

Scottish Group 27 January 2018

Ken Jobling's talk started with a warning: some records were somewhat risqué and “not particularly ‘PC’ these days”, matching his title with the first item to be played|: **Don't pretend to be innocent**. This philosophy was outlined in Old Etonian style by Ronald Frankau on a 1933 Parlophone, lecturing young ladies about to leave school for “the outside world.” Pandering to a wider audience, Frankau decried hypocrisy and advocated ‘sympathy’ and ‘sophistication’, even to the extent of telling ‘worse’ blue jokes to men and making them “think you're hot.” Evidently *some* young ladies took his advice...

In 1920s mode, we were treated to Dolly Kay questioning ‘fairy-tale’ innocence: *How Could Red Riding-Hood* “have been so very good and keep the wolf from the door” while wandering in the woods dressed in bright red? Similarly, Lily Lapidus on a *very* loud Parlophone claimed (*Is There Anything Wrong In That?*) not to be able to tell the bad from the good – whilst detailing various questionable encounters with men (“what's ‘It?’”). American cabaret artists Endor and Farrell in *Where's the girl?* (Columbia) went so far as to claim that “goodness was only a fad” and “it's so much fun to be bad.”

The Blues proved to be more direct, with food imagery virtually synonymous with sex. And so Rosa Henderson (on a 1924 Brunswick) claiming that *I'm a Good Gal* was somehow incompatible with needing a “meal.” By 1929, even Bessie Smith was reduced to telling us *I'm Wild About That Thing* (whatever That was). Worse still, ‘Hunter & Jenkins’ (a black husband and wife team) argued over getting any of her *Lollypop* and Lil Anderson simply said to *Press My Button* and “give my bell a ring.”

The 1930s English girls were hardly more genteel: Dawn Davis on Decca told us that her boy “thinks the same as me” as to what they get up to in various situations, getting drunk or when someone turns out the lights at a party: “If I'm not good, I do take care – *And So Does He.*” Betty Bolton (Imperial) apparently harkened back to music-hall humour with *She Jumped On Her Pushbike*; but with “only” two punctures, helpful men armed with spanners and bicycle pumps, and strangers grabbing her handlebars, she was bound to have a tumble...

Elsie Carlisle was even more blatant, with vocabulary based around weaponry and army tactics. It's worth quoting *The Gramophone* (June 1930, p.32): “As for Elsie Carlisle's *Man o' War* (Dominion C307, 1s. 6d.) she ought not to have done it; but since she did, and it's so cheap – well, that's the number of the record.”

Lastly, we had some ‘party’ records, a particularly American fad from 1930s to 1950s, often relying on clever word play, with *Sin-Tax* from Frances Maddox, and the anonymous *Virgin-ia's Downfall* on the Risque label (*sic*) – she was “named Virgin for short, but not for very long.” The ‘star’ of this section was Ruth Wallis on her own label with *The Pistol Song* from around 1953 – not only clever word play (“I sawed off his barrel...”), but *excellent* music in ‘country and western’ style.

To round things off, George Formby sang *The Window Cleaner (No.2)* – just more of ‘the usual’ – and the audience showed their appreciation of Ken's fascinating (and instructive) survey.

Peter Adamson