

*Ten Years That Shook The World:
Representations Of Youth(S) In Some
Musical Hits From The British Sixties¹*



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¹ This paper is affectionately dedicated to the memory of Rita Margarida Saraiva Coelho (1992-2013), an undergraduate student in Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures (English and North-American Studies) at FCSH-UNL, whom I met in two courses I lectured in 2012-13 and which were greatly enriched by her enthusiasm and the brightness of her young eyes and smile.

"Let us die young or let us live forever.
(...)
Forever young, I wanna be forever young."
(Alphaville, *Forever Young*, 1984)

"Tonight, we are young.
So let's set the world on fire.
We can burn brighter
Than the sun."
(Fun, *We are young*, featuring Janelle Monáe, 2011)

shall start by quoting Arthur Marwick's introductory words, just before singling out "(...) youth culture and trend-setting by young people (...)" (1998: p. 3) as one of the decade's most prominent features:

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"Mention of 'the sixties' rouses strong emotions even in those who were already old when the sixties began and those who were not even born when the sixties ended. For some it is a golden age, for others a time when the old secure framework of morality, authority, and discipline disintegrated. (...) What happened between the late fifties and the early seventies has been subject to political polemic, nostalgic mythologizing, and downright misinterpretation." (*Ibidem*)³

A few pages later, Marwick also points out:

"(...) the rise to positions of unprecedented influence of young people, with young subculture having a steadily increasing impact on the rest of society, dictating taste in fashion, music, and popular culture generally. Youth subculture was not monolithic: in respect to some developments one is talking of teenagers, with respect to others it may be a question of everyone under 30 or so. Such was the prestige of youth and the appeal of the youthful lifestyle that it became possible to be 'youthful' at much more advanced ages than would ever have been thought proper previously. Youth, particularly at the teenage end, created a vast market of its own in the artifacts of popular culture." (*Ibidem*: p. 17)

As far as pop and rock music are concerned and in the wake of the American pioneering examples provided, in the 1950s, by Bill Haley (1925-1981), Chuck Berry (1926--), Little Richard (1932--), Jerry Lee Lewis (1935--), Elvis Presley (1935-1977), Buddy Holly (1936-1959) and, meteorically, Ritchie Valens (1941-1959), the association of the British Sixties with emerging and expanding youth (sub)culture(s) needs no special demonstration⁴ to some extent, one might agree

³ To Gordon Thompson, "The sixties witnessed the beginning of a decentering of authority that continues to this day." (2008: p. 26)

⁴ "Until the late 1950s, Western popular music was dominated by Americans, whether through the big bands of the 1930s and 1940s or through the pioneers of rock and roll (...). British singers of the 1950s --- like Cliff Richard --- either tried to ape their American counterparts or developed their own homegrown form of music (...). This all changed in 1963 when four young men from Liverpool (...) developed a new and distinctive variation on rock, which helped take Britain out of its postwar and post-imperial melancholy. (...) The Beatles became the advance force of what was to become known as the British Invasion, opening the floodgates for a string of singers and bands from Britain to dominate popular music on both sides of the Atlantic." (McCormick, 2003: pp. 183-184) This is endorsed by Gordon Thompson, when he states that "(...) on 9 February 1964, as millions watched the Beatles on CBS's The Ed Sullivan Show, rock 'n' roll ceased to be an exclusively American art form. By the end of the decade, having overcome considerable political, economic, and

with Gordon Thompson and argue that it boils down to mathematics,⁵ as a baby-boomer born, say, in 1947 would be a teenager in 1960 and only 23 at the end of a decade itself as eternally young as such 'old dinosaurs' like Paul McCartney (1942--), Mick Jagger (1943--), Joe Cocker (1944--), Eric Clapton (1945--), Rod Stewart (1945--), David Bowie (1947-2016) and Elton John (1947--), to name but a few born before 1950 and, all of them, "alive and kicking", as the Simple Minds might put it or, in the words of A-Ha, a famous Norwegian band in the 80s, "Restlessness is in their [our] genes/Time won't wear it off".⁶ Granted that this image certainly owes to the ideals, dreams, values, codes and lifestyles, both personal, social and 'global', often held and shared by "angry young men",⁷ "rebels with (or without) a cause"⁸ and "teenagers in love"⁹ undergoing processes of mutual and self-discovery, the truth is that some slightly older friends of mine, now in their sixties, would still describe themselves proudly as not sexagenarians at all, but 'sexadolescents'... (whether or not one may consider "sex" as the root word and love as a spring and source of eternal youth).

Although this paper will only focus on examples coming from Britain,¹⁰ it may not be amiss to suggest that the mythical aura surrounding London in/and the

technological hurdles, British performers and production teams were fixtures in an internationalized pop music industry. Indeed, London's pop music recording industry came from being a colony of a distinctly American idiom to a major creative center in its own right in a few short years." (2008: p. 4; see also *ibidem*: p. 173) Finally, Gene Sculatti argues that "A revolução musical desencadeada pelos Beatles e alimentada por largos números de *baby boomers* endinheirados conduziu à explosão dos álbuns de *pop-rock* nos meados dos anos 60." (2005: p. 8)

⁵ "The beginning of the war signaled the birth of a generation of songwriters who turned twenty in, at or near the beginning of the sixties. They entered adolescence as rock 'n' roll established a symbolic expression of their growing independence and emancipation." (2008: p. 230)

⁶ In *We're Looking for the Whales*, 1986.

⁷ A label usually applied to playwrights and novelists active in and since the mid-1950s like John Osborne (1929-1994), Kingsley Amis (1922-1995), Harold Pinter (1930-2008), Allan Sillitoe (1928-2010) and Arnold Wesker (1932-).

⁸ *Rebel without a Cause* (1955), a film featuring James Dean (1931-1954), an actor -- and an icon -- often associated with the "live fast, die young" philosophy or way of life. The British singer Amy Winehouse (1983-2011), as well as three Americans, Jimmy Hendrix (1942-1970), Jim Morrison (1943-1971) and Janis Joplin (1943-1970), all of them twenty-seven by the time they died, can also be numbered among those shooting stars.

⁹ *A Teenager in Love* was the title of a 1959 hit sung by Dion and the Belmonts.

¹⁰ This option implies leaving out, for example, such pearls as Chuck Berry's *Sweet Little Sixteen* (USA, 1958), Neil Sedaka's (1939-) *Happy Birthday Sweet Sixteen* (USA, 1961) and Sam Cooke's (1931-1964) *Only Sixteen* (USA, 1959), which was soon sung in the UK, also in 1959, by Craig Douglas (1941-) and by the band Dr. Hook, already in the mid-70s.

Swinging Sixties¹¹ has also extended itself, although at a much smaller scale, to Lisbon, where, borrowing a Portuguese title, *A vida nunca mais foi a mesma* (Vilela and Mrozowski, 2012). In fact, through the Eurovision song contests, the Beatles' cartoons and the existence, in the record and distribution industries, of international companies like Decca, EMI, Parlophone, etc., besides our own Valentim de Carvalho, even this country west of nowhere, patriarchally ruled over by Oliveira Salazar (1889-1970), would occasionally catch glimpses of the big musical world flourishing out there,¹² not to mention the (self-) acknowledged influence of British pop on Portuguese bands like the Sheiks (founded in 1963 and often called and known as "the Portuguese Beatles"),¹³ who chose to sing in English¹⁴ and were therefore able to taste, both at home and abroad, some "sweet smell of success".¹⁵ According to Vilela *et al.*, "Uma cultura juvenil parece estar a emergir de entre as reviravoltas do ié-ié, do *twist* e do *rock'n'roll*, mas a Guerra Colonial leva estes jovens para outros destinos que não o estrelato." (2012: p. 106)

Let us then 'swing' back to Britain. Merely to state that most British rock and pop music composed, performed and recorded in the 1960s, "when I was younger,

¹¹The word was apparently first applied to London in 1965 by Diana Vreeland (1903-1989), journalist and chief editor of *Vogue*, and soon taken up by *Time*, in its issue of 15th April 1966. To Rainer Metzger, "London was the very embodiment of everything that was inspirational, innovative and progressive, and there were three factors in particular that propelled this surge towards the future, three crucial elements that promised a new world. These were youth, affluence and the mass media, and they became the key ingredients of sixties pop culture." (2012: p. 46)

¹²To say nothing of British fashion conveyed through such shops as "Por-fi-ri-os", founded in 1965, located at Rua da Vitória, 55-63 (Lisbon) and Rua de Santa Catarina, 39 (Oporto) and whose black and white logo looked like a record, a target or the Royal Air Force's; see, for instance, <<http://ratosreturn.blogspot.pt/2008/01/os-porfirios.html>> and Cabral, 2010: pp. 60-61. In the words of Vilela *et al.*, in the chapter "A vestir os Jovens lé-lé desde 1965" (2012: pp. 174-177), "(...) formou-se um novo nicho de mercado: jovens com fome de modernidade e de alguma rebeldia." (2012: p. 175) and "Os modelos mais modernos e irreverentes vêm de Londres, de King's Road e Oxford Street." (*Ibidem*: p. 176)

¹³The original members were Paulo de Carvalho (1947-), Carlos Mendes (1947-) Fernando Chaby (?-) and Jorge Barreto (?) Barreto and Mendes would later be replaced, respectively, by Edmundo Silva (?-) and Fernando Tordo (1948-). On the Beatles's influence, popularity and memorabilia in Portugal, see, for instance, Almeida and Lage, 2013.

¹⁴The Sheiks's most famous and popular early songs were probably *Summertime* (1965), a version of George Gershwin's (1898-1937) original, *Missing You* (1966) and *Tell me Bird* (also 1966). To Vilela *et al.*, "O mais bem sucedido dos grupos de ié-ié (...) e o maior fenómeno pop da década de 60, os Sheiks editam *Missing You* in 1965 [notice the slight discrepancy of dates], single que sai também para as lojas de discos em Espanha, Inglaterra e França." (2012: p. 109; see also Cabral, 2010: pp. 72 and 74-75)

¹⁵Title of a song (1990) and an album (2003) by The Stranglers (founded in 1974); also the title of a film directed by Alexander Mackendrick and produced by James Hill (1957), starring Burt Lancaster (1913-1994) and Tony Curtis (1925-2010).

so much younger than today", was primarily encoded and decoded, produced and consumed, by and for youths (of admittedly all ages)¹⁶ would be, of course, an incontrovertible truism and therefore neither particularly illuminating nor indeed very challenging... Likewise, to 'pick up' from the thousands of records, singers and bands "the best which has been written and sung" sounds like an impossible and a highly subjective task... I therefore decided to narrow down my selection to songs whose lyrics focus explicitly on the topic of Youth and I ended up with three, for us to briefly comment upon. I shall start with someone who actually owns a property in the Al(l)garve (Guia, nr. Albufeira).¹⁷ Ladies and gentlemen, please step back to 1961 and welcome a very, very young Cliff Richard (1940--):

The Young Ones (1961)¹⁸

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=cliff+richard%2c+the+young+ones&&view=detail&mid=4B7116C568C09C8AF5584B7116C568C09C8AF558&FORM=VRDGAR> (3:11).

After this soft, rosy and idealistic song, enacting and promoting, through romantic love, continuity and traditional or established values and practices in outdoor leisure, family life and society, here comes a much 'harder' rock hit from 1965, already bordering on punk and heavy metal:

The Who, *My Generation* (1965)¹⁹

¹⁶ "Together with (...) British film, and (...) British television, British pop music both earned international renown and worked changes within British society. (...) An alternative working-class culture had not replaced the upper- and middle-class culture of the forties and fifties: but there was in place a culture, enjoyed by all classes, in the creation of which the working class had (...) played a part." (Marwick, 1994: pp. 98-99). See also *idem*, 1998, especially "The Knitting Together of British Youth Subculture" (pp. 55-80) and "*Les Années Anglaises?*" (pp. 455-464).

¹⁷ *Quinta do Moinho*, where Sir Cliff Richard grows his own vineyards and is involved in the production of *Vida Nova*, to be tasted at *Adega do Cantor*, located at nearby *Quinta do Miradouro* (<http://www.winesvidanova.com/Portugeuse/whoweare.htm>).

¹⁸ Founded in 1958, The Shadows had different members throughout the decades, Hank Marvin (1941-), Brian Welch (1941-) and Brian Bennett (1940-) forming, together with Cliff, the usual line-up. "The Young Ones" was also the name of a popular sitcom broadcast in the UK between 1982 and 1984.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qN5zw04WxCc> (3:28)

Finally, an example from 1968, past the "Summer of Love" (1967), touching on such issues as temptation vs. self-control and underage sex, as if traditional morals and mores were trying to reassert themselves, after all the wild excesses of the Sixties:

Gary Puckett and the Union Gap, *Young Girl* (1968)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hn0ZJHVH17I> (3:01)

Deeply different from each other,²⁰ these three "oldies but goldies" illustrate in words, sounds and images the diversity and vitality of the British Sixties, to which one might well apply Wordsworth's (1770-1850) celebrated "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,/But to be young was very Heaven!" (*The Prelude*, XI, lines 108-109)²¹ A vibrant decade, whose memories still haunt our imagination, 'rocking' our hearts, 'shaking' our souls, 'rattling' our minds and 'rolling' on our dreams; a decade of which, in this day and age of intergenerational gaps, we are all pretty much --- older and younger --- orphaned, disillusioned and nostalgic children, forever trying to "catch the wind".²²

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¹⁹ Founded in 1964, The Who were formed by Pete(r) Townshend (1945-), Roger Daltrey (1944-), John Entwistle (1944-2002) and Keith Moon (1946-1978). "My Generation" was also the name of an American TV series released in 2010.

²⁰ "In the late sixties, (...) British rock and pop music splintered into a sparkling shower of psychedelic blues, bubble gum, nostalgia, punk, reggae, and a myriad of other styles (...)" (Thomson, 2008: p. 268).

²¹ As Carmen Posadas has put it, although in a book focused on the Portuguese social and cultural scenes: "Antes dessa década, ser adolescente era uma passagem inevitável mas ingrata. Um momento de NÃO-IDENTIDADE em que não se era nem criança nem adulto, mas (...) uma mistura de dúvidas e ansiedades que cresciam num invólucro de acne juvenil. Mas os anos sessenta, com o seu (...) espírito redentor, iam pôr termo a tal estado de coisas; desde então e até aos dias de hoje, a juventude é um posto." (1995: 6; see also "Do Nacional Cançonetismo à Canção de Protesto", pp. 76-79, and "A Segunda Metade da Década", pp. 79-81).

²² Title of a song by Donovan (1946-), released in 1965. But I might as well end as I have started, quoting Marwick's final words: "(...) there has been nothing quite like it; nothing would ever be quite the same again." (1998: p. 806)

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Gary Puckett and the Union Gap, *Young Girl* (1968).

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ABSTRACT

In the wake of the American examples provided, in and since the 1950s, by Bill Haley (1925-1981), Little Richard (1932-), Jerry Lee Lewis (1935-) and Elvis Presley (1935-1977), among others, the association of the British Sixties with emerging and expanding youth (sub- and counter-) cultures and pop music in particular needs no special demonstration. I therefore decided to narrow down my selection to songs whose lyrics focus explicitly on the overall chosen topic --- youth --- and I ended up with three, for us to listen to, remember and hopefully comment upon, if only in the privacy of our own images and memories of the Sixties.

KEY-WORDS

Youth Cultures; Pop Music; Youth