

Songs and Studios

Denmark Street and the tunesmiths of British rock

THE POPULAR MUSIC INDUSTRY in the United Kingdom continued to develop in the early Sixties. There were talented individuals at work in all areas: Billy Fury, for example, was far more than just a teenage idol. Not only was he an authentic rocker, who made Adam Faith and Cliff Richard look pallid, he was also an able songwriter who provided much of his own material. Johnny Kidd and the Pirates were producing some of the most aggressive sounds in rock 'n' roll, and their leader co-wrote one of the all-time rock classics, 'Shakin' All Over'.

Helen Shapiro, too, was a gifted singer with a distinctive voice and a home-grown repertoire. Studio technology was advancing and the strange genius of Joe Meek was flowering in a small studio off London's Holloway Road. Rock films showed an improvement over earlier efforts—*The Young Ones* and *Summer Holiday* were excellent examples of the genre—and it is indicative that the trad jazz fad, which seemed to sweep the whole country and was to have important consequences for the future, was a British phenomenon and owed little to the American commercial music business.

The most striking changes were, however, coming in the fields of songwriting and composition. Before the advent of rock 'n' roll, music publishers and songwriters virtually controlled the record business by providing all the songs and dictating, to a degree, who recorded them; they also profited by publishing sheet music for songs which became hits. In their own interests, music publishers were also expected to promote any recordings made of their copyrights and were thus involved from

the conception to the marketing of a particular song in both disc and sheet music form.

This songwriting and publishing fraternity was collectively known as 'Tin Pan Alley' (a term that had originated in the Twenties) and although no such place existed, it was commonly supposed to refer to Denmark Street, a small thoroughfare off London's Charing Cross Road where most of the leading music publishers were based.

Denmark Street pop

Even as late as the mid Sixties, Denmark Street was synonymous with the songwriting business and it was only in the early Seventies, when the majority of artists were writing their own songs and the industry became a vast international concern, that the Denmark Street era came to a close.

The birth of rock 'n' roll made little difference to the British music publishing industry and essentially its method of operation remained the same; as very few of the new breed of rock 'n' rollers actually wrote their own songs, the raw material had to be provided by skilled tunesmiths whose ranks encompassed both older, established songwriters, such as Norrie Paramor and Bunny Lewis, and newcomers like Lionel Bart who discovered they had a talent for writing in the rock idiom.

Bart rapidly made a name for himself by writing the bulk of Tommy Steele's early material in partnership with an actor, Michael Pratt. Born Lionel Beiglert in 1932, Bart was an ex-skiffler who regarded songwriting as an enjoyable sideline to his main vocation, **which was**

Two of Britain's leading songwriters were John Barry (left) and Norrie Paramor. Although neither of them were first generation rock 'n' rollers, they adapted to the music with consummate ease to produce a succession of hits in the late Fifties and early Sixties.

