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'The dancing front': dance music, dancing, and the BBC in World War II[1]

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Abstract

This paper offers a case history of the BBC's ambivalent engagement with dance music during the Second World War. It examines what 'dance music' meant to the BBC, musicians, and the public, and how they contested and performed those meanings in the context of new social dance practices and the growing popularity of what became known as 'swing' in Britain. Although broadcasting in effect disembodied music closely associated with the physical, the BBC was a primary way for people to access dance music which supported their bodily acts of leisure and regimentation. The BBC's study and regulation of dance music centred around two goals: pleasing important groups in national service and broadcasting morale-boosting music. The problem of whether these goals were congruent lay at the heart of the issue, for the youth active in national service emerged as the primary audience for the two genres – 'swing' and 'sentimentality' – about which the BBC felt most dubious.

In 1944, the popular bandleader Harry Roy returned from a four-month tour of the Middle East convinced of the popularity of dance music with British Forces: 'I entertained thousands and thousands of troops, all of whom are clamouring for dance music and more dance music. Yet the BBC attempts to produce statistics to prove that the popularity of dance bands is waning. They just don't know what they're talking about'. When the British Broadcasting Corporation barred him from delivering his customary good-bye message, Roy refused future broadcasts, claiming, 'The BBC is killing dance music'.[2] The BBC, despite its extensive audience research, seemed out of touch with listeners' views on the value and popularity of dance music, particularly in the Forces. Roy's action prompted a question in Parliament as to whether he could be compelled to broadcast, while a Lieutenant T. Ruck-Keene protested the reductions, claiming that most of the men in his command resorted to enemy stations to hear dance music.[3] Although the BBC had embraced dance music to an unprecedented degree in the first months of the Second World War, it had reversed its position by 1943, prompting widespread protest. Why did the BBC reverse its wartime dance music policy so abruptly – from embracing to 'killing' dance music – and how could it have so misjudged its popularity?

In the first months of the Second World War, the BBC mobilised dance music to boost morale, believing it could relax, cheer and energise listeners. Unlike classical music, which the BBC considered valuable for inherently musical reasons, dance

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music's value to morale depended upon its popularity, especially with special groups in the war effort, such as men in the Forces and young women conscripted for factory work. Therefore, the findings of the BBC's Listener Research Department, formed in 1936 by Robert Silvey, played an important role in shaping (or at least justifying) the schedule and quantity of dance music broadcasts throughout the war. Determining how many people listened to a broadcast was only the beginning: Silvey and his staff classified audiences by class, gender, age and enthusiasm for particular programming. Listener Research worked to understand *how* listeners experienced broadcast dance music – whether they listened attentively, danced, or used the programming to accompany labour or leisure. Meanwhile, BBC programmers carefully regulated dance music, which had long carried troubling ties with commercialism, Americanism, and the bodily. In 1942, the BBC banned 'slushy' lyrics, male crooners, and overly sentimental, insincere female singers to combat what it identified as morale-sapping sentimentality.

The BBC and the discourse it dominated referred to a wide range of genres – from American-style swing to strict-tempo ballroom – as dance music. While some BBC staff classified dance music as simply music for dancing, others recognised that it could satisfy attentive listeners, accompany factory labour, and provide a relaxing background. In 1943, the BBC's habit, in research, programming and policy, of grouping a broad array of musical genres and practices under a single category hampered its ability to understand the significance of the swing phenomenon and helped lead to its controversial assertion that dance music was no longer popular. It was not until the end of the war that Listener Research began to articulate a more complex understanding of dance music as comprising several distinct subgenres, each appealing to different age groups, with the youthful swing audience as a crucial minority.

Dance music was deeply meaningful to a large number of people at a time of often shocking change. The period saw not only the massive relocation of British civilians and members of the Forces, but unprecedented contact with everyday American soldiers. Musical practices marked as particularly American (and often African–American), especially swing music, jitterbugging and crooning, elicited passionate enthusiasm and powerful antipathy. Richard Middleton has observed that popular music is often 'seen as physically oriented (mentally impoverished): vulgar, spontaneous, participative, involuntary, visceral' (Middleton 1990, p. 158). Dance music, with its bodily qualities, was perceived in World War II Britain both as a force for building morale and unity as well as an emasculating, primitive influence on civilised people. It was tied to performing and listening bodies through dancing, the choreography of the assembly line, and the intimate, bodily quality of closely mic'ed dance band singers (Barthes's 'grain of the voice').

This paper offers a case history of the BBC's ambivalent engagement with dance music during the Second World War, drawing upon the contemporary press and materials in the BBC and Mass-Observation archives. It examines what 'dance music' meant to the wartime BBC, musicians, and the public, and how they contested and performed those meanings as swing emerged as a distinct popular music genre in Britain; it devotes particular attention to how new social dance practices helped alter understandings of dance music within and beyond the dance halls. Although broadcasting rendered performing bodies invisible, in effect disembodying music that was closely associated with the physical, the BBC was a primary way for people to access dance music, which supported their bodily acts of leisure and regimentation. The

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BBC's study and regulation of dance music, its audience, and its evocations of the bodily, centred around two goals: satisfying the tastes of important groups in national service and broadcasting music that would improve morale. The problem of whether these goals were congruent lay at the heart of the issue, for the young men and women who were active in national service emerged as the primary audience for swing and sentimentality, the genres about which the BBC was most ambivalent.

'Call it what you will': defining dance music

The BBC was ill equipped to distinguish between dance music, swing and jazz during the war, for its bureaucratic structure defined dance music as literally 'not music'. From 1930, the BBC Variety Department administered dance bands while the Music Department administered classical ensembles, brass and military bands, and light music combinations. The BBC's approach reflected the broader discourse in Britain since Paul Whiteman's 1923 and 1926 visits, in which jazz and dance music were synonymous (Godbolt 1984, pp. 54–9). Peter Noble displayed a typical confusion in *Kings of Rhythm*, one of the few books on dance music published in Britain during the war: 'Jazz, by which I mean dance-music, (not advanced jazz, which I shall refer to as swing). Jazz, popular music, dance-music – call it what you will – is undoubtedly an important influence on all our lives at the present time'.[4]

Only specialised critics and fans were able – or considered it important – to distinguish between dance music and jazz. Enthusiasts developed a discourse of jazz connoisseurship in rhythm clubs, which dated in Britain from 1933. *Melody Maker* provided a forum for the rhythm club movement, but it also reported on the British dance music profession and offered tips for semi-pros and amateurs.[5] The weekly's gramophone records reviews distinguished jazz from dance music along lines of musical style, marketing, and national origin. Edgar Jackson, a well-known and controversial critic, dealt with the more specialised discs, designated variously as hot, jazz or swing (the title of his column changed throughout the war).[6] He reviewed only American bands until late in the war when a handful of small British combinations embraced swing and Dixieland. Meanwhile, the pseudonymous 'Corny' reviewed 'commercial' dance music recordings, which featured mostly British bands and pop-oriented Americans.

While dance music was readily available 'over here', true jazz for British fans was an American import, embodied in the gramophone record. Real American bodies were largely absent in British jazz circles, especially from 1935, when the Ministry of Labour barred American bands from visiting the United Kingdom at the urging of a protectionist Musicians' Union. Jazz was distant in space, across the Atlantic, and in time, for those who remembered the visits of Louis Armstrong, Coleman Hawkins, and Duke Ellington in the early 1930s. During the war, some enthusiasts began to distinguish between jazz and swing. Charles Chilton, who hosted the BBC's *Radio Rhythm Club*, explained, 'the lovers of Negroid style are . . . using the old term jazz in its original meaning. . . . Swing is a term applied to the popular music which is a cheap imitation of that produced by Negro combinations'.[7] The British 'jazz versus swing' debate paralleled the American 'moldy figs' and modernists' controversy described by Bernard Gendron in his influential article (Gendron 1995). Swing was criticised as commercial, mechanistically slick, and inauthentically white, although it could more positively be construed as progressive, modern, and technically advanced. Golden age jazz (or, Dixieland) was criticised as corny, crude, and out-of-date, although

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advocates argued for its authentic Negro character, emotional affect, and status as 'real' improvised jazz.

While enthusiasts debated the merits of swing versus jazz, Mass-Observation, a left-leaning social survey organisation, located swing as a subgenre of dance music, although it rather confusedly persisted in equating dance music and jazz.[8] One survey, led by Alec Hughes just before the war, set out to prove that jazz, as an industrial folk music, was 'a tonic for the masses' in the stresses of war. Most respondents in a south London sample, though they claimed to enjoy dance music, associated 'jazz' with unruly noise and otherness. Hughes nevertheless concluded, 'we see jazz influencing a very wide section of the community'. Although his case for the broad influence of 'jazz' seemed forced, Hughes recognised that dance music and its audience were not unitary. He anticipated the BBC by dividing dance music into three categories, according to rudimentary musical criteria: 'ballroom (commercial)', swing, and 'old-time' (which featured turn of the century dances). 'Ballroom (commercial)' was favoured across gender and class lines, while a minority, who tended to be male and middle class, favoured swing, which generally appealed to only the 'true jazz fan' (Hughes 1939).

Dance music, swing and jazz were fraught categories in the abstract, but contemporary writers could readily articulate their social uses. Noble located jazz as a phenomenon of modernity, identified its youthful audience, and described the contemporary situations in which dance music was heard:

> Like the motor-car, the aeroplane, the transatlantic liner, television and talkies, [jazz] is part of our civilisation; it is something that most of us have grown up with. We switch on our radio to listen to dance-music for relaxation, we visit a dance-hall to dance to top-line bands for our pleasure, we eat in a West End restaurant in order to have the additional pleasure of seeing as well as hearing our favourite dance band. (Noble 1944, p. 8)

Noble was interested especially in dance music on the BBC, which employed five 'first-class dance orchestras' to provide extensive live programming.

The BBC's dance music programming was typified by Geraldo and Jack Payne, the bandleaders who enjoyed steady, long-term contracts at the BBC for most of the war.[9] They based their broadcasts on the concept of variety, 'something for everyone'. The formula reflected the diverse repertory required by dancers, supplemented with less danceable, entertainment numbers. A typical broadcast might include one or two 'hot' numbers played in a style that would earn accolades in *Melody Maker*, and a handful of commercial swing numbers, with the remainder of the programme comprising straightforward dance arrangements and even light classical adaptations. In addition to instrumental numbers, they featured several vocalists, both of the 'straight' and the crooner varieties, as well as close-harmony ensembles. Like the Mass-Observation sample, the BBC's dance music audience was largely conservative: it preferred dance music with clear melody and steady rhythm while shying from riff-based numbers, arrangements that obscured the original melody, and adventurous solos.

Perhaps the greatest indication of the straightforward preferences of most BBC listeners was the relative popularity of two programmes: *Radio Rhythm Club* (*RRC*) and *BBC Dancing Club*. *RRC* evoked a rhythm club meeting with its instructive records recitals and swing jam sessions. First broadcast in June 1940, it served as an on-air home for jazz and swing fans, who tended to be young and disproportionately affected by wartime displacements. Its listener figures, at around 10 per cent, were respectable for a programme serving a minority audience. In contrast, the wildly

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popular *Dancing Club* regularly enjoyed figures of over 20 per cent, especially in its second series, which began in September 1942.[10] The programme starred Victor Silvester, a ballroom dance champion, leading teacher, and popular recording artist. Silvester and his Ballroom Orchestra specialised in strict-tempo dance music: straightforward, rhythmically unwavering, instrumental arrangements of popular tunes designed for dancing rather than listener variety. Every *Dancing Club* 'meeting' featured spoken dance instruction, accompanied by a diagram printed in the BBC's programme guide *Radio Times*, and thirty minutes of dance music played for real dancers in a BBC studio.

The two programmes represented opposing ways for listeners to engage with broadcast dance music. While *Dancing Club* promoted the physicality of dancing, *RRC* rewarded attentive listening. Stanley Nelson, who wrote on jazz trends for *Dancing Times* (a monthly magazine serving ballet, stage and ballroom dance professionals), asserted in 1942 that the popularity of *RRC* and over two hundred active Forces and civilian rhythm clubs

> might be interpreted as an attempt to usurp the dancing part of modern dance music. . . . There is something fantastic . . . that one can play dance music on records for more than two hours and have 200 people listen with dancing as the very last thing in their minds. (Nelson 1942)

Strict-tempo dance music had its detractors, too, especially in the *Melody Maker*, where one critic complained, 'This particular form of dance music is duller and musically stupider than any other' ('Mike' 1941). As the transatlantic jazz critic Leonard Feather observed, 'The whole problem of strict-tempo dance music resolves into that of whether you want your jazz for listening or dancing' (Feather 1939). But how could dancing affect ostensibly disembodied broadcast dance music?

'Enjoyment for energy': class, dance halls, and factory broadcasts

In December 1939, *Melody Maker* reported a 'war-time craze for dancing'.[11] Social dance was not merely a popular escape; it came to be valued as healthful, morale-boosting amusement and for its enactment of potent ideals of cooperation for a nation at war. World War II represented a culmination of jazz-derived social dance as mass leisure activity, with interest crossing boundaries of class and ability. The BBC responded by shifting its representations of dance music to align with more populist values and by broadening its conception of the roles that broadcast dance music could play for listeners and the environments in which they lived and worked.

From the 1920s, dance music as performed by the top bands was located in elite restaurants and hotels, the purview of the upper classes. Simon Frith has argued that the BBC's regular broadcasts from these locations brought quality dance music to a wider audience – and, the BBC hoped, would serve as a gateway to 'better' music (Frith 1988). Broadcast dance music contributed to respectable middle-class entertainment in the home, whether it relaxed a tired businessman or allowed a couple to dance. National broadcasts soon made dance music widely popular; by the mid-1930s, the anti-commercial Corporation found itself a central player in the British popular music industry (Scannell and Cardiff 1991, pp. 181, 184). Meanwhile, numerous dance halls opened, making dance music and social dance an accessible, glamorous part of working and middle-class life, especially for the young (Nott 2002, pp. 168–90).

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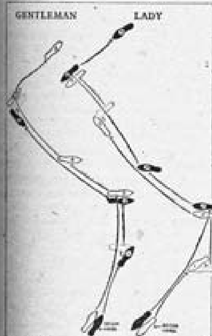
DANCING CLUB

Victor Silvester, well-known band-leader and dance expert, writes of his new series, 'BBC Dancing Club'. It starts in the Forces programme on Wednesday.

IN response to many requests from listeners the BBC Dancing Club has come into being. The idea at the back of it is two-fold—first, to provide half-an-hour's music that is ideal for dancing at a time of the evening when most listeners are able to take advantage of it, and second to give ten minutes of dancing instruction to the many people who wish to learn how to dance.



This diagram shows the quarter turns of the Quick-step. Keep it by you, because Silvester will refer to it in his broadcast on Wednesday evening.

'The Club will be on the air at 8 p.m. every Wednesday evening for the next four months, and perhaps longer, so you can be sure of getting music that you can dance to at the same time regularly each week. This will give listeners a chance to make their plans accordingly.

I shall devote the first few minutes of each broadcast to giving instruction in the most important figures used in ballroom dancing today. All these figures are standardised, which means that they never change. They have evolved and developed through practice and experience, and have been found to be the most natural and rhythmic forms of movement to music in tempo.

There are still numerous people who hesitate about learning how to dance. They seem to imagine they will have to learn masses of intricate steps which are popular one year and out of date the next. Nothing could be further from the truth. The main feature of modern ballroom dancing is that it is based on natural movement. The fundamental principle is 'the walk', and once you can walk well and rhythmically to music, with good balance and movement, you are more than half way to being a good dancer. Anyone can learn, and it is never too late to start.

Ballroom dancing is the most popular pastime in the world. It is enjoyed by every class of the community, in all weathers and climates, hot or cold, wet or fine. It helps people to take their minds off their troubles and worries, and gives them a chance of stepping forth into a gay, colourful atmosphere. That, as any mind doctor will tell you, is a mental tonic.

Fitness, Too

As an exercise, dancing is one of the best forms of recreation you could have, and it will give you physical grace and fitness besides the pleasure you derive from it. As a social exercise, too, I should be inclined to put it in a class by itself—the ballroom provides intense common interest set to music, friendship in rhythm.

In the running of the BBC Dancing Club I shall be ably assisted by producer David Miller. We shall do all that we can to cater for the non-dancing, as well as for the dancing, public. 'How can we interest the former?' you may ask. Well, after the brief dancing lesson, there will be thirty minutes of non-vocal rhythmic melody played by my Ballroom Orchestra, and this I hope will be 'easy on the ear', even to those who profess to dislike modern dance music!

So David Miller and I hope that you will join the BBC Dancing Club, and be with us on the air every Wednesday at 8 p.m.

The Army Listens

Each week soldiers all over the country hear 'Radio Reconnaissance'. The aims and objects of the series are outlined below.

'I ARRIVED at five minutes past four at a recreation hut from which the boom of a wireless set proceeded. Inside the hut I found a-lieutenant seated in front of about eighty men who were sitting on chairs and benches; a good wall map of Europe hung from an easel in front. It was a hot sunny afternoon, but, so far as I could see, no men were asleep.'

This is an extract from a recent report by a BBC man, who had visited an infantry training centre. The men there were listening to 'Radio Reconnaissance', the talks on current affairs broadcast to the Forces every Tuesday and Thursday. Listening to these is officially recognised in Army Orders as a desirable part of the training of any soldier.

'Radio Reconnaissance' began on February 4 this year, after consultation between the BBC and educational experts in the Navy, Army, and Air Force. Advice was given about the kind of programme the men would find useful.

Past Programmes

During the weeks of winter and early spring each 'Radio Reconnaissance' broadcast lasted for half-an-hour. It began with a short commentary on the news by Hilton Brown or Stephen King-Hall, followed by a longer programme on subjects closely related to the war and the fighting man. For instance, there was a series of talks on the battlefronts; there were six talks by Ritchie Calder on Science and the Fighting Man; there were six programmes about the places where Britain stands on guard, starting with Iceland and working eastward to Hong Kong.

When summer training began, the talks were reduced to fifteen minutes. But they still deal wi[th] places in the news and what it [is] like to fight there; with new figh[t]ing methods and machines; an[d] with the facts of geography, hi[s]tory, and science that shape event[s].

This summer the whole [of] Tuesday's fifteen minutes is give[n] up to a news commentary, [at] present given by Philip Jordan, [of] the *News Chronicle*. On Thur[s]days the period is made up of tw[o] or three shorter talks. We hav[e] had Brian Tunstall on Germa[n] naval strategy; Oliver Stewart o[n] airborne troops and radiolocation; Costin-Nian on military strateg[y] abroad; and Hilton Brown o[n] Stalin and Weygand.

Why And Wherefore

In both the summer and th[e] winter programmes our job is t[o] give not 'inside news' but clea[r] and authoritative explanation [of] the how and why of the new[s] as far as it can be told withou[t] helping the enemy.

Our second aim is to presen[t] this information in a way that ca[n] lead to useful discussion after eac[h] broadcast. Here is a report, afte[r] a lecture to the Army School o[f] Education at a training course fo[r] future Education N.C.O.s.

One of the N.C.O.s present des[c]ribed how all his unit had bee[n] paraded, about 600 of them, fo[r] both the Tuesday and the Thurs[]day broadcasts. An opportunit[y] was then provided for a voluntar[y] meeting to discuss the talks on eac[h] of the ensuing days; somethin[g] like 200 turned up. Another ma[n] said that some of the 'Radi[o] Reconnaissance' programmes ha[d] caused a surprising amount of dis[]cussion, and he instanced the on[e] dealing with the sinking of th[e] *Bismarck*. The discussion went o[n] till after lights-out.

Sound Liaison

That sort of thing is the sign o[f] a good broadcast, but it is also th[e] sign of some good work by th[e] Army Education Officer. In th[e] next report (about a programm[e] on Syria) you see him at work.

After the broadcast Lieut. X asked for questions. At first there was no response, so he started to expand one or two points about Syria and about Arab nationalism; then the men began to ask questions. All these questions were answered by Lieut. X with a clarity and fullness . . . which can only have been the result of very considerable study of the subject . . . This follow-up obviously interested and held the men.

This kind of thing means tha[t] the broadcaster and the Arm[y] Education Officer between the[m] produced a pretty useful bit o[f] training.

F. N. LLOYD WILLIAMS

An Army education class listens to 'Radio Reconnaissance'

Figure 1. An article by Victor Silvester on the first airing of BBC Dancing Club*, accompanied by a diagram of the quick step (Silvester 1941; courtesy of* Radio Times*).*

The BBC's so-called 'Outside Broadcasts' (OBs) of dance music continued to carry upper-class associations, however. Only about four thousand people could patronise the expensive restaurants where the best dance bands played, according to

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Count Ramon Vargas, a writer for the entertainment weekly *Band Wagon* who was apparently a member of this elite set (Vargas 1939). After the first panicked weeks of war, dance music fans welcomed the return of name band OBs as a restoration of normality, but the practice did not last. The military call-up reduced the ranks of civilian bands in the West End, phone lines connecting hotels to the BBC were at a premium, and with the threat of air raids, most broadcasts were made from studios in secure locations. Further, it became morale poison for the BBC to highlight class divisions, especially to British troops stationed abroad. One directive ordered, 'Avoid all references to ''high life'', i.e. West End cabarets and luxury in London etc. Keep all dancing references on level of troops' pay, i.e. Palais de Danse, Astoria Ballroom social standards'.[12] Unlike exclusive West End establishments, dance halls catered to a broader clientele and became the sites for wartime shifts in dance styles and culture.

Early in the war, Mass-Observation reported that dancing was the activity least affected by the blackout, other than pub-going.[13] Carl L. Heimann, the general manager of the Mecca dance hall chain, explained that dance palais offered bright lighting and 'fascinating illumination' to a nation under blackout (before the war many had used dimmed lighting), easy evacuation (compared to theatres and cinemas) in the case of air raids, and dance competitions enjoyed by the Forces (Heimann 1941). The atmosphere became more social, with 'a large increase in Excuse-me dances, and other forms which bring strangers together'.[14] Dance practices shifted from emphasising complex choreography. 'More and more people are dancing purely for relaxation, and to relax thoroughly you need the simple accustomed things', observed the *Dancing Times* columnist Irene Raines (1940). Seasoned dancers turned to less complicated dances while others, though 'handicapped by not knowing how to dance', decided to participate for the first time in 'one of the most popular forms of relaxation from stress of war'.[15]

How would the dance profession respond? British ballroom instructors taught the English style, which recognised four standard dances (the quickstep, waltz, fox-trot and tango) and certified students through a series of medal tests. While it was praised as artistic, stylish and graceful, the English style was considered less rhythmic, creative, and musically responsive than American dancing (Cropper 1940). Strict-tempo dance music served the requirements of the English style, where the music was expected to respond to the needs of dancers. Although many dance halls, such as the famous Hammersmith Palais de Danse, were strict-tempo bastions, others offered a broader array of dance music. The complexities of ballroom dance pedagogy created significant obstacles for students who wished to learn the basics quickly. From April to September 1940, Eve Tynegate-Smith offered an introductory dance tutorial in *Dancing Times.* Although intended for novices, especially those doing war work and lacking time for lessons, it is doubtful that Tynegate-Smith's method had much impact beyond the specialist publication – unless it played a role in inspiring *BBC Dancing Club.*

Dancing Club answered the wartime need for accessible dance instruction and highlighted the BBC's functional, respectable approach to dance music. It commenced in July 1941 with a series on the quickstep, the simplest and one of the most popular dances. Silvester emphasised the ease and naturalness of ballroom dancing: 'The fundamental principle is ''the walk'', and once you can walk well and rhythmically to music . . . you are more than half way to being a good dancer. Anyone can learn, and it is never too late to start' (Silvester 1941). Although a 1942 Listener Research study found that Silvester's instructions were 'of little use to beginners', the vast majority of

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listeners interested in dancing found the programme 'very helpful' or 'fairly helpful'.[16] The programme's fan mail indicated that many really did use it for dancing. F. Clifford, a sailor, wrote

> This series gives more pleasure to the members of this ship's company than any other programme, and it is eagerly awaited each week. The rhythmic melody of Victor Silvester's Ballroom Orchestra is a joy to listen to as well as to dance to. We also consider that the diagrams of the dance steps which you print each week are most helpful. (Clifford 1941)

Irene Raines credited Silvester's 130 wartime programmes with advancing the cause of dancing: 'Victor Silvester's lessons, simple as they seem, started many an argument in non-dancing homes that could only be settled by a visit to the local teacher. They are also ninety per cent responsible for the amazing keenness shown by HM Forces' (Raines 1945).

Beyond mere amusement, ballroom dancing for Silvester served as a mental tonic, offered physical fitness, and was 'a social exercise, too . . . [T]he ballroom provides intense common interest set to music, friendship in rhythm' (Silvester 1941). What could better serve the interests of the nation? Beginning with the post-Dunkirk production drives, dancing was celebrated as a tonic for both manual and 'brain' workers to help them sustain 'maximum effort' (Cross 1940). In a series of advertisements, the popular and affordable Mecca dance hall franchise promoted the values of dancing: 'Amusement. Fitness. Happiness. Poise & Good Figure' and 'Enjoyment for Energy: ''Mecca'' Nights mean Brighter Days'.[17] A night of dancing, Mecca promised and experts agreed, offered greater benefits that mere rest; in a nation of clothing, food, and time shortages, dancing energised with little investment.

Outside the palais, dance music itself could energise war workers on the job. It was the primary offering on *Music While You Work* (*MWYW*), a programme first broadcast on 23 June 1940, three weeks after Dunkirk, to demonstrate the BBC's regard for war workers, support the production drives, and 'relieve the tedium of work in . . . factories and shops'.[18] *MWYW*'s producers, especially Wynford Reynolds, cooperated with the BBC's Listener Research Department to determine the repertory and instrumentation that would best serve these goals. The half-hour programme was broadcast live twice daily and became an important employer for British bands, although the variety that characterised other dance band programmes was hardly a priority. Dance music that conveyed unruly emotions or libidinal release – slow or overly fast numbers, 'sob-stuff' vocals, complicated hot jazz, and rumbas – was banned. Bandleaders were instructed, 'These programmes are purely utilitarian; they do not need much contrast either in style or dynamics . . . just try to make the period one of unrelieved BRIGHTNESS and CHEERINESS'. The ideal programme featured arrangements with clear-cut melody, straightforward rhythm, and 'plenty of snap and punch'.[19] One early study reported that up to 75 per cent of workers preferred dance bands while programmers judged them to be most effective at fulfilling *MWYW*'s rhythmic and melodic requirements.[20] Silvester and his Ballroom Orchestra embodied the musical requirements of the programme: they appeared frequently on the programme and were popular with workers. Via the radio, strict-tempo ballroom music found its way beyond the dance hall to other choreographed bodily actions: the repetitive, manual labour of factory workers, who increasingly tended to be young women conscripts.

MWYW also embodied the BBC's new recognition that background listening to familiar music could be beneficial. After a 1941 Listener Research study of 52,000 workers, three-quarters of whom worked in women-only shops, found that 'workers

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Figure 2. A patriotic advertisement for Mecca Ballrooms-promoted dancing (with a soldier, of course) as energising for women war workers (September 1941; courtesy of Toronto Public Library and The Dancing Times*).*

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definitely prefer tunes that they know and the most popular programme is one which enables them to join in by humming or whistling', Reynolds added the criterion of familiarity to his requirements for the programme.[21] His embrace of familiarity reflected an interest in workers interacting with the music they heard; it also recognised dance music's role as background as listeners went about other bodily tasks. Before the war, the BBC had regarded attentive listening and physical engagement as binary opposites. It encouraged the public to listen in to the wireless with full attention, that is, in a state of physical relaxation and mental alertness (epitomised by the tired businessman). In wartime, however, the BBC had quickly recognised the value of background music for (mostly young) servicemen living in groups outside the domestic sphere.

Listener Research argued that background music could enhance morale, not only in the Forces and factories, but also in the home. In August 1940, Silvey provided BBC programmers with a perspective on broadcasting policy for the first winter under siege 'from the standpoint of the needs of the average listener'.[22] He argued

> The value of the familiar is going to be at a premium. Inevitably every time a news bulletin is switched on the listener opens the door to something new and potentially unpleasant. It is the 'background' programme that broadcasting can attempt to compensate for this and to restore balance. . . . [They] should put first cheerfulness and virility.[23]

Dance music played a crucial role in the BBC's programming for the Forces and in its broadcasts to factory workers on *MWYW.* With its familiar repertory and invocations of morale-building social dance, it seemed suited ideally for 'background' programming. However, the BBC's insistent discourse of brightness, cheer and virility as requirements for broadcast dance music revealed deep anxieties about the ways that dance music engaged listeners' bodies and emotions.

English style: choreographing virility in wartime

It may seem unexpected for Silvester, a man who began his career as an instructor at tea dances, to embody wartime notions of cheerful virility (Winstone 1941). Despite ballroom's spectacle of heterosexual pairing and ostensible male control, women gained prominence in the profession during the interwar period while men had to negotiate carefully their presentation as fully masculine and British.[24] The popular tango tea created an environment in which upper- and middle-class women could exercise financial and social superiority in their interactions with professional male partners, who were usually of lower-class backgrounds and potentially exotic ethnicities. As an obviously foreign gigolo in a 1932 Dorothy Sayers mystery, explained: '[M]ademoiselle . . . thinks: ''*Voilà!* that is the gigolo. He is not a man, he is a doll stuffed with sawdust''. He is bought, he is sold . . . Then the English husband, he says, ''Well, what can you expect? . . . He lives on foolish women and he does not play the cricket'' ' (Sayers 1968, p. 72). Susan Cook has observed in the case of Vernon Castle that male ballroom dancers who achieved celebrity status had to distance themselves from the effete lounge lizard and smarmy gigolo: the route lay in balancing old and new codes of British, male identity (Cook 1998, pp. 134–5, 146–8).

Early twentieth-century Anglo–American society witnessed a confrontation between Victorian notions of manliness, in which upper-class white men distinguished themselves through restraint, and newer notions of masculinity, which tapped into the energising possibilities of primitive aggression and sexuality

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(Bederman 1995, pp. 1–44). Silvester was no mere gigolo: with his wife and partner, Dorothy, he won the first World Ballroom Dancing Championship in 1922 and became a driving force in codifying the English Style, which combined the codes of manliness and masculinity in powerful new ways. In his classic *Modern Ballroom Dancing*, Silvester explained that the new English Style was 'based on natural movement', replacing the 'pretty' movements of Victorian dance teachers. The path to 'modern technique' lay through the infusion of 'Negro Jazz', for 'the Anglo–Saxons . . . lacked virile dances of their own'. Nevertheless, 'the love of order which seems to be innate in the English' helped tame the 'chaos' of jazz-derived dance (Silvester 1974, pp. 21, 16, 29). Silvester embraced the crisp control of manliness while drawing on the 'primitive' power of jazz, promoting the English Style as beneficial to mental and physical health for respectable British men.

Silvester's masculinity faced further challenge in the Second World War, when some derided male dance musicians as unpatriotic shirkers. Unsurprisingly, profiles at the time emphasised his colourful service record as a child soldier in World War I (Winstone 1941). Not only did he codify dance in the English style, but his strict-tempo dance recordings bent the unruly dance band to the metronomic service of dancers. The manliness of Silvester's enterprise was set further in relief by the problematic figure of the crooner. In July 1942, the BBC banned male crooners (along with their sentimental repertory) to 'encourage a more virile and robust output of dance music' and 'to accord more closely with the present spirit of the country'.[25] At a time when able-bodied men were expected to serve the nation, the voices of male crooners evoked 'effeminate', 'knock-kneed' bodies; they were 'sufferers from acute melancholia', who could demoralise and emasculate their listeners (Steerwood 1940; Thomson 1941; Dean 1942). The crooners' sentimental repertory was cast, not as a healthy escape, but rather as a demoralising scourge, especially with the distressing war news of early 1942. A veteran Lieutenant Colonel claimed, 'The sickly and maudlin programmes are largely responsible for the half-hearted attitude of so many people towards the war' (Lawrence 1942).

In the first months of the ban, the BBC extended Silvester's *Dancing Club* to an hour. Whether playing for *Dancing Club* or *MWYW*, Silvester eschewed crooners and slow numbers; instead, he specialised in 'non-vocal rhythmic melody' that was 'easy on the ear, even to those who profess to dislike modern dance music!' (Silvester 1941). Seton Margrave of the *Daily Mail* hailed *MWYW* and Silvester as models for a truly British popular music, as opposed to the 'syrupy blather' of *RRC* or the American import of crooning. Noting the results of a factory survey, he wrote

> The people of Britain are looking for what is simple and honest, well known, and well loved. When bands that try to be clever will try to be good they will qualify for 'MWYW', and the band that appears most often in 'MWYW' will be the band of the year. (Margrave 1941)

Indeed, Silvester and his Ballroom Orchestra had an enthusiastic public at the beginning of the war, and they continued to win popularity polls throughout the period.

The practice of background listening and the reassuring appeal of familiarity must account for Silvester's success. By the end of the war, many within the BBC had acknowledged that dance music accompanied a wide range of physical activities in the Forces, factories and homes. The housewife, listening during her household labours – and leisure hours – was replacing her tired husband in programmers' imaginations. Listeners reported sewing, knitting, chatting, playing cards, and 'plucking my eyebrows' while the radio played.[26] When the BBC commissioned the

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critic Spike Hughes to evaluate its house bands, he judged most of them inappropriate for attentive listening but fine for background listening. This was an adequate standard for broadcast dance music because 'the roll-back-the-carpet-and dance era of broadcasting ended long before the war . . . the purpose . . . is [now] to provide a reasonably pleasing background to housework, reading or conversation'.[27]

Nevertheless, the concept of dance music for dancing, exemplified by Silvester's strict-tempo ballroom, proved useful for those who sought to control sentimentality during the war.[28] The Director of Music Arthur Bliss declared, '[Dance bands'] obvious duty is to compel people to dance. . . . I would much rather have exhilarating and cheerful music to any ''blue'' or debilitating sound'.[29] The BBC's wartime policy assumed a dichotomous model in which virile dance music for dancing opposed effeminate dance music for dreaming (signalled by the grain of the crooner's voice). However, the growing popularity of swing music and dance was creating a new paradigm, which would render obsolete the BBC's assumptions about dance music.

Radio Rhythm Club: broadcasting the British swing boom

Swing was a minority taste in Britain until around 1942. Like jazz enthusiasts, swing fans knew their heroes through records only. In an interview with Mass-Observation before the war, Leonard Feather estimated that the average swing record sold five hundred copies in Britain while it sold five to ten thousand in the United States.[30] Barring American shortwave broadcasts, the infrequent transatlantic relay, and the token swing numbers featured by British dance bands, live swing music fell largely beyond British experience outside of rhythm club jam sessions. The 'typical musical odyssey' for young swing fans was a growing appreciation for American music, according to Stanley Nelson of *Dancing Times*: they 'begin as fervent admirers of Harry Roy or some other home product. Then they hear of the Americans, of Basie, Ellington, Artie Shaw . . . and then it is an immediate step to their local rhythm club and real connoisseurship' (Nelson 1942). Swing was part of a nascent youth culture; it carried associations both with the concentrated bodies of attentive listeners and the spontaneous physicality of jitterbug dancers.

The BBC's *Radio Rhythm Club* played an important role in popularising swing in Britain. While few at the Corporation were sympathetic to jazz as an entity distinct from dance music, the programme provided a site for rhythm club culture to gain a national hearing, creating an imagined community for jazz and swing fans. Harry Parry, a Welsh-born clarinettist who preferred 'small swing-groups' and eschewed playing in the 'quiet ''tea-room manner'' ', was the programme's most visible swing personality (Noble 1944, p. 61). He first appeared in a series of jam session broadcasts; in October 1940, he became the leader and arranger for the programme's new house band, the Radio Rhythm Club Sextet.[31] Following the pattern of other broadcasting bands, Parry's sextet soon gained a recording contract: they were the first British band in ten years to appear on Parlophone's 'Super Rhythm Style' series and were reviewed for *Melody Maker* in Edgar Jackson's American-oriented jazz column.

Parry took over producing *RRC* in March 1941 when the original producer, Charles Chilton, joined the RAF. With Parry's band appearing twice a month, the programme enjoyed steady growth in listenership, with figures reaching as high as 15 per cent. This was impressive for a 'niche' programme that lacked a regular broadcasting slot until October 1942. More importantly, according to the BBC's wartime priorities, 92 per cent of Forces listeners liked *RRC*.[32] Parry's profile beyond the

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Figure 3. Harry Parry signs autographs for fans, some in uniform and many of them women (undated; Bangor Manuscript 32688; Courtesy of Archives Department, University of Wales, Bangor).

programme was confirmed when he received over 12,000 votes from *Melody Maker* readers to appear on a special *Melody Maker*-HMV jam session concert, which was recorded live before 1,000 enthusiasts, and when fans mobbed the sextet when it performed a series of Sunday concerts (Fletcher 1942). Early in 1942, Parry and his sextet toured the Variety halls, augmented with three singers, two 'coloured' jitterbug dancers, and a stage set modelled after a radio studio: they attracted record audiences.[33] By the end of the year, Parry's Sextet was placed third in the mainstream *Sunday Pictorial*'s band popularity poll, and the Harry Parry fan club formed ('Detector', February 1943).

Once the narrow terrain of swing enthusiasts, the press hailed Parry as 'the first band leader to arrange swing music for the layman *and* to get the layman to listen to it and enjoy it' (Williamson 1944).[34] Other bandleaders took note. Geraldo, the BBC's leading dance bandleader started a swingtet of his own and began a series of 'swing club concerts'.[35] He also began to model his dance orchestra after Glenn Miller's popular band, which earned him the dismissive appellation of 'pseudo-American' within the Corporation.[36]

Even BBC Listener Research recognised the phenomenon and began refine its understanding of swing, which it classed as a subset of dance music. In a March 1942 survey of Forces listeners, it listed 'swing numbers' as one of the six types played by dance bands, a decision that reflected both the versatility demanded in palais work and the 'something for everyone' approach of most broadcast dance music. Listener

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Research noted that although the swing category earned the most votes (40 per cent), the top ranked swing number in a list of current dance band hits ('Woodchoppers Ball') earned only 6 per cent of the vote – it was outranked by ballads, which evoked so readily the bodies of male and female crooners.[37] A year later, Listener Research produced a new study in which swing was finally granted subgenre status as 'swing (hot jazz)', in contrast to strict-tempo and 'straight (sweet rhythm)' dance music.[38] In the wake of Britain's swing boom, fuelled in no small part by *RRC* and its star Harry Parry, the BBC finally recognised swing as a distinct musical category.

American style: the jitterbug invasion

Britain's 1942 swing boom was not generated by broadcasting alone; it was anticipated and in many ways shaped by jitterbuggers and their energetic engagement with swing. Rhythm club stalwarts were not necessarily delighted by the arrival of young, physically active swing fans, however. In November 1940, an anonymous rhythm club secretary complained of the infiltration of jitterbugs into his club and the accompanying exodus of 'sincere' members. Unlike 'the true jazz fans' who appreciated 'the Chicagoans', Duke Ellington, and Fletcher Henderson, the jitterbugs had the poor taste to declare Gene Krupa's 'Tuxedo Junction' 'terrific' and Glenn Miller's 'In the Mood' to be 'solid'. 'What was responsible for this sudden change [in membership]?', he asked. 'Possibly it was the ''jam session'', in which British players enacted the unruly playing of their distant American models ('A Rhythm Club Secretary' 1940). *RRC* appeased both sides by offering both records recitals and jam sessions; indeed, such tastes were not necessarily exclusive.

Jitterbuggers also infiltrated the dance halls. The first British jitterbug marathon was held on 20 November 1939 at London's Paramount dance hall, which was a popular centre for jitterbuggers (and, later, Americans) during the war. *The Dancing Times* anxiously followed the progress of the new dance and its practitioners. 'Sitter Out' attributed the popularity of jitterbugging to the war:

> It has been said that all dance is originally the motor reflex of intense excitement and that in the case of many of the most primitive peoples the dancers depended upon the exhilarative power of rhythmic movement. It is therefore not at all surprising that the present time of great mental stress should witness a mild invasion of our ballrooms by 'jitterbug' dancing. ('Sitter Out' 1939)

For ballroom professionals, jitterbug dancing was primitive and un-English; for the public it was associated with overt libidinal physicality, America, Hollywood, and Negro culture. (It was no coincidence that Parry employed coloured jitterbuggers on his tour.) Young people were especially receptive to American culture, and jitterbuggers affirmed swing as expressive of youth culture (Erenberg 1998, pp. 37–40). In contrast, America served 'as the image of industrial barbarism' for older and more cultured classes – as well as the BBC (Hebdige 1982, p. 200). The frenzied jitterbugger and depressing crooner (often with an American accent) were two extremes of the forces corrupting British dance music; as one listener complained to the BBC, 'Let us have our music ''decontaminated'' . . . from the notorious and intoxicated jitterbugs, of the world of cooing crooners and screaming saxophones' (Mack 1939).

Although some ballrooms encouraged jitterbugging with competitions and cash prizes, others tried to eradicate the dance. In a report from dance halls around Britain, jitterbugs and jitterbugging were cast as 'other': a London phenomenon, an American craze, located in 'the cheaper halls', 'a newcomer to town'.[39] Many palais prohibited

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jitterbugging. For example, Miss Betty Lyons, the manager at the Hammersmith Palais de Danse, 'frowns on the Jitterbug, indeed, if persistent, he is evacuated' (Raines 1941). Jitterbug dancing, with its Lindy-derived acrobatics, was criticised as indecorous, ridiculous, and 'about the most disgusting and degrading sight I have ever seen in a ballroom' (Moore 1940). Ballroom dance professionals feared that the jitterbug might infect the English style – or replace it in the ballroom. This was a real possibility, for, as Stanley Nelson argued, 'The ordinary staid, although undoubtedly beautiful, English style is *completely inadequate* in relation to [swing]' (Nelson 1940). Edgar Jackson asserted that the jitterbugs were the reason why ballrooms were not dominated by strict-tempo dance music and dancers (Jackson 1942). The dance proved persistent, despite all efforts to eradicate it.

It would be inaccurate, however, to cast British dancing during the war as encompassing only two opposing styles. Early in the war, Monsieur Pierre noted the increasing popularity of English 'rhythmic' or 'crush' dancing (Pierre 1939). Derived from the quickstep, the dance was more responsive to swing music than the standard dances. More importantly, crush dancing (as implied by its name) took less space than English style dancing; it was suited ideally to crowded wartime dance floors (Cave 1943). With the build-up of the American presence in Britain beginning in 1942, US servicemen entered British dance halls, and ballroom professionals gained greater insight into the possibilities of rhythmic dancing from the source. Observers like Norma Cave, Tynegate-Smith, and the doyenne of English-style dancing Josephine Bradley were fascinated by the Americans' 'naturalness' (Tynegate-Smith 1942; Cave 1943; Bradley 1944). Although they considered the best English style dancers superior in footwork, poise and grace, they credited the Americans with instinctive creativity, innate rhythmic sense (except in the waltz), and infectious enjoyment and enthusiasm. Tynegate-Smith's three 'C's' – comfort, confidence and consideration – that made one 'lovely to dance with' were derived from her perceptions of the Americans' dance style (Tynegate-Smith 1942, 1943). One shudders at the morale implications for British troops, who were threatened by the American GIs' appeal to British women (Reynolds 1995, pp. 263–7, 326–7).

When the jitterbug first emerged at the beginning of the war, some dance professionals recognised its possibilities. Not until the fall of 1943, however, did Josephine Bradley introduce a modified form of the jitterbug: the jive.[40] Bradley, who was sometimes credited with creating the English style, was a leading dance teacher, hosted popular tea dances at the exclusive Grosvenor Hotel and, like Silvester, lent her name to strict-tempo dance recordings. Between June 1940 and August 1942 she toured the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, returning with an interest in American dance styles and a fascination for the jitterbug (Raines 1942). A year later, she met Edgar Jackson at the Decca studios when recording for his *Music While You Work* series (a supplement to the BBC programme). He invited her to hear '*real* dance music' and see '*real* dancing' at the Feldman Swing Club. She heard musicians who had performed in jam sessions on *RRC* and observed the dancers: 'the swing of the whole dance floor had a pendulum-like regularity. I could not disassociate the dancer from the music, they were the complement of one another, and in that lay my big thrill'.[41]

Bradley invited some of the dancers to her studio and set about standardising the dance. Within months, she demonstrated jive dancing at the bastion of strict tempo, the Hammersmith Palais de Danse; wrote a series on the topic for *Dancing Times*; and, with her 'Jive Rhythm Band' (composed of top British swing players),

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issued American-style big band arrangements of swing numbers for jive students – earning positive reviews in the swing columns of the not-disinterested Jackson. Not to be left out, Silvester decided to give a jive lesson on *Dancing Club* and recorded his own jive records, although they were in Dixieland style and unsuitable for jive dancing. The dance profession had 'cashed in' on jive, but how well did the BBC understand the audience for swing? (Jackson 1943).

Constructing/contesting the audience

1942 and 1943 were eventful years for dance music at the BBC, with its ban on crooners, triumphs for Silvester, and the recognition of swing by Listener Research as a subgenre of dance music. At the end of 1943, even as Bradley was introducing the jive to London, however, the BBC moved to cancel its contract with Geraldo while he and his band were touring military camps in the Middle East.[42] In order to assert a distinct British national identity in the face of growing Americanisation, the Corporation promoted the 'British-style' Jack Payne, who had ignored the swing boom, over the 'American-style' Geraldo. Cancelling Geraldo's contract was part of the BBC's broader aim of reducing its dance music output overall, the need for which it supported with data compiled by Listener Research. With its apparent popularity decline, the broad category of dance music broadcasting had lost its primary justification of boosting wartime morale.

Nonetheless, dance music – broadly defined – remained overwhelmingly popular among the Forces and other crucial wartime audiences. From its March 1942 survey of roughly 12,000 men, Listener Research concluded that one in four enlisted men 'could be regarded as a dance music fan'. What constituted 'dance music' was another question. Silvester, with his strict-tempo *Dancing Club* ranked first, and Geraldo, who played a variety of music including swing, was in second place.[43] The 1943 *Sunday Pictorial* poll (which must have represented largely civilian tastes) matched closely the BBC's findings among the Forces, but Harry Parry joined Silvester and Geraldo at the top ('Detector', February 1943). Critics cited Parry's success as they urged the BBC to jettison the general category of 'dance music' and to recognise the significance of swing.

In July 1943, Listener Research finally issued a full-scale study of dance music tastes (including swing), in which it finally attempted to solicit the opinions of listeners interested in dance music. It found that 31 per cent of the public liked dance music 'very much', another 44 per cent 'quite' liked it, and 25 per cent disliked it. Young people, women, and the working class favoured dance music disproportionately. As both men and women in the Forces tended to be younger than the general population, 'the average member of the Forces is considerably more dance music minded that the average civilian'. While the bulk of swing fans fell into the dance music enthusiast category, a far greater percentage of the 'enthusiasts' preferred strict-tempo dance music in the style of Silvester.[44] The 'lukewarm' group favoured sweet dance music overwhelmingly.[45] Most enthusiasts favoured vocal music, and the crooning ban had affected several of their favourite singers. Listener Research suggested that providing a 'couple of good swing sessions a week' and featuring mostly vocal numbers in dance music programmes would 'please the Forces and at the same time please those civilians who care most for dance music'.[46]

Although the qualitative study, which represented opinion in the Forces, showed dance music to enjoy a solid following, Listener Research soon reported an

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overall decline in dance music popularity in its longitudinal tracking of listener tastes. Even when it took listener age and the effects of the call-up into account, the popularity of dance music had fallen among young people, who made up the bulk of its fans.[47] More importantly, dance music was the only type of programme broadcast by the BBC to experience 'a steady decline in popularity, with a corresponding increase in unpopularity'.[48] In early 1944, the BBC reduced drastically its dance music output.[49]

Melody Maker's radio critic, 'Detector', condemned the BBC's approach to charting dance music popularity. Listener Research reported listener tastes as shaped by what the BBC offered, rather than studying the public's opinions on the *quality* of BBC dance music broadcasting. After all, the BBC itself had been obsessed throughout the war with poor dance music performance standards, vocalists and repertory. It had contributed to the problem by broadcasting relentlessly a handful of bands, and song plugging was a significant problem – surely even the best performers and repertory could become tiresome after such repeated exposure. Moreover, it had cancelled the popular Geraldo's contract while continuing to promote the far less popular Jack Payne. 'Detector' attacked the BBC's knowledge of dance music and its commitment to soliciting the opinions of listeners who understood it. Reacting to a question that directed respondents 'interested in dancing' to rate *Dancing Club*, which was anathema to swing dance enthusiasts, he called for the Corporation to seek the opinions 'of the younger generation who rightly realise that dancing is something more than parading about like a lot of stuffed peacocks in what is known as the English ''Competition'' style' (June 1943).

The Listener Research longitudinal studies were also problematic in that they underrepresented men in the Forces, whose preferences were notoriously difficult to track. Anecdotal evidence from musicians who toured the camps, like Harry Roy, and letters from servicemen showed that Forces stationed abroad still wanted dance music, despite declining popularity figures at home. Dance music broadcasting still had an important role to play in maintaining troop morale and serving the national war effort, but the Forces were demanding the 'wrong' music. They preferred swing and the sentimental repertory crooned by female singers, while the BBC promoted a singular 'virile British dance music'. The Corporation had used the fledgling techniques of consumer research to make broad claims of mass preferences that excluded the views of its most crucial wartime audience. Meanwhile, it had zealously regulated the dance musics linked most problematically to the physical, which were precisely the repertories with the most passionate followings among the Forces.

Men in the Forces had stepped temporarily from the easy chair, but they soon returned to the radio hearth. With the arrival of peace, the BBC's new Light Programme promised to 'feature more dance bands and dance music than ever before'.[50] The war had led the BBC to reconsider the makeup of its audience and the ways in which listeners used broadcast dance music. It was not simply music for dancing or relaxing 'entertainment'; rather, it could also serve as a reassuring background presence, especially for older listeners and those working at home. The BBC maintained a post-war commitment to these listeners: *Dancing Club* returned to the air in November 1945 and *MWYW*, at the urging of industrialists, continued after the war until 1967, ensconced as a symbol of light background music. With the introduction of the Third Programme in 1946, the BBC split its address between attentive and inattentive listeners, the physically passive and the indeterminately active. While the

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wartime controversies over the BBC's dance music broadcasting dramatised dance music's embodiment in the voices of crooners and in *RRC* jam sessions, Listener Research fixed listeners' bodies – whether dancing, regimented, or at rest – more firmly in BBC discourse.

The BBC also relinquished its conception of a unitary dance music audience. In 1945, Listener Research found that age, not sex, was the most significant factor in predicting dance music preferences. (It ignored class in the study.) The dance music public could be envisioned as two discrete groups: older listeners preferring strict-tempo and sweet dance music, and younger listeners preferring the swing-oriented bands that had become popular during the war. Listener Research warned, 'If . . . the dance music public is regarded as one and indivisible, the desires of the younger section of it will be completely swamped by the tastes of the older, and more numerous, section'. This was borne out by Geraldo's overwhelming popularity with listeners under thirty (58 per cent ranked him first) while those over thirty preferred Victor Silvester by the same margin. Twenty-eight per cent of teenagers favoured Parry, but his name barely registered with those over thirty.[51]

The BBC's tradition of recognising multiple audiences and its wartime commitment to serving groups active in national service finally had benefited vocal, young dance music and swing fans. Although Stephen Barnard locates *Jazz Club*, the 1947 successor to *RRC*, as the 'seminal programme' in the BBC's 'first tentative steps towards recognising a ''youth'' audience', it was the wartime contestation surrounding dance music that had laid the groundwork for such recognition (Barnard 1989, p. 36). Transformed from a morale-builder, post-war dance music and swing became a special service for a new minority audience – youth, a group that would later define the American-inspired musical revolutions of skiffle and rock 'n' roll.

Endnotes

1. Many thanks to the BBC Written Archives Centre (BBC WAC) and its head archivist, Jacquie Kavanagh, for permission to use BBC copyright material in this article. The WAC's extensive collection of internal and external correspondence, press clippings, and Listener Research findings made possible both a reconstruction of BBC decision-making and a broader cultural history of gatekeepers, cultural producers, and audiences. The Mass-Observation Archive's social survey materials, along with the contemporary press (especially the monthly *Dancing Times* and weeklies *Melody Maker*, *Band Wagon*, and the BBC programme guide *Radio Times*), were also important primary sources for this article.
2. 'Harry Roy through with broadcasting!' *Melody Maker* (22 April 1944), p. 1.
3. 'Harry Roy and BBC', *Melody Maker* (6 May 1944), p. 1; and letter from T. Ruck-Keene, Lieut. RN, to DG (4 June 1944), BBC WAC R41/113/1.
4. Peter Noble, *Kings of Rhythm: A Review of Dance-Music and British Dance-Band Personalities* (London: Dunlop Publications, n.d. [1944]), p. 5. In a review of Noble's *Transatlantic Jazz*, the jazz critic Rex Harris observed, 'I am still in the dark as to what jazz is to him' (Harris 1945).
5. There were also underground publications that specialised in jazz to the exclusion of dance music (Godbolt 1984, p. 162).
6. Jackson also reviewed the same repertory for *Gramophone*.
7. *Radio Rhythm Club* script (11 February 1943), BBC WAC R21/121.
8. Tom Harrisson, an anthropologist and ornithologist, and Charles Madge, a 'leftist poet and a frustrated journalist', founded Mass-Observation in 1937 in response to the Abdication crisis and amid growing anxieties about the threat of war. Fascinated with 'myth and superstition in national life', they sought through qualitative, participatory research to understand how everyday people thought and lived and to make this knowledge available to all, with the aim of breaching 'the great gulf of ignorance dividing rulers from ruled, class from class' (Jeffrey 1999, p. 1–2).
9. Payne had led the first BBC Dance Orchestra between 1928 and 1932, while Geraldo had led bands at the Savoy Hotel since 1930.
10. Audience Research, [Weekly] Bulletins, *Sound* (1941–1943), BBC WAC R9/1/1–3. BBC Listener Research considered listener figures of over 20% to be noteworthy.

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11. 'All bright on the West-End Front!', *Melody Maker* (9 December 1939), p. 1.
12. *Policy Directive for Variety Material Broadcast Overseas*, from Cecil Madden (c. 9 October 1943), BBC WAC S24/54/19.
13. Mass-Observation File Reports: 11A Jazz and Dancing (November 1939), p. 1.
14. *Ibid*., p. 5.
15. *Ibid*., p. 8; and 'The sitter out', 'Ballroom notes', *Dancing Times* (April 1940), pp. 415–17.
16. *A Listener Research Report: Summary of Opinion of Listeners in the Forces on 1 Radio Dance Music 2 BBC Dancing Club* (21 April 1942), BBC WAC R27/73/2.
17. Mecca Ballrooms, advertisement, *Dancing Times* (August 1941), back cover; and Mecca Ballrooms, advertisement, *Dancing Times* (September 1941), back cover.
18. Letter from AC(P) to Mr Andrew Stewart (M of I) (18 June 1940), BBC WAC R27/257/1.
19. *Music While You Work*, BBC Internal Circulating Memorandum from Mr. Denis Wright to OB Ex (22 July 1940), BBC WAC R27/257/1.
20. *Music in Factories: Preliminary Report* (26 June 1940), BBC WAC R27/257/1.
21. *Music While You Work*, BBC Internal Circulating Memorandum from Wynford Reynolds to AC(P) (5 August 1941), BBC WAC R27/257/2.
22. *Broadcasting Policy* (28 August 1940), BBC WAC R9/15/1. The policy statement represented a compilation of 'all the available evidence' rather than simply the results of a questionnaire, because 'the average listener is not sufficiently articulate about the needs he feels, nor even conscious of them all'.
23. *Ibid*.
24. Silvester was the only man in the first Committee of the Ballroom Branch of the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing, which formed in 1924 (Silvester 1974, p. 40).
25. *Dance Music Policy*, BBC Internal Circulating Memorandum from Assistant Controller (Programmes) to C(P) (3 June 1942), BBC WAC R27/73/1.
26. Audience Research, [Weekly] Bulletins, *Sound*, no. 174 (18 January 1944), BBC WAC R9/1/4.
27. Spike Hughes, *Report on the Four BBC Contract Bands and Victor Silvester's Band* (12 August 1943), BBC WAC R27/73/2.
28. This had been done before. In 1935, the BBC turned to dance music for dancing as a way of limiting 'vocal refrains' and pretentious 'symphonic arrangements'. *Dance Music Situation*, BBC Internal Circulating Memorandum from DV to Controller (P) (5 November 1935), BBC WAC R27/475/1.
29. 'Leading questions put to Arthur Bliss', *Radio Times* (15 May 1942), p. 5.
30. Mass-Observation Box 4: Musicians, Bands, Clubs and Instrument Makers, 38/4/F: Swing (XXVII), 'Leonard Feather' [interview] (28 June 1939).
31. The original personnel included George Shearing, a blind pianist considered one of the leading swing and boogie woogie pianists in the country, vibraphonist Roy Marsh, drummer Ben Edwards, who played with Victor Silvester's Ballroom Orchestra, and two members of Ken Johnson's West Indian Orchestra, guitarist Joe Deniz and bassist Tom Bromley (who were always announced enthusiastically as 'coloured').
32. Audience Research, [Weekly] Bulletins, *Sound*, no. 174 (3 January 1942), BBC WAC R9/1/4.
33. 'Harry Parry booked for stage', *Melody Maker* (24 January 1942), p. 1.
34. By this point, however, jazz enthusiasts were complaining that *RRC* had fallen into a rut under Parry. In January 1943, Chilton got leave from his RAF duties to return to *RRC*. Parry was booted from the programme and took up residence at the new Potomac Restaurant which, as his adoring biographer put it, catered to 'the ever-growing number of Americans who were crowding into London' who appreciated his 'all-jazz' offerings (Noble 1944, p. 66).
35. 'Two unknowns make good at Geraldo Swing Club concert', *Melody Maker* (23 May 1942), p. 1.
36. Pencilled comment on Spike Hughes, *Report on the Four BBC Contract Bands and Victor Silvester's Band* (12 August 1943), BBC WAC R27/73/2.
37. *A Listener Research Report: Summary of Opinion of Listeners in the Forces on 1 Radio Dance Music 2 BBC Dancing Club* (21 April 1942), BBC WAC R27/73/2.
38. Listener Research Department, *Broadcast Dance Music: Results of Enquiries Made in May 1943* (26 July 1943), BBC WAC R27/73/2.
39. 'In the dance halls to-day', *Dancing Times* (March 1940), pp. 359–61.
40. Amateur dancers, especially after the Americans arrived, were probably modifying the jitterbug on their own as well. Andrew Crookes, the dancing manager at the Paramount, a dance hall popular with British jitterbuggers and Americans, reported that the dance had changed: 'More attention is devoted to clever rhythm and breaks, the wilder leaps and bounds are sobered, and as the dance quietens the pattern becomes more intricate and attractive'. Irene Raines observed, 'To hazard a purely feminine version, perhaps the stocking difficulty has helped' (Raines 1943).
41. Josephine Bradley, 'The jive', *Dancing Times* (May 1943), pp. 19–20; and 'Josephine goes jitterbug', *Melody Maker* (25 September 1943, pp. 4–5.
42. *House Band (Overseas Services)*, BBC Internal Circulating Memorandum from Mr Cecil Madden, Criterion, to Mr John Watt (DV) (1 December 1943), BBC WAC R27/71/4.
43. *A Listener Research Report: Summary of Opinion of Listeners in the Forces on 1 Radio Dance Music 2 BBC Dancing Club* (21 April 1942), BBC WAC R27/73/2. Victor Silvester was ranked first by 30% of the respondents; Geraldo by 24%; Ambrose (who rarely broadcast, but had been first-rank before the war) by 12%; Joe Loss and Harry Roy (both stage bands) by 6%; and Jack Payne and Billy Cotton by only 5%.

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44. Listener Research Department, *Broadcast Dance Music: Results of Enquiries Made in May 1943* (26 July 1943), BBC WAC R27/73/2. 13% of enthusiasts preferred swing while 31% favoured strict tempo dance music. In addition, 34% favoured 'straight (sweet rhythm)' and 22% expressed no preference.
45. *Ibid*. 48% favoured 'straight (sweet rhythm)', 24% favoured strict tempo, 2% favoured swing, and 26% expressed no preference.
46. *Ibid*.
47. Audience Research, [Weekly] Bulletins, *Sound*, no. 162 (26 October 1943), BBC WAC R9/1/3. Between October 1941 and October 1943, enthusiasts diminished in all age categories. 16–19-year-old enthusiasts diminished from 65% to 54%; 20–29-year-old enthusiasts diminished from 43% to 34%; 30–49-year-old enthusiasts diminished from 22% to 17%; and 50+ aged enthusiasts diminished from 11% to 9%.
48. *Paper on Listener Research for Royal Statistical Society*, BBC Internal Circulating Memorandum from Listener Research Director (RJE Silvey) to C(P) (23 May 1944), BBC WAC R9/15/1.
49. This shift coincided with the introduction of the General Forces Programme, which replaced the Home Front Forces Programme and treated domestic audiences to the same programming that was broadcast to troops overseas. The change spurred fresh debates over crooning and morale. For a more detailed discussion, see Baade (2006) and Baade (2002, pp. 376–439).
50. 'More bands on the air in new BBC programmes', *Melody Maker* (28 July 1945), p. 1.
51. Listener Research Department, *Dance Band Preferences: Spring 1945* (20 April 1945), BBC WAC R9/9/9.

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