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Dancing on the Pier



Dancing on the Pier in the 1950s, (HPC 120.002)



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Dancing on The Pier

The 1930s were the heyday of the pier. In the first week of August 1931, a staggering 56,000 people passed through the turnstiles (the population of Hastings was then 66,000). There was dancing every night, daytime concerts, stunt diving, speedboat trips and even a searchlight fitted to the end of the pier for youngsters engaged in night-time swimming. Post WWI through the 1940s, the foxtrot was certainly the most popular fast dance and the vast majority of songs produced during these years were for foxtrots. The waltz and tango and even the lindy hop, while popular, never overtook the foxtrot's appeal.

The 1930s

In the 1930s, the influence of American Jazz led to the creation of British dance bands, who provided a social and popular music that began to dominate social occasions and the radio airwaves. [...] From about 1925 to 1946 the most popular form of music in the UK was that produced by dance bands. The British bands never quite adopted the kind of "Swing" music that was generally associated American "Big Band" jazz. It was quite tame compared to American jazz and was generally more sweet. Billy Cotton had perhaps the longest fame, as he still had a prime-time TV programme until the late '60s. The fame of Ted lasted until 1964. Fans tended to divide them into "Sweet" (Ambrose, Geraldo and Victor Silvester) and "Hot" (Harry Roy and Nat Gonella). Jack Hylton's band was "hot" until 1933, then became sweeter as their success grew. Some of the lead singers enjoyed fame on their own. Most famous were Al Bowlly and Al Bowlly and Leslie "Hutch" Hutchinson.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Early_British_popular_music

British Dance Bands

This is a genre of popular jazz and dance music that developed in British dance halls and hotel ballrooms during the 1920s and 1930s, often called a Golden Age of British music prior to World War II. [...] Thousands of miles away from the true origins of jazz in the United States, British dance bands of this era typically played melodic, good-time music that had jazz and big band influences but also maintained a peculiarly British sense of rhythm and style which came from the music hall tradition. Often comedians of the day or music hall personalities would sing novelty recordings backed by well-known British dance band leaders. Some of the British dance band leaders and musicians went on to fame in the United States in the swing era.

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Night time concert in the bandstand (HPC068.012)

It's true that the British dance bands of the 1920s and 30s don't conform much to post-rock 'n' roll notions of what constitutes a pop act. They looked more like orchestras: a bandleader up front, often with a conductor's baton; musicians divided into sections of rhythm, brass, wind instruments, sometimes strings; singers who were essentially anonymous, their names only rarely credited on recordings. Yet they formed the soundtrack to British life, and helped to shape the pop industry that we know today.

Their existence coincided with the birth of both radio and record companies, which freed musicians from an existence confined to theatres and music halls – and allowed pop fans to experience their favourite songs at home without having to play them themselves on a piano in the front room. The dance bands quickly realised the commercial potential of these new media, and exploited it fully. One of the more lamentable results of this savviness was a preponderance of novelty songs in the dance bands' discographies, from The Teddy Bears' Picnic to Makin' Wickey Wackey Down in Waikiki.

<http://www.theguardian.com/music/2010/jan/14/pre-rock-popular-music>
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_dance_band

Five 1930s Classics Songs

Lew Stone and the Monseigneur Band: My Woman

Lew Stone was renowned as one of the best arrangers in the business, and this rewrite of an anodyne tune originally sung by Bing Crosby shows why. Behind a vigorous Al Bowlly vocal, every note bristles with unrequited passion and petulant fury.

Ray Noble Orchestra: The Very Thought of You

Another Al Bowlly vocal, this time in creamily sentimental mode. The whispering piano, shuffling percussion and mellifluous violins are practically anaesthetising: to listen is to swoon.

<https://youtu.be/OVoN-xmVtNA>

Bert Ambrose and His Orchestra: Too Many Tears

One of 124 songs released by Ambrose and his orchestra in 1932 – and no wonder they were so popular. The lyrics, smoothly sung by Sam Browne, may be mournful, but the playing isn't: it's crisp, acerbic and blazing with attitude. <https://youtu.be/hekpi1UbFBI>

Lew Stone and His Band: Tiger Rag

Stone again, this time in "hot" mode – that is, conducting spirited jazz-inspired music that called on the -fine soloists in his band, including trumpeter Nat Gonella and trombonist Lew Davis, to razzle-dazzle with their individual improvisations.

<https://youtu.be/h9em5H1PfQY>

Jack Hylton Orchestra: Hylton Somp

Jack Hylton was a populist with a penchant for daft novelty songs. This 1932 instrumental, however, is something else: a heady concatenation of jazz solos inspired by Hylton's great hero, Duke Ellington, that shows how thrillingly British musicians could swing.

<https://youtu.be/j3V3LmsikHI>

<http://www.theguardian.com/music/2010/jan/14/pre-rock-popular-music>

1930s – Popular Dance Styles

The foxtrot, the waltz, the tango, the modern ballroom dance



Dancing in the ballroom on Hastings Pier (HPC067.056)

Developed in the 1910s, the foxtrot reached its height of popularity in the 1930s. [...] At its inception, the foxtrot was originally danced to ragtime. From the late teens through the 1940s, the foxtrot was certainly the most popular fast dance and the vast majority of records issued during these years were foxtrots. The waltz and tango, while popular, never overtook the foxtrot. Even the popularity of the lindy hop in the 1940s did not affect the foxtrot's popularity, since it could be danced to the same records used to accompany the lindy hop.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foxtrot>

Modern ballroom dance has its roots early in the 20th century, when several different things happened more or less at the same time. The first was a movement away from the sequence dances towards dances where the couples moved independently. This had been pre-figured by the waltz, which had already made this transition. The second was a wave of popular music, such as jazz, much of which was based on the ideas of black musicians in the USA.

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Since dance is to a large extent tied to music, this led to a burst of newly invented dances. There were many dance crazes in the period 1910–1930. The third event was a concerted effort to transform some of the dance crazes into dances which could be taught to a wider dance public in the US and Europe. Here Vernon and Irene Castle were important, and so was a generation of English dancers in the 1920s, including Josephine Bradley and Victor Silvester. These professionals analysed, codified, published and taught a number of standard dances.

It was essential, if popular dance was to flourish, for dancers to have some basic movements they could confidently perform with any partner they might meet. Here the huge Arthur Murray organisation in America, and the dance societies in England, such as the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing, were highly influential. Finally, much of this happened during and after a period of World War [World War One], and the effect of such a conflict in dissolving older social customs was considerable.

Later, in the 1930s, the on-screen dance pairing of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers influenced all forms of dance in the USA and elsewhere. Although both actors had separate careers, their filmed dance sequences together, which included portrayals of the Castles, have reached iconic status. Much of Astaire and Rogers' work portrayed social dancing, although the performances were highly choreographed (often by Astaire or Hermes Pan), and meticulously staged and rehearsed.

Franks A.H. 1963. *Social dance: a short history*. Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.
Richardson P.J S. 1948. *The history of English ballroom dancing (1900–1945)*. London: Jenkins

["History of Musical Film, by John Kenrick". Musicals101.com. 1996](#)

["Review of "Swing Time" \(1936\)". rogerebert.com.](#)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ballroom_dance

1940s – Popular Dance Styles

The jive, the lindy hop/jitterbug, these three dance styles seem to be inextricably combined. But here is an attempt at the differences: In ballroom dancing, the jive is a dance style that originated in the United States from African-Americans in the early 1930s. It was originally presented to the public in 1934 by Cab Calloway in the United States it was called *swing*. In the UK variations in technique led to styles such as boogie-woogie and swing boogie, with "jive" gradually emerging as the generic term.

Paul Bottomer. 1997. Black Dog & Leventhal. page 157. [ISBN 1-57912-049-0](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jive_(dance))
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jive_\(dance\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jive_(dance))



Dancing on the Pier (HPC067.015)

Lindy Hop is the 'original swing/jive dance'. Lindy Hop had its heyday during the 1930s and 40s when it was danced by black dancers, particularly in the Savoy Ballroom in Harlem, USA. As its popularity grew then the white dancers started to dance it as well. However, because of the racial divide in America at that time, they called the same dance Jitterbug. American culture was having an impact in Europe and as the Music of the era crossed the Atlantic so did the dance.

During the 2nd World War years, American GI's came to Europe and brought this 'wild' form of partner dancing with them. There was little or no formal teaching of this street dance and this repeating of the teaching from person to person altered the dance minutely with each repetition.

http://www.jazzjiveswing.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=88:-what-is-the-difference-between-lindy-hopjitterbugjive&catid=44:general

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Lindy Hop, also known as Jitterbug, is the authentic Afro-Euro-American Swing dance. It is an unabashedly joyful dance, with a solid, flowing style that closely reflects its music -- from the late 20's hot Jazz to the early 40's Big Bands. Just as Jazz combines European and African musical origins; Lindy Hop draws on African and European dance traditions. The embracing hold, and the turns from Europe, the breakaway and solid, earthy body posture from Africa. The dance evolved along with the new swing music, based on earlier dances such as the Charleston and the Black Bottom, by black people in Harlem. Lindy Hop is a Jazz dance. Jazz is dancing music. Swing is Jazz music.
<http://dancing.org/lindy-what-is.html>

1950s – General Overview

Week after week following its launch in 1952, the NME singles chart was packed with American names. The exceptions – Vera Lynn, Dickie Valentine, Lita Roza – had, like their American counterparts, chiefly started their career with a dance band. No wonder Bill Haley and the Comets' Rock Around the Clock had such a seismic impact on British teenagers when it arrived here in 1954: it was the first new sound they had ever heard.

<http://www.theguardian.com/music/2010/jan/14/pre-rock-popular-music>

The music of the 1950's in the United Kingdom was a diverse form. The music of this generation was a compilation of Britain's most popular forms. These include dance bands from earlier generations, brass and silver band music, music halls and folk music. Music from Britain was to become a modern platform for the world. Some of the influences that happened in this era were jazz, traditional pop and swing. Many of these came through in an American form at first because of records and films. While traditional dance bands ruled in the 1930s and 1940s, jazz had started to integrate itself into British culture. The American musicians had ragtime and other jazz forms and they introduced it to Britain through performers travelling to their country and also in the form of recordings. In the late 1950s "modern jazz" was becoming notably more pronounced and it was a combination of jazz and the new "bebop" music of America.

Some of the first performers were Ronnie Scott, George Webb, John Dankworth, Ken Colyer and Humphrey Lyttelton. [...] Scott's Soho Club was one of the biggest success stories of the times. Traditional pop was still being dominated by America in record sales and performers in the early 1950s.

War time music stars were able to capitalise on the songs and many reached chart-status. It also brought about new British performers such as Jimmy Young with two number one chart topping hits in 1955. The music was often re-recorded hits from American songs, but it started a new generation of musicians that would lead Britain into Rock and roll.

Skiffle combined several music forms to produce this new sound. Country, folk music and jazz were implemented in its creation. The instruments used were improvisational or homemade. Lonnie Donegan hit the charts in a big way with his rendition of "Rock Island Line" by Leadbelly. The song and artist commanded eight months as part of the Top 20, reaching number 6. This was also the first gold record debut in Britain.

The revival of folk music was inspired by politics and with the network of folk clubs that sprang up in the 1950s it enjoyed success again. [...] Hamish Henderson, Jimmy MacBeath and Fiona Macneill were only a few of the names that played in the clubs and at festivals.

The big music stars of the 1950s in America included the one and only Elvis Presley. It was music and performers of this ilk in the mid-1950s that led to the propulsion of Britain into this music genre. One of the draws of this type of music was its cross-culture appeal. Yet, it took longer for Elvis to make an impact on Britain in the 50s because the music industry had to cross the pond without MTV. It relied more on lesser known shows and radio.

At this time, the number one selling records in Britain were American artists. Elvis Presley had two number one selling recordings with "All Shook Up" and "Jailhouse Rock". Paul Anka became a chart topper with "Diana" and Bill Haley and His Comets hit it big with "Rock Around the Clock".

The 1950s were the start of change for music industry professionals. Big Bands and swing may have remained, but by the middle of the next decade they were losing their hold. Elvis and rock 'n roll opened the doors to huge hits like the Beatles. The change from Big Band and Swing to solo artists having the power to top charts is something the decade has to be recognised for.

<http://age-net.co.uk/entertainment/british-music-scene-1950s>



Hastings Pier at night with the dancehall in the background (HPC006.117)

Dancehalls

Throughout the 1950s an entertainment that had sprung to life between the wars went on expanding. Dance halls were the Tinder of their day. In 1953, the Economist described them as Britain's second-biggest entertainment industry after cinema, with an estimated attendance of about four million a week and 200 million over the year. The figures for the consequence of all this dancing are, like those for online dating, less reliable: The Daily Mail suggested in 1950 that 70% of couples in Britain had first met on a dance floor, and in Glasgow as high a proportion of marriages were often said to have originated in the same way. "The masses are content to shuffle. All they want is to get around [the floor] tolerably comfortably."

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What mattered about dancing to the young was that in a more segregated age – inside and outside the workplace – it allowed us to meet and touch members of the opposite sex. Few dance halls survived by the end of the 1960s. Nott's explanation for its downfall is that a new era of prosperity and job security had turned the working class "away from such communal pleasures and towards home buying, homemaking, family life and 'individualism'. That may well be part of it, but I think a bigger reason was the slow but steady erosion of male/female separation. Tom Harrisson, one the founders of the Mass Observation, is quoted memorably in the book when he writes of young men coming to pre-war dance halls "perhaps wanting love, but very vaguely". A different male generation began to realise that you met women as you met men – randomly, by odd routes, at work, in pubs (where they were much more present), as the friends of friends, in circumstances where you were relieved of the ulterior motive and the silly hope that something might come of it when the last number ended and you asked the second most important question of the night: can I see you home?

[Going to the Palais: A Social and Cultural History of Dancing and Dance Halls in Britain, 1918-1960](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jan/23/dance-halls-were-the-tinder-of-their-day), by James Nott is published by Oxford University Press.
<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jan/23/dance-halls-were-the-tinder-of-their-day>

Rock and roll, the twist

When rock and roll first emerged in the early 1950s, record companies were uncertain as to what style of dance would be most applicable to the music. Notably, Decca Records initially labeled its rock and roll releases as "foxtrots", most notably "Rock Around the Clock" by Bill Haley and his Comets. Since that recording, by some estimates, went on to sell more than 25 million copies, "Rock Around the Clock" could be considered the biggest-selling "foxtrot" of all time. Today, the dance is customarily accompanied by the same big band music to which swing is also danced.

The twist is a dance that was inspired by rock and roll music. From 1959 to the early sixties it became the first worldwide dance craze, enjoying immense popularity among all people and drawing fire from critics who felt it was too provocative. It inspired dances such as the Jerk, the Pony, the Watusi, the Mashed Potato, the Monkey, and the Funky Chicken, but none were as popular.

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Having seen teenagers in Tampa, Florida doing the dance, Hank Ballard wrote "The Twist" and released it as the B-side of Hank Ballard and The Midnighters' 1959 single "Teardrops on Your Letter". Dick Clark, having noticed the dance becoming popular among teenagers, recommended to Cameo Records that the more wholesome Chubby Checker rerecord the song, which was released in 1959 and became a number one hit in 1960. The dance became passe among teenagers as it became acceptable among adults and the song was released, becoming a number one hit again in 1962.

"For many years, the Guinness Book of World Records listed Haley's version as the top-selling pop record of all time with 25 million copies sold -- a record that stood until 1997 and which technically remains intact as Elton John's "Candle in the Wind" tribute to Princess Diana was issued a CD-single, not a vinyl 45." ['Rock Around the Clock' Tribute](#)". Retrieved July 11, 2012. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foxtrot>
Bronson, Fred (2003). *The Billboard Book of Number One Hits*, p.74. Billboard. [ISBN 9780823076772](#).
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twist_\(dance\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twist_(dance))

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