

Joyful occasions

From the preceding quotations, it will sufficiently appear, 1. That dancing was a religious act, both of the true and also of idol worship. 2. That it was practised exclusively on joyful occasions, such as national festivals or great victories. 3. That it was performed by maidens only. 4. That it was performed usually in the day-time, in the open air, in highways, fields, or groves.

DR LYMAN BEECHAM's tract on dancing published by The American Tract Society, cited in *May Christians Dance?* by Jas. H. Brookes

Somewhere between twelve and thirteen, I formed a gang of three with Janey and Cara. For the first time, I felt like a girl. It was as if I couldn't have been a girl on my own or with my sister but only if I were connected to other girls. Alone I existed more and more in a perpetual state of embarrassment but with my friends I was a girl, no, we were GIRLS and we went forth into the world arms linked, making noise.

Were we trying to get attention or to scare everyone else away? We did not smile, we guffawed. We did not sigh, we shrieked. We were never irritated, we were enraged. When we sang, it was as loudly as we could. It was not meant to be serious or beautiful and while sometimes it might have been to make ourselves feel safe in the dark as we made our way home, we were just as loud in daylight.

If we sang out of trepidation or the need for release, the experience was nonetheless one of joy, as was dancing. I

mirror, as a rehearsal of love. It was preparation for saying 'Look at me' and 'Yes I will' and 'I know how'.

There are times when we need the rocket fuel of singing and dancing to power us through an act of blind faith. Falling in love is one of those times, when we need to move into a phase of enchantment with enough force so that when things cool and the air clears, we are locked into that person, that love. We fall in love and we sing as we walk down the street; we turn up the music and dance.

Michel or Joël, Yannick or Olivier, *Je t'aime et tu dances bien... mais ce soir... il est trop tard...* and it would take days to get home, the long drive and the ferry, the sea we'd cross as the sun pulled away and we wrapped up and sank back into village life and school life and family life, and the first of the last years of it all.

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Separation and contrast

... colour ... exhibits itself by separation and contrast, by commixture and union by augmentation and neutralisation, by communication and dissolution ...

JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE, *A Theory of Colours*

That year, Marc Bolan had a television show called *Marc* and in the first episode, he promised 'a lot of new sounds, a lot of new experiences', before introducing ... Who was it again? He picked up a badge as if to check the name and then waved an arm dismissively in their direction – 'Oh yeah, The Jam.' A man who sported ringlets and a leopardskin catsuit talking in a floppy voice about three boys who buttoned down their collars and measured the turn-ups on their trousers. While Bolan lounged on a fluffy pink throne, The Jam posed rigidly – black suits, white shirts, black ties, black-and-white shoes – in front of a plain black backdrop. Clean-shaven, short-haired and with emphatic estuary accents, The Jam played 'All Around the World' and here was a speeded-up, pared-down sound that I knew could take me further and faster than any boy in his car. Bolan cooed and drawled but The Jam shouted: 'All around the world I've been looking for new...' I was looking for 'new' and it lay in such collisions and detonations and two-minute songs, and in a new kind of colour.

Essex in the 1970s was a world of painted pub signs rather than of neon, of black-and-white television, early closing

time and the corner shop. Children wore school uniform, men wore suits or at least jackets, women wore co-ordinated outfits by day and blocks of colour or floral expanses on special occasions. Many in the village did not leave the house without hat and gloves, whatever the weather. Teenagers were subdued. The shape of their clothes had started changing along with the shape of their music but for most, it happened slowly. We were also so colour deprived that we were impressed by a set of six winking red, yellow and green lights lined up in front of a DJ's deck.

In November, our English teacher took us to see *Othello* at a theatre marooned in a shopping precinct in Basildon New Town, a place of concrete that looked as if it had never quite dried out. It was just another long afternoon to be got through and then, as we were ushered off the bus, I caught sight in a shop window of the cover of the Sex Pistols' *Never Mind the Bollocks*. The offending word had been covered with tape but that didn't thrill me nearly as much as the bubblegum pink and acid yellow of the cover. It was strident, lurid, and magnificently out of place in that damp mall. It buzzed.

The colours of punk, like its rumour, set off a vibration and cracks began to appear – orange socks, blue hair, lime-green nails, pink trousers. Hippies wore orange, pink and lime too, but in shades of flowers and fruit, whereas the punk equivalents were synthetic. Punk colours were primary but not in terms of light theory: that meant a rainbow, which was hippy shit. A rainbow was beautiful, softly graduated and glistering. With punk, it was more as if an old image of the world had been broken down to the four components of colour printing: cyan, magenta, yellow and black. These are dead colours. Alone, they suck in light, but reduced to tiny dots they can be used to build up a full-colour image that

looks realistic. They conspire to play an optical trick, the illusion of glorious Technicolor out of three nasty shades. In punk, colour combinations were dishwasher and vomit. It was a form of aesthetic resistance, a spectrum chosen to remind the world of all that was unnatural or decayed: pink like rubber rather than roses, green like snot rather than leaves.

Punk didn't just change what I listened to and how I dressed. It altered my aesthetic sense completely. This is what music could do: change the shape of the world and my shape within it, how I saw, what I liked and what I wanted to look like. How does this work? You listen to Yes and fall in love with boys with long hair. You listen to T. Rex and find only men in lurex scarves beautiful. Or is it the other way round? That you find you like the look of boys in suits, The Jam say, and so fall in love with their songs? Does it depend who you come across or is there something building up inside you, as I believe there was in me – a half-formed vision needing an external phenomenon, such as music, in order to complete itself?