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*Mardi Gras John Sinclair Guanajuato, Mexico
Bangkok Diamanda Galás Third World War
the gospel according to unpopular culture an anthology*



Mozic and the Revolution Revisited.

by Rich Deakin

Britain's COMMUNITY BANDS of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

MUSIC IS a soundtrack to popular culture. The revolutionary movement of the 1960s was no exception. 1967 is forever associated with flower power, peace, and the summer of love, while 1968 —tumultuous in terms of global unrest and revolutionary ferment — is synonymous with being “the year of the barricades.” Much has been written about 1968 and music and revolution, most notably Mick Jagger and John Lennon in Britain and their brief flirtations with radical chic. However, there was also a music scene operating at a grass roots, street level of the British counterculture that included the likes of the Deviants, Edgar Broughton Band, and slightly later Pink Fairies, Hawkwind and Third World War.

These bands did not have the same clout as first division rock stars, like Jagger and Lennon, but no one in Britain did more to promote music as a revolutionary medium than Mick Farren, front man of the Deviants and regular columnist for the underground press. Frequently finding himself and his band on the receiving end of police “stop and search” tactics, Farren was often moved to make anti-police diatribes. In an article for *International Times (IT)* (Jun 68) entitled “Guerilla Pop,” he talked of providing “a turned-on army,





FRIENDS

Friends Number 25 March 8, 1971, 15m, 10m, 10m, 10m





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music instead of bullets, happenings instead of battles,” adding “A rock group on a rooftop can be as effective as a machine gun... Putting pop groups into the streets, into parks throughout this summer is the first move.”

By the time the Rolling Stones released *Street Fighting Man* in August 1968, Farren and the Deviants had already rewritten the music industry’s rulebook by making a record and releasing it themselves, thereby keeping the means of production and distribution within the underground. They played a number of benefits in support of various radical causes throughout the year, including a student sit-in at Essex University and anti-Vietnam war festival in Trafalgar Square, where their homemade pyrotechnics very nearly put paid to the band as well as a section of the audience.

FROM THE Midlands town of Warwick, the Edgar Broughton Band was spearheading the assault from the provinces. Moving to Ladbroke Grove in October 1968, the Broughtons quickly nailed their revolutionary credentials to the mast, announcing a preference for free concerts with an intention to perform as many as possible over the coming year. They often instigated collections at their gigs “for those living destitute in London’s parks,” and after the free Hyde Park concert in September 1969 presented approximately £100 to the occupants of the infamous squat at 144 Piccadilly.

That same month the Edgar Broughton Band and a cohort of Hell’s Angels visited Warwick in defiance of the town council’s ban on a free concert. Echoing Mick Farren’s exhortation about “putting pop groups into the streets and parks,” they played on the back of a flatbed truck to a crowd of more than 200, which they lead, pied-piper like, through the streets causing much disruption in the process. Afterwards Edgar Broughton was quoted as saying: “I don’t think I could possibly lead a revolution in the physical sense... The revolution must come from the people themselves.” He added: “We don’t go out to incite riots, of course, but if there’s any trouble when we play then that’s just hard luck.”

Farren seems to have found a kindred spirit in Edgar Broughton, and by the summer of 1969 the Deviants and Edgar Broughton Band regularly shared





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the same bill. It even seemed the Deviants were on the verge of some kind of wider acceptability. But the usually indefatigable Farren was showing signs of disillusionment with the politics of the underground rock scene. He told *ZigZag* (Sep 69): “We used to be heavily political, but the validity of that sort of statement coming from a rock’n’roll band is becoming somewhat questionable... it’s OK if you are in a band which is very closely allied to the community, but the community has become so diverse that it’s impossible for a group to be that much a part of it.”

If Mick’s radical affectations appeared to be waning, he wouldn’t be allowed to forget them in a hurry. Germaine Greer, in an *Oz* article called “Mozic and the Revolution” (Oct 69), bemoaned the credibility of the wider underground music scene transmitting revolutionary ideals, with particular reference to the futility of Mick’s own efforts. This she blamed on Mick’s inability to hear what rock music was really about, in turn suggesting he didn’t really understand his target audience, nor they him, “They wanted to have a good time,” wrote Greer, “and there was this wheezing Jeremiah begging them to hate something. They were too good mannered even to hate him. Mick ended up hating nearly all his audiences. He meant to yell at their parents, but he ended up yelling at them.”

Farren was ejected from the Deviants in October 1969 when the rest of the band decided to pursue a more musically competent route, having tired of his revolutionary histrionics.

TRADITIONAL RECORD companies, management and agencies were viewed with suspicion within the underground music scene — emasculating, sanitising and repackaging the original deal into something less threatening and more palatable in order to turn a profit. And therein lies the rub. Three of the leading UK underground groups of the era — Pink Fairies (into which the Deviants mutated after Farren’s departure), Hawkwind and Edgar Broughton Band — were all signed to major labels. The Deviants had provided a template for independent labels several years earlier by self releasing *Ptooff!*, but it was an exception to the rule. Signing to a major label was a necessary evil in the late sixties and early seventies, and in order to become a successful propagandist one had to





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deal with the music establishment on its own terms — subverting it and not be subverted by it. Asked whether signing to a subsidiary of corporate capitalist giant EMI compromised their ideals, Steve Broughton was moved to say: “If we sell as many records as they would like us to, and if we sell as many as *we* want to, eventually we are going to turn people onto burning EMI down.”

Similarly, the Pink Fairies told *ZigZag* (Sep 70) in the summer of 1970, before having a record deal: “I think it’s really good to rip off a record company for a huge amount of bread — I think that’s really far out because they’re the people you should rip off... The whole community system/underground has got to be financed and the way I see it, the record companies are in a good position to do it.”

Such rhetoric didn’t stop letters appearing in the underground press accusing bands like the Broughtons and the Fairies of being “fakes” and “underground hypes.”

The underground press proved relevant to the likes of so called ‘community bands,’ such as Hawkwind, the Edgar Broughton Band and the Pink Fairies. Farren says:

The relationship with the ‘community’ bands was highly symbiotic. The underground press publicised them, which made it possible for them to tour and get record deals. They travelled around spreading the ethos, and the demand for the newspapers and magazines grew and flourished for a while.

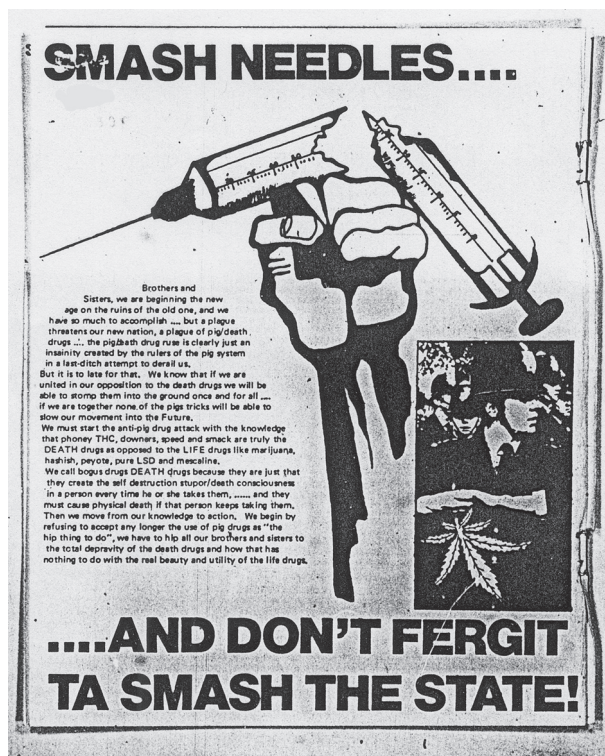
It was far from a superficial relationship, as evidenced when underground papers and magazines such as *IT*, *Oz*, *Friends* and *Nasty Tales* were busted with frightening regularity. The bands would play benefit gigs, providing a means for publishers to pay legal costs and mount a defence for themselves.

Festivals became an integral part of the ethos and lifestyle of the community bands and counterculture in general. If not playing free festivals, such as Phun City or Glastonbury, Hawkwind and Pink Fairies would set up outside the perimeter fences of major festivals and provide free music to those unable





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or unwilling to pay the admission price. The 1970 Isle of Wight Festival is a case in point, and both bands provided free non stop music for hours on end.

Significantly, the Isle of Wight festival was instrumental in establishing the British White Panther Party. It is well documented how gangs of foreign anarchists, English Hell's Angels, White Panthers and other agitators engaged in pitch battles with security guards and tore the fences down. The White Panthers name was initially a cloak of subterfuge used by Mick Farren to highlight the concentration camp like conditions of the festival site; he encouraged maximum disruption by publicising how the festival could be viewed free from a huge escarpment nearby. Farren may have used the name as a hit and run job to disrupt a rock festival and the capitalist proclivities of its promoters, but under the aegis of the White Panthers numerous community initiatives





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arose back on the Grove. Neighbourhood councils and free food/clothing programmes were in turn supported by a number of local bands, who began to play for free under the arches of the Westway flyover at Portobello Green. These gigs and promoters, such as the Greasy Truckers, proved instrumental in founding the Westway Theatre and, later, the notorious punk and reggae venue Acklam Hall.

IN OCTOBER 1970 Mick Farren reported the formation of the British White Panther Party and its objectives in an article for *Melody Maker* (Oct 3, 70) ("Rock: Energy for Revolution"). Its aim was "to work within the freak community in Britain." Farren acknowledged the futility of attempting to replicate tactics used by American militants, because the problems of British society were different and less extreme.

Adopting the name and taking many of the ideals from the radical black militant organisation the Black Panther Party, the original White Panther Party was established in the US in 1968 by Detroit cultural revolutionary, and then manager of the MC5, John Sinclair. The legacy of the American Panthers struck a chord in the politically turbulent era of early seventies Britain. Taking their cue from Farren's White Panthers, British chapters emerged in Manchester, Glasgow, Exeter and several around London. Interviewed by Jonathon Green in 1987, Mick Farren said: "We formed the White Panther Party to do something, I don't know what... People want a name, post-hippies out of money wandering round wondering what had happened to flower power and walking around in worn-out velvet pants. Furious amounts of drugs — people were shooting heroin by then. Post-hippie junkies."

The late John Carding of the Abbey Wood chapter ("very serious cats," according to Farren), frequently espoused radical rhetoric in the pages of the underground press, and the White Panther Party's ten-point programme was itself based on the Marxist-Leninist version of the American Black Panther Party programme. Point Ten summed up:





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We want a free planet. We want a free land: Free food: Free shelter: Free Clothing: Free music and free culture: Free media: Free technology: Free education: Free health care: Free bodies: Free people: Free tenant space: Everything free for everybody.

On a more realistic level they also championed environmental causes. Point Seven stated: *"We want a clean planet and a healthy people... We want to restore the ecological balance of the planet and secure the future of humanity and its environs."*

Bands frequently played benefit gigs to raise funds for the Panthers, and the Panthers were on hand to provide food and extolled the efforts of these bands in the underground press, or their own newssheets, such as *Chapter!*, *Street Sheet* and *White Trash*.

DURING A decidedly fraught tour of Germany in February 1971, the Edgar Broughton Band and their promoters were accused of overpricing by militant German audiences hell bent on making all rock music free. Eventually exonerated in Germany, the band's reputation remained somewhat tarnished in Britain when news of the tour filtered back. That summer, the Broughtons embarked on a free "guerrilla tour" of English seaside towns: Redcar, Blackpool, Brighton and Weston Super Mare. Cynics said it was an attempt by the band to regain their underground credentials following the German debacle. Whatever the reason, the tour was virtually scuppered before it began. Despite a ban in the towns they were touring, the Broughtons played regardless, on a flatbed truck, and were arrested more than once.

Local councils and police may not have been compliant but some education authorities were, and the Broughtons extended their free music programme that summer by playing a series of "Children's holiday summer play centres" at schools in London, Manchester, Bristol, Nottingham and Newcastle. Edgar told *Beat Instrumental* (Sep 71): "gigs organised by schoolkids actually come off, whereas a lot of events organised by freaks never happen."





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THE ANTI-WAR movement and message of peace of love was still high on the counterculture agenda, but coming to the fore in the early 1970s were politically emotive issues like the IRA and internment in Northern Ireland, the Angry Brigade, women's lib, and gay lib.

The Angry Brigade equated to a British version of the German Red Army Faction and Italy's Brigade Rossi. Rather than indiscriminate acts of violence, their targets were symbols of capitalist society, such as property. When the Angries used the underground press as a mouthpiece, the Special Branch investigation in the aftermath of the Angry Brigade bombings impacted on the wider underground community. Farren made an interesting analogy between the Angry Brigade and the underground press when he stated in 1999: "[The Angry Brigade] accentuated the ongoing debate among the advocates of direct action and non-violence, but, in practical terms we had to treat them, metaphorically, as another rock band looking to make their name." The activities of the Angry Brigade weren't universally approved throughout the underground, but the police activity they provoked ensured the likes of *IT* and *Friends* would continue to support the Angries over the establishment any day.

The Angry Brigade was a measure of how much had changed by the early seventies, and a number of underground bands played benefits for those arrested in connection with the bombings. One of these bands, Third World War, displayed a rare radical bent. Comprising Jim Avery and Terry Stamp (two session musicians from Shepherd's Bush), Third World War were uncompromising in the revolutionary rhetoric espoused in their lyrics, and something of an anomaly within the underground, looking and dressing more like suedeheads — a subculture evolved from skinheads.

The band addressed working class issues, such as the daily grind and the struggle to make ends meet, as on *Working Class Man*. Another song, *Shepherd's Bush Cowboy*, has references to boozing, skinheads, "queer bashing," gambling, prostitutes and football hooliganism, ending with the eponymous protagonist's imprisonment. Other songs (*MI5's Alive*, *Ascension Day*, *Preaching Violence*) advocated the overthrow of the monarchy and government by means of violent revolution.





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Seeing Third World War perform at Northern Polytechnic, Mick Farren was impressed enough to say in an *IT* review (Apr 71): “They are essentially Britain’s MC5... they play simple uncomplicated hard rock romping and stomping, and sing lyrics that stem from Dagenham factory floors, preaching violence against the bosses and the rest of a hostile society.” He called Ascension Day (in *IT*, May 71) “one of the best street fighting songs since We Shall Be Together.”

UNDERGOING A significant personnel change in 1972, the Pink Fairies finally had enough of playing their part in the revolution and had designs to reach a wider audience. Drummer Russell Hunter told *Melody Maker* (Oct 22, 72): “this summer there were hundreds of bands prepared to play at those gigs under the motorway, so did people really want to see us every week? I’m sure not. Now the precedent has been set, it’s not necessary for us to do it all the time.”

The Fairies never really did reach a mainstream audience. Their old running mates Hawkwind did, however, and hit the top ten in the summer of 1972 with *Silver Machine*. It was proof indeed that commercial success could be possible, while maintaining a degree of hip within whatever was left of the underground.

Hawkwind’s most controversial song, lyrically at least, came a year later. Its release coinciding with an intensive IRA bombing campaign on the UK mainland, the BBC refused to play the follow up single, *Urban Guerrilla*, and it was withdrawn by the record company.

THE TIMES had changed and with it the underground. Continued police harassment helped contributed to its demise — the high profile obscenity trials of *Oz* in 1971 and Mick Farren’s *Nasty Tales* comic in 1973 being obvious cases in point. The underground press and community bands had fed off, and thrived on, the support of one another. Now this relationship was gone. The country at large was in one hell of a mess, with crippling industrial action in the form of miner’s strikes, the three day week, fuel shortages, rising inflation, and IRA bombings. To quote Marcus Gray: “Come hard times, people would





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rather party than revolt.” In Britain, the youth fiddled while Rome burned in a new scene of stack heels, glitter and glam. Underground music went even further underground, and adapted itself to the hippy travelling lifestyle that had developed out of the early free festival scene. This nomadic culture revolved around an annual festival circuit, the main one being Stonehenge, and flourished throughout the seventies and early eighties until outlawed by the Thatcher government in 1985.

If all the main proponents of community based activity had effectly fallen by the wayside with the onset of punk (Hawkwind being the exception), its influence on punk and subsequent movements is not inconsiderable. Shortly before punk hit national headlines, Mick Farren wrote for the *NME* an article entitled “The Titanic Sails At Dawn.” Recognising the stirrings of the nascent punk movement, Farren’s now somewhat seminal treatise advocated taking “rock back to street level and starting all over again” in order to challenge the increasingly stagnant music scene. Within months the Sex Pistols released *Anarchy In The UK*. When the Pistols swore on the live Bill Grundy Show a parallel could be drawn with the David Frost Show six years earlier, and the furore caused by the American Yippie radical Abbie Hoffman and representatives of the British underground. In simplistic terms, the punks had more in common with the sixties counterculture than they’d care to admit. A strong anti-establishment thread ran through the core of both, and the later anarcho-punk movement became closely affiliated to the free festival scene. This whole festival-cum-travelling culture later mutated and fused with the more anarchic aspects of rave culture, such as alternative community based collectives like Mutoid Waste Company and Spiral Tribe, culminating at Castlemorton Common Festival in May 1992. And so it continues. Whilst there is still music and politics, and the potential for rebellion... mozic and the revolution anyone?

Rich Deakin is the author of *Keep It Together! Cosmic Boogie with the Deviants and the Pink Faries* (Headpress 2007)



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