

Everybody Saturday Night: Music, Dance and Politics

Some of those from the immediate II World War youth generation, who have had their life histories or reminiscences recorded as part of this project, think of themselves as having brought 'a breath of fresh air' to society at the time and helped to change it for the better. They narrate their experiences of the time as first-hand protagonists forming part of an unprecedented upbeat generation that fomented an atmosphere of rebellion – as shown in music, dance, dress fashion and in politics. Against a background of political restlessness accompanying the post-war reconstruction, the struggles for integration and independence, they talk of their conveyance of new or 'modern' political and social ideas, beliefs, values and mores which they view as having gone against the conservative way of life of previous generations. Certainly, the set of recorded narratives from the youths of the 1950s and the 1960s provide an atmosphere of vibrant, rapidly changing times which they refer to as 'extraordinary times' and 'good old times' ... with a deep sense of nostalgia. Many remember themselves as teddy boys, who did not only dominate the many dancing floors around the island, but who were also on the vanguard of political activism, taking part in anti-colonial riots and resisting Catholic Church repression, particularly during the political-religious conflict of the 1960s.

This research project is proving to be one of the most popular fieldwork topics, as illustrated not only by the increasing number of interviews but also by the range of material – both visual and musical – which has been bequeathed by participants. Narrating the experiences of their youth and being recorded 'for posterity', these persons feel recognised and appreciated as protagonists and as makers of history. Some of them declare that they are in search of more opportunities to be able to share their memories – their past experiences – with today's young.

Salvu Bezzina: 'I ended up a teddy boy because I loved music and dancing. I did not know how to dance very well, but I used to like seeing people dance and naturally ... the girls ! In those times, 1957, we used to go dancing either at *Għar id-Dud* , *Café Riche* or at '*Rockyvale*'. Somewhere else there were others, larger dancing places ... and then, as time passed, and as this slowed down...we used to go to 'Bamboo', 'Granada' ... any place which was frequented by other youths, any place where a little dancing took place.

Teddy boys were working-class kids...with little money, because a wage was five or four pounds, and you would do anything to buy a Teddy boy trousers. A drink at that time, not in abundance, coke, Pepsi, Kinnie, sometimes a beer and at others a little bit of whisky, things like this, but going to dance was always a pleasure, always go...have fun seeing people and girls everywhere....

There were local singers... the 'Big Beaters', for example : there was the juke-box... most of them in the bars ... very nice juke-boxes these were, you put three pence or one shilling, three pence each or five with one shilling. At the 'Sirens', at St. Paul's [Bay], we used to go to dance there also. And at that time it used to be packed with people. There used to be people on Fridays but not as much as on Saturdays... because 'everybody Saturday night'...



Donated by N. Chircop

A teddy boy, the first thing he wore was a drainpipe trousers either with a zip or with a lot of buttons, with a large curl in front of the eyes, always trying to twist it sharply, like a car's sunvisor on his forehead. At those days this is how we used to make our hair... and shirts with the collar up our neck...with pockets a little bit fancy, most of them'.

Lawrence Ancilleri: 'We, for instance, were born after the war; our childhood was surrounded with the destruction left by the war...a group of children growing up with everything destroyed. But all this also affected our ways of thinking and acting ... our ways of living. We were the first to start using cookers, as those before us used to cook on fire with wood. Then we can talk of these things which affected us as youngsters ... there was the talkies and the walks (*passiġġati*) at *Xgħajra*. You would go there and literally see two hundred, three, four, five, six hundred people, in a square, all walking up and down, here and there, and one always looking around in search of a girlfriend ... for a date.

The radio, especially the B.F.B.S. of the British military services, used to broadcast in English the songs of the day. So, the exposure to the English language... had a tremendous effect on us...




This was the time of the early Beatles...and then Elvis Presley and Little Richards. These were associated with those guys who were a little troublesome... they used to go to the villages, in the bars frequented only by the males, in

order to play the juke-box, the famous juke-box. They used to dance there. I remember....males with males, youth between themselves, ehh! ... for us they were grown-ups. With the long curl on their forehead, with their jeans trousers like funnels stretching their legs ... I don't know how they used to wear them. Sharp pointed shoes and heels. Their long painters left to grow towards their lips... they were troublesome ones.


One other thing I would like to add, the Church used to condemn the so called 'French kiss'. There was great censorship ... and up till about 1964 women could not wear their bikini. I remember we used to go near the Breakwater to see the WRENS ... These were English women sailors who used to swim in their bikinis in the port!


TUNES TO BE PERFORMED BY "JAMES DOWLING AND HIS BAND" IN THE PALACE SQUARE ENCLOSURE ON THE THREE DAYS OF CARNIVAL:—


1. P.S. I LOVE YOU — Johnny Mercer Gordon Jenkins.
2. YOU YOU YOU — Lotar Olias.
3. BLAZE AWAY — arr. by Abb. Holzman.
4. FOR YOU RIO RITA — E. Santeugini.
5. NIGHT TRAIN — Oscar Washington.
6. OH! MY PA PA — Paul Burkhard.
7. CUBAN MAMBO — Xavier Cogut.
8. ENILORO — Obdulio Morales.
9. ANNA — R. Vatro.
10. CHICKA BOOM — Bob Merrill.
11. "GIN AND TONIC" — Van Alexander.
12. FAT MAN BOOGIE — Billy May.
13. NUMBER ONE — James Wille-Robertson.
14. BIG HEAD — Jack Meadows.
15. ANSWER ME — Gerhard Winkler.



MURPHY
Radio







Sole Distributors: **ARCADES HOLE**
43, Old Theatre Street, Valletta Phone: Cent, 4727