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What's On E-Book?

By Helen Marketti



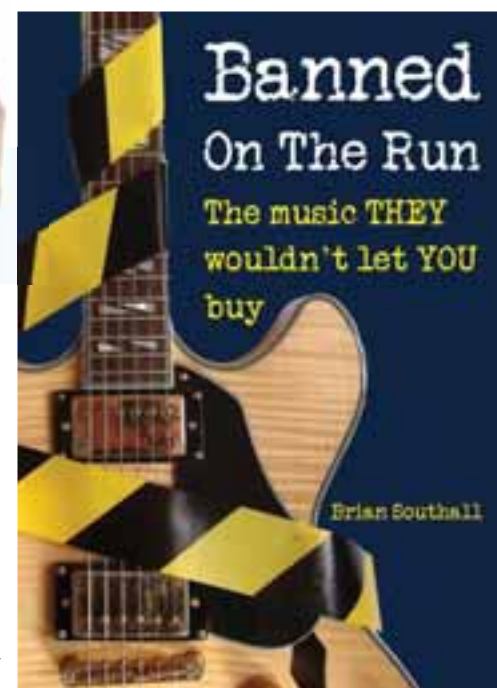
Banned On The Run

The music THEY wouldn't let you buy.

Brian Southall has seen it all during his many impressive years in the music industry. His latest book, *Banned On The Run - the music THEY wouldn't let you buy* (Poppublishing, UK, 2014) is a collection of songs dating back to the 1930s that were banned from airplay and exposure to the public. Lyrics were considered offensive and inappropriate for the listening audience. It is an entertaining E-book as we share in the stories of why many songs were given the axe.

Some examples from the book of well known songs being banned from the radio included The Everly Brothers hit, "Wake Up Little Susie" (1957). It "suggested" that Suzie did more than just sleep over. The Coasters hit "Charlie Brown" (1959) was banned for a short time on the BBC because of the word "spitball". Next, the folk rock trio of Peter, Paul and Mary with their classic "Puff The Magic Dragon" (1963) was on a list of records to be banned by then Vice President, Spiro Agnew. It was not clear if the song was referring to smoking dope or a fun song for children. Agnew stated that the song was "blatant drug culture propoganda." How about the Rolling Stones? "I Can't Get No Satisfaction" (1965) was taken off radio stations because there were complaints that the song was "sexually aggressive."

Brian Southall's music career began as a journalist on the Essex Chronicle back in the 1960s where he interviewed pop groups of that generation. Jobs at Music Business Weekly, Melody Maker and Disc followed before he joined A&M Records as a press officer. He then enjoyed a 15-year career at EMI Records, in press, promotion, marketing, artist development and corporate communications enabled him to work with the likes of Paul McCartney, George Harrison, Queen, Cliff Richard, Pink Floyd, Sex Pistols and The Rolling Stones. In 1989, Brian started working as a consultant to Warner Music International (Madonna, Phil Collins, Simply Red, R.E.M.), the international music retailers HMV and both the BPI (British Phonographic Industry and IFPI (International Federation of the Phonographic Industry).



I was reading your bio and experiences in the music industry as well as the list of books you have previously written. You certainly have firsthand knowledge and the inside scoop on many famous artists! Would you please share a story or two about some of your experiences in having worked with The Rolling Stones, Pink Floyd and members of The Beatles?

*After EMI had sacked the Sex Pistols for swearing and generally behaving badly, the next band we signed were the Rolling Stones (the original bad boys of rock n roll) and I recall Mick Jagger saying at the time that if we were going to sack him every time he said 'f***', then he wasn't going to sign with us!*

I suppose the most famous Pink Floyd story is about the giant plastic pig that was secured to London's Battersea Power Station to promote Floyd's Animals album. Some way or other it escaped and a huge inflatable pig floated off into air traffic corridors near Heathrow and Gatwick airports. When a pilot reported seeing a flying pig on his way into London, the air traffic controllers called EMI and - as head of EMI press office - I took the call. Between my boss and me, we explained what had happened and eventually the pig came to earth in a farmer's field somewhere in south England. The farmer later complained that his cows had 'dried up' and gave no milk for months after being 'scared' by the pig and he tried (in vain) to sue EMI and Floyd for compensation.

My favorite memory of Paul McCartney is when I interviewed him for the EMI book I wrote tracing the history of Abbey Road studios. He suggested that we do the interview in the place where he used to hide during the hectic Beatles days in the sixties and we ended up in the boiler room in the studio's basement sitting on a couple of up turned wooden crates while he told stories of their time in Abbey Road. And the fact that it was winter meant that the boilers were on the highest setting so we sat and sweltered!

I also had the distinction of being mistaken for George Harrison by my own boss. I came into the EMI building in Manchester Square with George around 1975 and when he went to the bathroom I carried on up the stairs to the first floor (where the Beatles first UK LP sleeve photo was taken) where I was met by the company's MD who looking at the long hair and the beard thought I was George. He shook my hand and welcomed me to the building and when I explained to him (he was Dutch!) that I was Brian Southall and was head of press for his record company; he simply said 'good' and walked off. When I then discovered that the same MD was going to the same meeting as George and I, I excused myself as the idea of the EMI boss thinking I was George and that George was me would have been confusing and embarrassing. When I told George the story later he thought it was hilarious and suggested I go on the road as his double.

Do you think as far back as the 1930s that artists were pushing the envelope to see what they could get away with or were they just focusing on their own music?

I think that back then artists were primarily focusing on their music and just put down on record what they performed live without much concern for radio play or record sales. These were the early days of radio while live music shows - in UK music hall, US vaudeville or in clubs and bars - were enormously popular and had few if any restrictions regarding content.

Now that we are in 2014, is music even more expressive? Have we evolved further with the times or is it still conservative?

I think music has always been expressive - it's just that times change and people's acceptance of lyrics, artwork and stage antics changes along the way. There will always be things in music which quite rightly cause offence – racism, sexism, violence, religious bigotry etc – but in general much of the stuff that was banned over the past 40 to 50 years wouldn't raise an eyebrow in these days of the internet.

In regards to the songs that were banned for one reason or another, do you think it was more of the personal opinions of the “authority figures” or were they truly trying to “protect” the listening audience?

It was a bit of both although some of the ‘authority figures’ in broadcasting or politics did get carried away with their own personal issues over lyrics and content. Certainly, in the UK something like the BBC – a national broadcasting network – did believe that part of its remit was to protect the public from moral outrage but as time went by, they were in the habit of making a laughing stock of themselves. Many of the decisions taken by broadcasters or even retailers were based on the personal concerns or issues of the people in charge with little or no regard for the views of their customers.

What about the songs, “Call Me” by Blondie and “My Sharona” by The Knack? Would those songs be considered offensive and sending the “wrong message”?

I worked at EMI/Capitol when we put out My Sharona and I have to say that nobody ever expressed any concern about lyrics such “always get it up for the touch of a younger hand” or “burning down the length of my thigh” – and that includes radio who played the hell out of it. The biggest controversy was of course whether The Knack were The Beatles and I think that rather diverted attention away from the song itself.

I never really understood why anybody had any concerns about Call Me by Blondie – a song written by a woman about a ‘call boy’ for a movie entitled American Gigolo - which sort of said it all. What was it that upset people – the idea that someone could ring and book the man?

What sparked interest in putting the book together?

A general and probably unhealthy interest in pop and rock music going back over 60 years. I collected stories in my head – and fortunately, I have a good memory – and thought it might be fun to put them down on paper for people to hopefully enjoy. It's not meant to be a deep social analysis of the subject – just a casual romp through some entertaining, bizarre, humorous and occasionally worrying moments in pop music history that people might have missed or forgotten about.

Are there any new projects in the works?

I am working on a couple of new books for next year – titles remain a secret for now – but I do have a new title out next month called From Me To You, which looks at: 1 & 2) The songs The Beatles ‘covered’ on record and on stage that were not written by group members. 3) A run through the songs The Beatles wrote but never recorded and ‘gave away’. 4) A final section which is a personal look at 25 cover versions of songs written by The Beatles.

Banned On The Run - the music THEY wouldn't let you buy is exclusively published as an e-book by Poppublishing and is available on Amazon.com for \$6.61.

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