Mainly, this applies to the determination of the new status of the British pop music relating the US music market. The British Invasion bands the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and the Kinks attracted elements of musical entertainment shows of the 19th century, first of all, the music hall with all its attributes (musical form, theatrical performances, clothing, songs themes, etc.) in two aspects. Firstly, music hall tradition was used as a tool for marking their place in contemporary music space. In early 1960s, new British rock groups were based on American blues that implied usage of certain musical patterns, themes and format of presentation. As Roberta Schwartz notes<sup>70</sup>, a focus on the American music market largely dictated the format of the British pop music that was widely supported by the British audience and at the same time discontent among the British media. Applying and processing of the British cultural tradition, especially recognizable music hall was the original decision of the British musicians and mainly the Kinks to define a new status and a new format of British popular music already oriented on the national audience. Secondly, the reference to historical subjects, personalities, historical musical forms in songs' lyrics and live performances questioned the naivety of pop music and has received wide-ranging discussion in the music journalism. In contrast to the prevailing notions of pop music as youth music devoid of intellectual seriousness and a sense of the past, the Kinks offered another musical language, discussing the concept of memory, preservation of the past and history.

A further element of the 'relevant history' can be characterized as *'usage' of the past and history as a tool of identification in a wider cultural meaning*. Robert Colls points out<sup>71</sup> that crisis of British identity after the fall of the British Empire and the post-war political transformation of the British state demanded a new understanding. In this context, processing of historical subjects, personalities, and popular national traditions was a new attempt to find and mark their new national identity. Thus, appeal to more distant national past (images of Victorian England with its pastoral scenery, cozy houses and measured life), famous historical personalities and events can be considered as a claim to belong to the British tradition and its continuation in the new

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<sup>69</sup> Faulk, B.J. *British Rock Modernism...*, p. 129–155.

<sup>70</sup> Schwartz, R. *How Britain Got the Blues...*, p. 129–130.

<sup>71</sup> Colls, R. *Identity of England...*, p. 292–293.

changing circumstances. It is worth mentioning here the study of a sociologist Michael Bourdaghs on the comparison of the Kinks and Japanese rock band of the sixties, Happy End, dubbed 'Japanese the Beatles'. He notes<sup>72</sup> that in the context of national uncertainties both groups actively used the past for identifying themselves in the present time.

Nevertheless, the Kinks did not try to preserve the past, but actively creating on its basis a space for their own artistic realization (that is interconnected with the previous elements of the 'relevant history'). At the most basic level, these lines can be interpreted in two ways: firstly, there is no point living in the past, it is necessary to find new sources of identity; and secondly, it is needed to accept the past and try to find the foundations for identity in the past. The Kinks combined these two lines: firstly, understanding that the past is gone, but it is also an essential part of the present; secondly, the position of 'now' is deeply determined by the past, but since the past is a part of history, it cannot and does not need to be reconstructed. In this way, the Kinks did not contrasted 'then' and 'now' with the negative assessment of the current situation, and did not propose to reconstruct the state of 'then' (the past).

Undoubtedly, the Kinks were speaking about the past with some tinge of sentimentality and nostalgia, but *an appeal to the past had been done through humor, sarcasm, and irony*. On the one hand, represented in a humorous light history highlighted the lack of 'fixation' on the past and a lack of desire to reconstruct and restore it; on the other hand, it made it clear to the listener that the past was used basically as a 'spent material'.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, representing the past as a tool for describing the present, using historical themes, images and characters in song lyrics and stage performances, the Kinks marked a new trend in the modernization of British popular music. Usage of the past in the Kinks' songs, the musical style and the presentation was taking to determine their place in the contemporary music scene, and more generally – the place of contemporary British pop music. Thus, the Kinks served the past as a tool for understanding and description of the present, the musicians were more focused on the concept of 'living' and 'relevant' history, and the past was taken to become a necessary element of their artistic language. Moreover, this practice has received support and understanding from the British audience, and the American audience was perceived as traditionally British.

On the wave of interest to the national past in England in the late 1960s, the band turned to the British music hall tradition, which was particularly relevant for the British audience. This

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<sup>72</sup> Bourdaghs, M. What It Sounds Like to Lose an Empire: Happy End and the Kinks. Tsu T., ed. *Perspectives on Social Memory in Japan*. London, Global Oriental, 2005, p. 130.

caused a complete change of the band's image, the format of live performances, thematic of songs' lyrics, and structure of musical form. The music hall tradition was represented in the Kinks' music through vocal styling, lyrical themes, and songs' choppy rhythms. Raising and processing of the British cultural tradition, especially recognizable music hall was conditioned at the same time by desire of the British musicians and mainly the Kinks to define a new status regarding strong influence of American popular music and a new format of British popular music oriented on the national audience. From this point of view the 1967–1969 years can be seen as a key moment in the development of American cultural influence on British popular music and the appearance of a new popular English musical style, in which traditional music hall and the representation of national historical images were central aspects. This tendency allowed not only to override attitude toward American popular music, but also to form own musical scene and musical movement in England (named Britpop), and – increasingly – to rethink their own past in the post-imperial era.

Finally, I would like to stress the place of history in popular music. In accordance with the above, popular music appeals to the past and history in spite of the prevailing stereotypical notions of popular music as a phenomenon that is reversed only to the present and is devoid of a sense of the past. In the case of the British music culture this practice became one of the key elements that have been developed over the next decades and demonstrated as an important component to date. As it can be seen, the past often becomes a central concept, and the different modes of perception and patterns of work with the past in different ways determine the relation to the actual cultural content, 'working' closely with other cultural forms, and showing the complexity of the phenomenon of mass culture.

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