Associated-Rediffusion: The UK's First Groundbreaking TV Franchise

Comedy 1: Ronnie Barker and the Pythons
+ intro by season curator Dick Fiddy
Tue 2 Sep 18:15
Drama 1: The Entertaining Mr Orton
Sun 7 Sep 17:25
Comedy 2: The Fred Shows
Fri 12 Sep 18:10
Drama 2: Harold Pinter
Sat 13 Sep 17:30
The Lost World of Children's Programming
+ intro by Elinor Groom, Curator of Television
Tue 16 Sep 18:20
Drama 3:
The Classics at Associated-Rediffusion
Sat 20 Sep 14:15
Object Z + intro by writer Jon Dear
Sun 21 Sep 14:35
Captive Cinema + intro by Lisa Kerrigan, Senior Curator of Television
Tue 23 Sep 18:20
Ready Steady Go!
Fri 26 Sep 18:00
Missing Believed Wiped: Associated-Rediffusion Special
Sat 27 Sep 12:15
The Precious Things – Oddities and Rarities from the BFI National Archive
Sat 27 Sep 15:20
Tackling Racism + intro by Chantelle Lavel Boyea, BFI Assistant Curator of Television
Fri 3 Oct 18:10

The Associated-Rediffusion collection is preserved in the BFI National Archive

With thanks to Archbuild

With thanks to
BFI colleagues Xavier Pillai, Lisa Kerrigan, Chantelle Lavel Boyea and Elinor Groom

The Associated-Redifffusion season has been made possible with help from colleagues from across the BFI including the BFI National Archive; the Rights and Contracts Department, the Events Department, the Cinemas Office and The Content Remastering Team

Please note that some of the programmes in this season contain racist language, attitudes and other content that reflect the views prevalent in its time, but will likely cause offence today (as they did then). For specific content warnings, please visit **bfi.org.uk/whatson**

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Ready Steady Go!

In the early 1960s, as pop music became the vanguard of a newly developing and revolutionary artistic and cultural movement, television producers began to tackle the task of inventing a format to cover the emerging scene in a 'hip' and 'happening' way. ABC Television made a brave stab with *Thank Your Lucky Stars* (1961-66) but it was with *Ready Steady Go!*, an intoxicating blend of performances (both mimed and live), celebrity interviews, mime competitions and dance demonstrations, that British TV got its first authentic 1960s pop show – one the kids were keen to watch.

The show's main host may have been the avuncular Keith Fordyce (a veteran of Radio Luxembourg in the 1950s who had also presented *Thank Your Lucky Stars*) but with the arrival of co-presenter Cathy McGowan – a pretty, mini-skirted ingénue, who had answered an ad to become a teenage adviser on the show – the series found its true face and one with which the watching pop fans could identify.

In its prime the Friday night series really lived up to its catchphrase 'The Weekend Starts Here', with an irresistible mix of the hottest stars from both sides of the Atlantic. Initially running 30 minutes, the series soon switched to a 50-minute slot and gradually discouraged acts from miming, hoping to up the ante with the excitement of live performance.

The ramshackle nature of the production – with cameras in shot, dancers gathered close to the acts and performances and interviews taking place in different areas of the studio – gave it a chaotic but appealing style. Musical guests were constantly from the top range and reflected the individual musical tastes of the production crew as much as chart position or new release status.

The series coincided with, and exploited, the tremendous explosion of British pop talent which took the world by storm. Surviving footage provides a priceless archive of some memorable moments and important performances from some of the greatest stars of the day. In the 1980s, the rights to tapes of the series were acquired by pop artist-turned-entrepreneur, Dave Clark.

Dick Fiddy, BFI Screenonline

Francis Hitching (editor of Musical Programmes at Rediffusion) on 'Ready Steady Go!'

The phenomenon about those early days of *Ready Steady Go!*, was not the teenagers who enjoyed it, but the adults. They, used to write and telephone in their hundreds: protesting, inquiring, congratulating. If there was one word to describe their reaction, it was bafflement. They simply couldn't believe their eyes.

RSG! quickly became half a musical programme, half a weekly documentary. It was the first pop programme to show teenagers as they really were, acne and all. The reason for its early runaway success (one week it had a rating in the sixties, easily a record for the slot) was that it happened at a time when teenagers were more curious, more inventive, more interesting, more clanish, and more independent than ever before. Their clothes, their dancing and their music all showed this. And the outside world looked on bewildered, as explorers at a complex initiation/fertility rite.

Pre-*RSG!* was pre-jerk, pre-Rolling Stones, and pre-Carnaby Street. I remember the first night I went out hunting for audience dancers, going into a club and realising with a shock that they weren't doing the twist. The Rolling Stones I knew about already – I had been at the Richmond Jazz Festival earlier in the year when a handful of people watched the supposed main attraction, Acker Bilk, while simultaneously police and officials tried desperately to control an audience of thousands crammed into the Stones marquee. The new fashions were there for anybody to see – provided they looked at teenagers, not film stars.

These three elements became the mixture which exploded every Friday evening, forcing themselves into national thinking. In its early stages, the teenage attitude represented a genuine popular folk movement, confined not by class but by age. At its best, it was a rejection of commercialism and paternalism; even at its worst it had the flavour of home-made bread.

The criticisms made at the time by adults now sound absurd. 'It isn't music'. 'All that long, dirty hair'. 'They don't even dance together'. 'I can't tell one song from another'. 'I wouldn't let my daughter marry one'. In most cases, the opposite of the criticisms was the truth.

For the first time this century Britain had popular music of its own – derived, it is true, from urban American blues, but still incomparably better than the sentimental product of Denmark Street (remember 'Where Will the Baby's Dimple Be?'). As for the hair, criticism would have been better directed against dandyism than dirt. And does anybody still seriously suggest that the traditional lot are as expressive as Sandie Serjeant?

More disciplined, yes; more creative, no. It was probably this aspect that most riled adults – that teenagers could happily and successfully get along without the authority of anyone older. Elkan Allan, who as executive producer devised and master-minded the programme, enthusiastically endorsed this. Apart from myself, who was regarded as somewhere between an elderly brother and a youngish uncle, everybody on the production team had to be more or less in their teens. What's more they had to work as a team and keep control of the programme's content. What matter if Cathy McGowan fluffed her lines: to a teenager she was one of Us, not Them. Meanwhile Vicki Wickham, who started on the programme as my secretary and became the editor, gradually developed into a kind of conscience for the pop world. Earlier than anyone, she identified the source of the best of current pop, and held this up as the example which every record producer had to match.

Stories of the Beatles' retirement were published the same week as the announcement of the end of *Ready Steady Go!* The coincidence should signify something. The end of an era, perhaps. More likely, it's just that the novelty has worn off. Teenagers don't dance, dress or sing less interestingly than they did in 1963. But the adults have joined the game.

From *Fusion*, the house magazine of Rediffusion – number 45, Christmas 1966