

## Musical Tradition In Live Sport

By George Frampton

Earlier this year, Channel Four broadcasted a documentary called 'Playing for England.' It portrayed a group of Sheffield Wednesday football fans who took all manner of musical instruments to matches, and thus lead the singing or just play anthems, e.g. 'the March from Aida'. 'The Sun' recruited the band to form a nucleus of a larger band to 'represent England' at last year's football World Cup in France. Having visited the newly-professional Saracens RFC at their Allied Dunbar matches at Watford as a member of the Fabulous Fezheads who, in turn, supply entertainment, I witnessed a different use of music as an entertainment aid, and realised that there is now a diversity and possible revolution in musical tradition in live sport at the moment. The least we can do is to document and report it since, in some parts of the country, the tradition of singing at football matches is in danger of going under.

There are two books in print charting the progress of singing at football matches. They are 'You're Not Singing Anymore' by Adrian Thrills, and 'Dicks Out - 2' by Rob Merrills. Both essential reading.

I shall start back in 1962 when my father first took me to see my own team play, viz. Aldershot Town, who were playing Southport as I recall it. The team seemed to be permanently anchored to a mid-table slot in the former Division Four in those days, but still managed to attract 5000 or so spectators to each of its home matches. I cannot recall anything original being sung by the fans peculiar to Aldershot by the fans, but you have to bear in mind that this was before BBC TV launched 'Match of the Day' and that aspect of televised sport became more available. Pre-match audio entertainment was supplied by a selection of vinyl records played over a crackly tannoy, courtesy of Rumblelow's electrical shop in Wellington Street. One thing I do recall from 1964, with the Dave Clark Five in the charts with the songs 'Bits and Pieces' and 'Glad All Over', how the massed young sat on the railings at the back of the East Bank and dug their heels into the corrugated iron stand behind them in time to the eponymous drummer's chorus! (You can still see the dents there to this day!)

Elsewhere, apart from that, the only other peculiarity I recall from those days was how the Metropolitan Police Band would be employed at Arsenal home matches, to play a selection of music before kick-off time. I gather that this practice was only abandoned fairly recently, but I suppose you would have to ask any Arsenal supporter or the novelist Nick Hornby of 'Fever Pitch' fame to answer that one.

For sheer invention, it is supposed that Liverpool's Spion Kop choir was in the van for terrace singing and chanting in the 1960's. The F.A. Cup Final did (and still does) include a tradition of 'community singing' accompanied by a military brass band before the players enter the pitch. This culminated with a white-suited gentleman (Frank Ray??) leading 'Abide With Me'. Very often, the chanting from the crowd drowned all this, even when the Tannoy was turned up to full volume! In 1964, with Beatlemania at its height, Liverpool played Leeds in the Cup Final, and the full might of the Kop choir was broadcast to the nation. 'Ee-aye-addio, we've won the cup' became the chant of the day, and the adoption of the song 'You'll

'Never Walk Alone' - a hit for Gerry and the Pacemakers from around that time - seemed to herald a consciousness that other teams had their own anthems e.g. West Ham United's 'I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles' which had a greater vintage than Liverpoolian topicality.

Whilst on the subject of football team anthems, a quick straw poll around my work colleagues (plus my own folk memory) revealed Southampton's 'When the Saints Go Marching In', Portsmouth's 'Pompey Chimes' (i.e. 'Play up, Pompey; Pompey, play up', as in chimes from a bell-tower), and Bristol Rovers - whose fans sing Leadbelly's 'Goodnight, Irene' (Now where did that come from?) With the monotonous regularity that Manchester United now appear in Cup Finals, 'Glory, Glory, Man United' seems to be de rigeur, sang to the tune 'John Brown's Body', but hardly original.

I attended the first Bert Lloyd memorial conference at Cecil Sharp House in February 1984, at a time when football had become discredited owing to the hooliganism taking place. One speaker (David Bathe?) spoke on the use of song at matches, not that anything further came from that. In those days (and still today), rivalry between fans was rife, and the songs caustic in nature. To the tune of Jim Reeves' 'Distant Drums' was sung 'I hear the sound of distant bums, over there, over there. And do they smell like f\*\*king hell. Over there, over there!' If the opposition deigned to score, and their fans cheer, the chant went up 'You're gonna get your f\*\*king heads kicked in.' Not nice, but popular culture doesn't have to be. The fire in a wooden grandstand at a Bradford City cup tie, the Heysel riot in Belgium, and the Hillsborough disaster in the F.A. Cup semi-final of 1987 spelt the death knell of terracing in premier football. Various judicial reports vowed to make the game 'safer' for its spectators and rid the game as an excuse for insurrection. One upshot of this is the removal of standing room at the terraces of all established Premiership football grounds. Standing up when seated is discouraged, if not impossible. Salaried stewards are employed to prevent on-pitch incursions, alas some acting as jobsworths and antagonistic towards visiting supporters. There are still many supporters who find it difficult to get emotional when seated in any game, however passionate. Standing up to salute a goal, could lead to one's expulsion from the ground. All-seater stadia led to the destruction of such notable bastions as Liverpool's Kop, Chelsea's Shed, United's Stretford End, and Arsenal's North Bank. As a result, any cheer-leading had to be differently sourced.

But this never finally quelled the singing or chanting. Although much of it is quite obscene, and questions the legitimacy of match officials in many cases (!), this is often outweighed by the clever use of parody of popular song as a key tool. Examples that spring to mind include the dimming of the career of Nottingham Forest's striker Jason Lee who sported a rastafarian hair style atop his head. This led to the singing by Millwall supporter's at their next away match of 'He's got a pineapple on his head' to the tune 'He's Got the Whole World in his Hands'. At Aldershot home matches in recent seasons, any opposing players wearing his hair tied back in a pony tail, is greeted with the song 'Where's your caravan?' to the song 'Chirpy, Chirpy, Cheep, Cheep' (a hit for Middle of the Road back in the 1970s) as though the unfortunate is a bona fide new-age traveller.

The European Nations Finals in this country in 1996 (Euro96) revitalised musical tradition. Next to the Eurovision Song Contest, songs penned to be sung by squads of football teams come close to universal derision! 'Back Home' sung by the England World Cup squad in 1970 is palpably memorable, with Chelsea's 'Blue is the Colour' a close second. Lonnie

Donegan singing 'World Cup Willie' back in 1966 doesn't quite fall into that category since it didn't involve the England squad of the day. A better comparison here lies with the comedians David Baddiel and Frank Skinner along with Lightning Seeds front man Ian Broudie who wrote and recorded 'Three Lions' in 1996, which rose in popularity in direct proportion to the home team's success as they progressed through to the semi-final, with the song finally being sung by the massed crowds at Wembley Stadium.

However, one trend that had started to take off during this tournament (which returns us to the opening remarks) was the use of a brass ensemble by supporters of the Dutch team. Verdi's 'Aida' seemed to be their theme tune, and once started, the supporters would yodel along to it. Why 'Aida'? What connection was there with Holland? The documentary 'Playing for England' detailed how the Sheffield-based musicians were to have done the same thing for England in France two years later. This seemed to have been a manumissionary attempt by 'the Sun' newspaper rather than anything spontaneous, and history will record how the theme from the film 'the Great Escape' became their signature tune. History will also recall that despite the successful re-release of Baddiel and Skinner's 'Three Lions' which topped the charts once again, a second 'hit' was attained by one Fat Les whose 'Vindaloo' song also achieved similar pre-eminence. 'Vindaloo' appeared to be the resultant of a rap anthem along with another brass band rendition of an unknown tune which resembles 'Clementine', but whose origins seem lost. Incidentally, 'Vindaloo' is in march time and is ideal accompaniment for 'the Gay Gordons' or 'Caerphilly March' for any dance band musicians out there!

The 'Barmy Army' chant I shall attribute to fans who attend the English cricket teams tours abroad - they seem more vocal there than at home, in any case. One irony here, is that they recorded their 'barmy army' chant/song to coincide with the 1999 Cricket World Cup held in this country. Unfortunately for them, such is the malaise in the nation's summer game, the release coincided with the team's failure to qualify for the second round of the competition, and the whole thing dive-bombed. Anyway, the chant 'barmy army' has been adopted in turn by many sets of football supporters. At Aldershot, the chant is 'Georgie Borg's barmy army' after the team manager - almost a double entendre since Aldershot is famed as the home of the British Army. At one match I saw, one supporter procured a drum and accompanied the chant for twenty minutes without stopping in a rather humdrum game versus Staines Town. In the match last season versus Slough Town, the away fans even brought along a drum and a trumpet to accompany themselves, leading the fans as they clapped in reprise. Conversely, at one time during the last five years, one national newspaper reported how a request went out in the match day programme for Arsenal supporters to come forward and act as official cheer-leaders - as though football needed such a thing!

Which brings me to my last point - cheer-leaders. It is a well-known fact that American sport would be emasculated were it not for its razzmatazz, complete with pom-pom girls in micro dresses waving huge candyfloss-like balls of whatever to the strains of a marching band. It has been my fortune to find the dance team I play music for - vis a vis, the Fabulous Fezheads - to be 'twinned' with Saracens rugby football club. Rugby Union is trying to promote itself as a professional game with a family-based image in a way that Association Football would like to be. The Fezheads themselves seem to be another link in the Sarries' marketing ploy (well, the beer money's okay, even if it means a 170 mile trip around the M25 from Kent to Watford). Other entertainment includes the Saracens Starlites who, you've

guessed it, comprise teenaged girls in micro skirts waving huge candyflossed balls of whatever in the centre of the pitch in time to music played over the tannoy. But there's worse to come! There is a booth which controls the tannoy which plays all manner of tape-recorded jingles. During the actual match, the Starlites sit down facing the crowd in the Stanley Rous Stand where the bulk of the Saracens supporters sit. If the ball is booted downfield, the tannoy plays out a 'cavalry charge' at a million decibels. When someone goes down injured, the theme from 'the Addams Family' goes up with the Starlites waving their pom-poms in time to the last two beats of each line of music. Unlike the 'round ball' game, no supporter stands up and shouts 'Get up, you fairy' or raises his ire for any other reason. Strange. So genteel. When the home team score, Queen's 'We Will Rock You' goes up, and there's a dance that goes with it which, I assume, Roy Dommett would be only too glad to notate. (There is a deliberate bias involved. No muzakal accompaniment is played when the visiting team score!) Having mused about this project last Spring, with the start of a new season six months later, I have started to take my cassette recorder to matches to adjudge crowd/tannoy reaction. First indications are that some modifications in the music have evolved, and very loud indescript organ music has replaced identifiable snatches of song. (I wonder if they fell foul of the Performing Rights Society so far as royalties were concerned?)

Okay, professional Rugby is on the make, and the Saracens have been very successful at marketing its own image. It could never happen in Soccer! So there I was in my kitchen at home, listening to Radio 5 Live on a Monday night, racking my beer and half-listening to the Wimbledon v. Aston Villa match played at Selhurst Park. When the home team won a corner, you could plainly hear a bugle horn tattoo over the tannoy! Aaaargghhh!

Musical tradition is evolving in professional sport at an astonishing rate. It is my belief that few people directly involved with the Folk Arts have believed it worthy of study. Perhaps it is too pithy by half, thoroughly unpleasant, and best left ignored. Popular culture can be like that, but its progress ought to be charted.