

# 3 BRINGING THE BEAT

The coldest night of my life was spent in a minibus between Aberdeen and Gills Bay, heading for Orkney, during a Sensational Alex Harvey Band UK tour. It was also, as my good pal Luck would have it, the coldest night of the year, making it down to minus 20 – and the minibus wasn't entirely windproof or snowproof. I'd have burst into tears only the moisture had frozen in my eyes, and there was the added danger of getting stuck to the window – again. 'This is like the old days,' said Chris Glen. As an encyclopaedia of all things SAHB, I was able to tell him the band had never played Orkney before. 'No,' he said, 'this is like the old days going up to Dundee.'

In the motorway age, the eighty-mile Glasgow–Dundee trip can be completed legally in an hour and twenty-six minutes. In the sixties, it was a different story but it was nothing compared to the epic four-hundred-mile run from Liverpool to Elgin. And, if it was also snowing, the fun just never ended.

**PETER KERR, Clyde Valley Stompers:** Travelling was murder. There was only one motorway, the M1, which went from the outskirts of London to Rugby. Everything else was single-lane trunk roads, so you'd spend hours and hours on end sitting behind streams of trucks. And you'd be doing runs like London to Birmingham and back again on the same night. Complete hell.

Even more of a hellish trip was experienced by the Beatles in 1963, as they set out on a five-day tour of Scotland. They completed their Hogmanay show in Hamburg then flew to London, but with the weather against them the show scheduled for 2 January was abandoned, which meant their first appointment in the north of the nation – asides from having backed Johnny Gentle in 1960, with a guest drummer because they didn't have one yet – was on 3 January, at the Two Red Shoes in Elgin.

The venue's owner, Albert Bonici, was a smart operator. Partly because bands didn't know any better, and partly because it was worth taking the risk, Bonici pressed the pre-Fab Four (now four) into a deal which made him their exclusive Scottish agent. It was a standard trick he'd continue to get away with until the London businessmen began to realise how big a market Scotland really was. They also played Dingwall Town Hall, the Museum Hall, Bridge of Allan, and the Beach Ballroom, Aberdeen, all for three shillings a ticket, before heading southward. But it was a mixed impression they left behind them.

**COLIN McINTOSH:** You can always tell a good band, and without doubt they were that – but they didn't grab me. My girlfriend loved it, but I'd seen better. If you ask me, Alex Harvey wiped the floor

with the Beatles – I'd seen him a few months earlier and I found myself comparing everything to his show. But when they dropped the covers and did one of their own tunes, you could feel things changing. They definitely had something there. But you couldn't do a set of all your own songs in those days... and anyway, I was heading towards R&B. When I heard the Stones I knew I was right. The girlfriend didn't last either!

Nevertheless, the thirty-seven-date promotional tour propelled *Please Please Me* to the number one spot after a gradual climb, where it stayed for seven weeks. DJ Keith Fordyce told the *NME*: 'I can't think of any other group recording in this style. I shan't be in the least surprised to see the charts invaded by the Beatles.'

And, lo! The beat boom had arrived. Finally there was a convincing direction for all the young post-skiffle bands that had been springing up across Scotland – unsure of their future, they'd been influenced by a wide range of musical styles, and that was to serve them well in the coming revolution. And for those who hadn't struck a note in anger yet, there was a punk ethic at the top of the charts again, fuelled by the four-on-the-floor drum drive. Another generation of Scots reached for guitars thanks to the Liverpudlians – who once, never let it be forgotten I suppose, had a Scot in their line-up.

**ALAN MAIR, Beatstalkers:** Rhythm was in my blood. We lived with my gran, and I loved it when my uncles put Radio Luxembourg on. Even if I was meant to be in bed I couldn't help dancing around if I heard a song I liked. The actual sound of guitars really moved me too. My mum bought me an old acoustic one at an auction and I used to play it with my ear stuck to it, so I could hear a kind of electric sound. But when you got to thirteen or fourteen, and you were just becoming aware of yourself, you realised it was cool to be in a band. That's why everyone was doing it.

**ANDY LOW:** I thought the Beatles were incredible. The look, the delivery, the harmonies – it was a breath of fresh air. I'd seen so many copycat groups at the Beach Ballroom in Aberdeen, I really thought about giving up going to concerts, although God knows what else there was to do at the time. But the Beatles brought it back to life. I thought, 'Hey, maybe I can do that.' and I borrowed my mate's guitar – then bought one myself. It's been a big part of my life ever since. I never joined a band and never went on stage – never really wanted to. But it's still important to me.

**ROB MITCHELL:** People were screaming right the way through the songs. I thought, this is a great way to get girls! Although to be fair, they more or less did that at every gig. The other thing was, you didn't have to learn the words because of all the screaming – you just needed to know the chorus!

This time round, there was less of the doubt shown by record labels in the past. The pop machine was soon the only game in town, heralding the advance of Merseybeat across the world, and, for a while anyway, American singers trying to spoof British accents. It was also the end of the line for the musical genres who'd been pretenders to the throne.

**PETER KERR, Clyde Valley Stompers:** *Peter and the Wolf* had done very well for us. We ended up doing a lot of telly – *Morecambe and Wise*, *Thank Your Lucky Stars*, *Cool for Cats*... We were resident on *Young At Heart* from TTTV. We'd go up to Newcastle every Wednesday, the show went live from seven till eight, then we got pissed on Newcastle Brown because the sleeper didn't leave till half past eleven. We did the title track for a Norman Wisdom film, *On the Beat*, and even appeared in Tommy Steele's movie, *It's All Happening*.

But all through this the line-up was changing. The Lyn Dutton Agency were good in that respect – it was always a problem to find new Scottish members in London, but we managed it up until near the end. The first non-Scot we got was at least Irish, Joe McIntyre, but then the guy who'd replaced Ian Menzies left himself, and the first English guy came in. We knew the hard fans, especially in the west of Scotland, would take a dim view if we filled the line-up with Sassenachs.

We wound up with this guy who just didn't fit – it wasn't anyone's fault, it just happens. But it was social – when you're living in a van you've just got to get on. So we replaced him with someone we chose ourselves, and that's when the agency took the hump. It doesn't make any sense, looking back on it – you've got to let the band be the band.

So they called me into their office and said, 'We're firing you... We've got to get someone in who'll let us run things.' Then they offered me a job in the agency! Of course, I told them what to do with it...

I went back and told the boys. They all said, 'That's it, we're going with you.' I said, 'Don't be daft – you're earning good money here!' But the agency had tried to get at them all, and they knew you couldn't go along with that kind of thing. So there I was with a band, no name and no work – just like when I'd come back from Germany before I joined the Stompers! Their support was very touching, though.

So we called ourselves Pete Kerr's Scottish All Stars, even though we weren't all Scottish any more. But Ian Menzies and Lyn Dutton still had the name, so they got the Leathertown Jazz Band, an all-English band, back from Germany, dressed them in tartan and called them the Clyde Valley Stompers. They went out on the road – and lasted a week.

So that was very sad – but everything was about to change anyway, because of the Beatles. We'd all been thinking we were going to have to shift away from the trad stuff. We'd been getting more progressive anyway. Some of the last broadcasts we did as the Stompers were very different from the stuff we'd done before. It was the best time to lose the Stompers name.

But things were moving so fast that within a year there wasn't enough work for us to keep going, and that was the end of my career as a touring musician. No one could have seen all that coming. Not even the Beatles.

It was a momentous year, was 1963. Purchase tax on records was cut, meaning you now paid 6/3 for a single, 10/1 for an EP and 30/11 for an LP (30p, 50p and £1.60 respectively). As the US and USSR installed their leader-to-leader hotline, an anti-nuclear march in London drew seventy thousand protestors, while Martin Luther King told two hundred thousand civil rights demonstrators: 'I have a dream...' *Ready Steady Go!* announced: 'The weekend starts here!' JFK told the world with dodgy grammar, 'Ich bien ein Berliner', and months later he was assassinated. The following day, William Hartnell appeared as Dr Who. After manic crowd scenes outside the London Palladium during a Beatles' appearance, the word 'Beatlemania' entered the language. And the Great Train Robbers made off with £2.6m.

**PETE AGNEW**, Nazareth: When we were still the Shadettes we used to play Burntisland Palais every Saturday night. Sometimes we'd play the local cinema afterwards during the midnight horror presentations – movies with names like *The Wasp Woman*...

We had a knackered ex-gas board van, painted bright yellow, and we wore bright yellow suits with a black 'S' embroidered on the pocket. To our eternal shame, now! When we finished at about 4 a.m.

we'd be too tired to bother changing clothes, so we'd just pack up and head home. One time like that, it was the morning of 9 August 1963, and just after we chugged up the hill out of Burntisland we were pulled over by a police car. Two cops told us to get out of the van and unload it. We asked what the problem was, and they said there'd been a train robbery and a lot of money was involved.

They said it had happened a couple of hours earlier, and we thought it must have been at Aberdour or Kirkcaldy or somewhere like that. But they said it was Buckinghamshire – four hundred miles away! And we're in a bright yellow van in bright yellow suits, mind you! We were probably the first, and definitely the most colourful, suspects in the Great Train Robbery...

Record labels were hungry. Starving. Ravenous. Brian Poole and the Tremeloes, Freddie and the Dreamers, Gerry and the Pacemakers, John Doe and the Kitchen Sink if they could sign them. They urgently wanted to present as many new faces as they could so they pounced. They were accused of visiting towns, cleaning them out of beat groups and leaving them empty. Except in Scotland...

A growing number of outfits north of the border felt they were better than the gunk being churned out down south. In Dunfermline, Manny Charlton and the Mark Five got so upset they decided to walk all the way to London in protest at the way Scotland was being ignored.

It may be true that they didn't walk so much as hitch, especially when there were no media types about – but it worked; the Mark Five were met in Market Harborough and offered a deal. Then, after one single, they were dropped. So, actually, it didn't work. And it's also worth noting that the group had completed three hundred and sixty miles of the journey, while the record company managed to make it a whole seventy miles out of London. Well done them.

Many Scots rock'n'rollers were establishing a sound that took a lot from beat, but was still in the line of sight with R&B. In the purest sense, then, the London labels couldn't be sure it would sell, and of course didn't see the point in taking a risk when everyone in Liverpool was playing exactly what would sell.

Still, it finally happened – Dean Ford and the Gaylords were signed by EMI. The Glaswegian five-piece, all around sixteen years old, had been hammering away for around two years by this point, inspired by Cliff and the Everlys. They'd started as the four-man Gaylords but added Tommy McAleese, alias Dean Ford, and changed the name to reflect the trend of focusing on the frontman. They quickly became the unquestioned biggest band in Scotland; but, underlining the problems with Scots having a slightly different approach, and the labels' unwillingness to spend money on risky moves, success down south continued to evade them.

Mick Jagger was making a similar observation about the developing R&B movement, in which, of course, the Rolling Stones were deeply involved. 'It's got to move out of London,' he told the *Melody Maker*. 'It has to spread to live. That's the only way it can become popular and retain its form at the same time.'

Perhaps, perhaps, perhaps – but in Scotland it applied more to the pop-based than the blues-based stuff. The black music influence had been alive and well for some time. When the Alex Harvey Soul Band headed for Hamburg in mid 63, they took with them the founding embers of the Scottish rock blaze.

**FIONNA DUNCAN**, Clyde Valley Stompers: I first heard the Alex Harvey Band at La Cave in Glasgow. I remember being blown away by Alex's amazing voice and the powerhouse sound of the band. I was thinking, this has got to be 50 decibels higher than us at our loudest – and people think we're loud! He also affirmed the fact that so many Scottish singers have a black sound.

**PETER KERR, Clyde Valley Stompers:** We also did a gig in The Place in Edinburgh – it was a series of old tea warehouses – there was us and the Alex Harvey Band. We were playing different parts of the club, and I remember going down the stairs and hearing what they were doing – it was fantastic! Absolutely bloody shit hot! There was no way we could go that far, but jazz has its roots in blues so we could certainly touch on the rhythm and blues side.

If you find the Soul Band album on sale, buy it. I managed to get one cheap in a really weaselly manner – I bought a cover without a disc on eBay for about a fiver, then, two years later, someone sold me a disc without a cover for about twenty quid. Total value when put together: approaching £120. Big tick!

The sleeve notes are a slice of perfect beat-scene schmoozery, demonstrating how unsure the labels were about who they were selling to: *The manager of one of Hamburg's leading twisteries was on the blower... I scrambled into my nitelife clothes and headed hotfoot for the Reeperbahn... The manager gave me a soft drink with a hard filling and a ringside seat at the twisting turmoil... I memorised the nifty twisted variations that were being ground out all around me... In my mind I'd already signed Harvey after eight minutes... Then came an interval, Harvey came to me, and we both came to an agreement... The result is this LP, recorded on the spot in that nitery.*

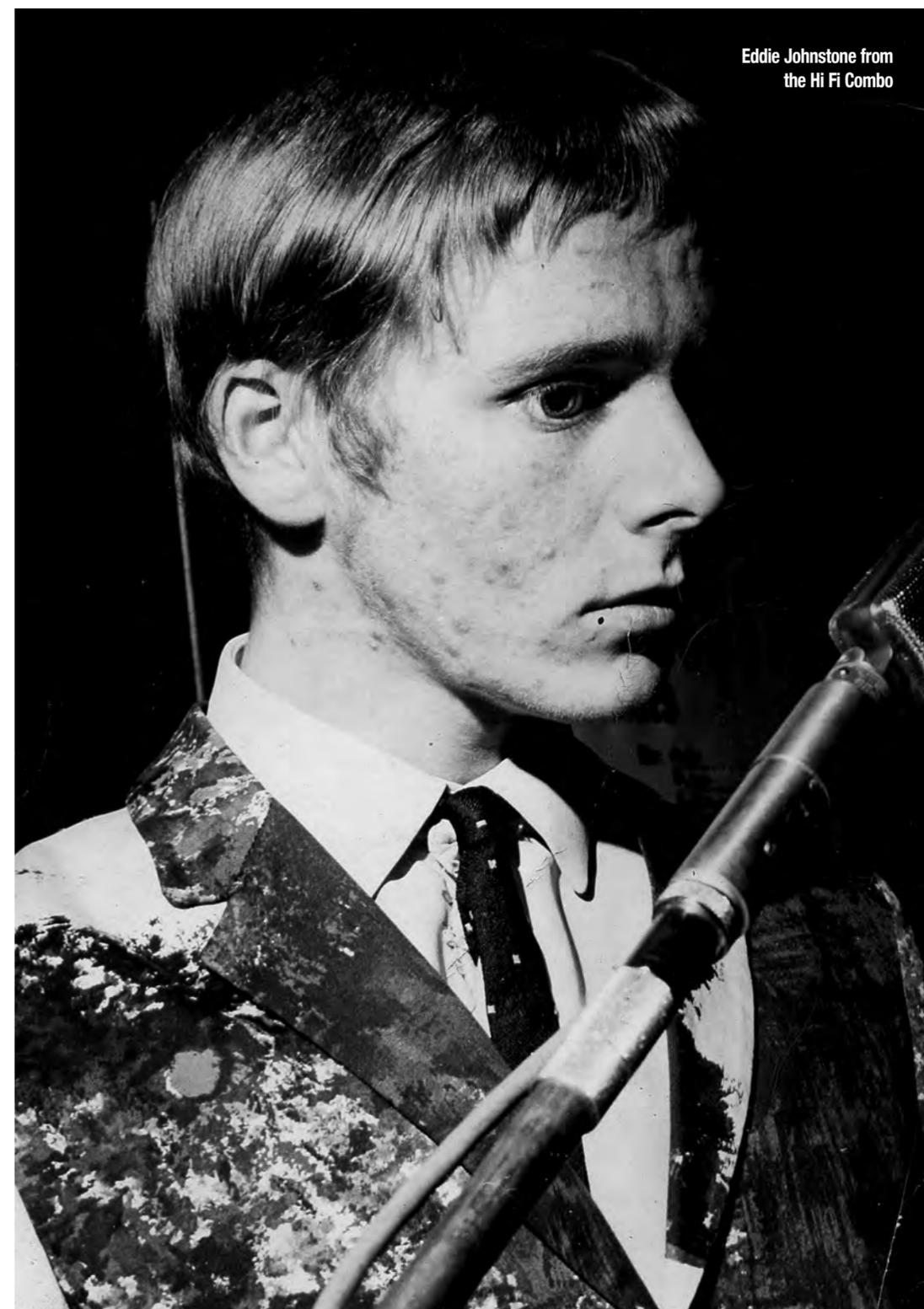
The shame is, the album doesn't demonstrate the Soul Band in all its glory, because most of the musicians are from Kingsize Taylor's band, due to the carve-up between the various recording contracts. Still, it clearly demonstrates the dramatic edge Harvey had already been working on for around eight years. Versions of *Framed* and *I Just Wanna Make Love to You*, which he'd later revisit and turn into Harvey vehicles for a new generation, show just how much of a performer he already was.

On 1 January 1964, when everything was still shut and 'Yer Uncle Michael's affy tired, son' was being slurred across the nation by slouched lumps on sofas, later-to-be-Sir Jimmy Savile launched *Top of the Pops* from a converted church in Manchester. Like all the other music shows, the bosses gave it a tentative one-season run, and of course it stayed on air for forty-two years. Episode one starred the up-and-coming Rolling Stones, the Hollies, Dusty Springfield, the Swinging Blue Jeans, the Dave Clark Five, Gene Pitney, Freddie and the Dreamers and no Beatles at all... well, except for the Beatles. A week later, more than seventy million people in the USA – that's a quarter of the population, fact fans – tuned in to watch the JohnPaulGeorgeRingo thing on the *Ed Sullivan Show*.

New forces were gathering to help the beat boom replace the baby boom: the pirate station Radio Caroline began broadcasting from the Suffolk coast, BBC2 was launched and the first experimental transmissions in stereo were made. In other music technology, Robert Moog's first synthesiser arrived, as did the Fender Rhodes electric piano, the Hohner clavinet and the Studer four-track tape recorder.

Prime Minister Nehru of India died, Canada replaced the Union Jack with the maple leaf, Nelson Mandela was jailed and the earliest kind of human, *Homo habilis* ('handy man') was discovered. Meanwhile, the earliest kind of music venue was dying out in Scotland – the ballrooms had finally fallen against the flood of cool new clubs, and in the frenzy of opening doors there were enough stage spots for everyone to get a gig. Stories abound of bands painting moustaches on because they were far too young to enter the club they were headlining. The Gaylords were ahead of the pack, but many others were starting to catch up, including the Beatstalkers.

**ALAN MAIR, Beatstalkers:** The singer, Davie Lennox, and I, both worked at Dalglish's as sheet metal draughtsmen. We'd been going for over a year by this point and we were doing really well



Eddie Johnstone from  
the Hi Fi Combo

wherever we went. We'd end up sleeping in the factory sometimes – if you were coming back from a gig in Aberdeen at five in the morning it made more sense to go straight to the factory than to try going home first.

All the bosses took us in – all the bosses, the MD and everyone, and we were standing there with our heads bowed as they shook their fingers saying, 'It's not good enough – we know you're sleeping here. If it doesn't stop we'll have to let you go.' We told them we were going to turn pro, but it just sounded like a big joke to them. No one realised what a following we had all over Scotland.

They weren't the only band leaving school or work on Friday afternoon, playing five, six or more shows over the weekend then heading back to normality at 9 a.m. on Monday. The boys to entertain yoo-hoo included Glasgow's Pathfinders, Chevrons, Studio Six and MI5; Edinburgh's Avengers, Crusaders (at least two, one of them Golden) and Boston Dexters; Aberdeen's Facells, Diamonds, Jacobbeats and Johnny and the Copycats; Ayrshire's Tones, Ancestors and Chase; Caithness' Rocking Stompers, Hunters, Federals and Talismen; Clydebank's Boleros and Dundee's Poor Souls.

Top venues included: Glasgow's Locarno, Majestic, Lindella, Elizabethan and Burns Howff; Edinburgh's Place, Gamp, McGoos and St Mary's Hall; Leith's Top Storey; Aberdeen's Looking Glass, Elte, Philemon, St K's and Double Two in Torry; Dundee's JM's; Ayr's Bobby Jones's; Peterhead's Rescue Rooms; and, of course Elgin's Two Red Shoes.

**BRIAN HOGG**, writer: I started going to see bands in Edinburgh when I was thirteen. In those days there wasn't the alcohol connection to music that you have now. The first club I started to go to regularly was called the Green Hill, in 1964. The main band was the Athenians, who were great. There was the Avengers, who were the first band I heard doing songs by Paul Revere and the Raiders – *Just Like Me* and *Steppin' Out*.

Then I started going to the Gonk and seeing bands like the Moonrakers and the Hippo People. The Place was also going at the same time – that was where Alex Harvey and the Boston Dexters used to play. The Dexters looked great with their gangster image and Tam White had a fantastic voice. Then there was Bungees, the all-nighter.

A lot of the Glasgow bands would play where I was staying, Galston in the west of Edinburgh, then move on to a venue closer to the city centre, and finish up at an all-nighter – so they'd be doing three gigs in the one night. There was a difference between the east and west coast bands... Edinburgh bands would do an obscure Kinks track but the Glasgow bands would do an obscure soul track. They were less kinda 'poppy', if you like.

**EDDIE JOHNSTONE**, Hi Fi Combo: The band was formed in 1965 by two brothers from Kilbirnie, Dick and Andy Sneddon. Dick was the drummer and Andy played bass. They recruited Glaswegian Kenny Munro on guitar, and a singer with an amazing range, Tommy Gray, from Lochwinnoch. They reckoned music on the Tamla Motown label would be the next big thing, at a time when most bands were playing chart covers. They began to search for the perfect organist to complete the line-up – and that's where I came in.

I was starting my second-year exams at Ballochmyle Hospital when they turned up at my dormitory room. They knew I'd been playing piano in my own rock'n'roll band, and asked me to play something

for them. I took them to the recreation hall where there was a grand piano, and played the *Theme from Exodus*, plus a piece by Mozart. Then Dick asked in his strange brogue, 'Dae ye wahnt tae jine oor bonn? Wi'v bin searchin' furra perfect organist – but ye'll huv ti' dae...'

As they frightened me terribly, I declined their offer, but they offered me stardom in both Germany and Britain, a record deal and millions of pounds, which I felt was pretty generous considering they all looked poverty-stricken. It seemed a little better than the £2 a week I'd earn with my RGN Certificate. I resigned from the hospital and bade farewell to my nursing girlfriend Katie Girvan. Katie, wherever you are, I'm sorry about that scribbled note I put under your door...

Scotland was rockin' at long last – and was finally cutting discs. Despite having the first record deal, the Gaylords didn't have the first single. The honour went to the Athenians, whose *You Tell Me* was released by Waverley, a mainly traditional-Scottish label which was also the country's first independent. Soon came the Poets' *Now We're Thru*, which made it to number thirty, while the McKinleys released *Someone Cares For Me*; and later came the Gaylords' long-awaited first cut, *Twenty Miles*. But as Dean Ford and co settled in to their new homes in London, having marked their departure with a private party in the Picasso Club, the first proper Scottish rock'n'roll hit was recorded by none of the aforementioned heavyweights.

*We-eeeeee-eeee-eee-eeee-eeee-eeee-eeee-eee-ll.... you make me wanna...*

Lulu and the Luvvers made number seven in mid-64 with their cover of the Isley Brothers' track *Shout!* starring fifteen-year-old Marie Lawrie's middle-aged vocal. Inspired when she'd heard Alex Harvey singing the number, she'd teamed up with a band called Gleneagles and they'd become the near-enough overnight sensation breakthrough act Scotland so badly needed. They appeared on *Top of the Pops* on 3 and 10 of June, surrounded by Brian Poole and the Tremeloes, the Dave Clark Five and the Swinging Blue Jeans – and did it all without tartan.

**ANNE BROWN**: A girl my age on *Top of the Pops*? From my home town? Now you're talking! Watching the show was about the only time me and my big brother agreed on anything. I told him right there, 'I'm joining your group!' And they didn't have a singer so he let me! All I could do at first was Lulu's 'Weeell...' bit, but it was a start. Soon I was getting into the Stones and a whole world of music, but then my parents cut in – they wanted me to be a good little girl and not a rocker, and there was certainly no way I was going on stage. My brother stood up for me, but no one could talk them round, and that was that. I still do *Shout!* at the karaokes and family parties, but my brother gave up the guitar in the sixties. Parents! And I should know – I'm one now...

The Stones, by now, were the figurehead of rebellion, playing the Devil's music and corrupting the young the way Lulu couldn't. They'd had their first number one with *It's All Over Now* and there was no stopping them. An appearance in Hamilton had led to a full-scale riot when four thousand people tried to get into a fifteen-hundred capacity venue, and after a mighty struggle the police had given in and let them. As the newspapers lambasted them, they rolled on to a show in Blackpool during the Glasgow fair fortnight. Naturally enough, a goodly percentage of Glaswegians were holidaying in Blackpool at that time of year, and the latest Stones riot was blamed on 'drunk Scots', thanks a bigoted lot. Soon afterwards Jagger and his cronies would appear on the *Ed Sullivan Show*, and the presenter would promise never to have them back, only to do just that the following year.

In the UK, 1965 started with the abolition of the death sentence, the death of Winston Churchill, a ban on

