

IN THE past few years, the BBC has cited as "unsuitable for broadcasting" a string of records. Yet one of the very latest to be banned — McCartney's "Irish" protest by his Wings group — is already climbing the MM chart.

And, paradoxically, the BBC admit that if it made No 1 in their chart it would be rated as such. Currently it is at No 19 in the BBC chart, and No 23 in the MM Pop 30.

But even if the public buy it in millions, it will still not be played by the BBC! Other hit records have suffered a similar fate. "A Day In The Life" — a track from the Beatles' Sgt Pepper album (No. 1 in the BBC chart and in the MM album chart) was banned. And so was Jane Birkin and Serge Gainsbourg's "Je T'aime" (again a No. 1 in the BBC chart).

And in his Pick of the Pops rundown on Radio One, Alan Freeman even refuses to mention the title of

The BBC's ban on Wings' "Give Ireland Back To The Irish" and McGuinness Flint's "Let The People Go" has rekindled the whole question of record censorship by a public corporation.

What right has the BBC to censor records? Should millions be denied the chance to hear records which, in many cases, hit the chart? The MM asked the musicians to comment — and gets an official reply from the BBC.

the McCartney single, simply referring to "a song by a group called Wings."

Max Romeo's "Wet Dream" (which again entered the BBC chart — it reached No. 16) was axed. And so was "We Love The Pirates," by the Roaring Sixties group. This came on the scene around the time the Government had clamped down on the pirate ships. It did not make the BBC chart, however.

But the BBC has not banned "The Miner's Song" by John and City Lights — a song sympathetic to the miners' cause; neither has it banned "Belfast '71" by Allan Taylor.

The Frankie Howard and June Whitfield version of "Je T'aime" was banned. But the original Jane Birkin version was played by the BBC over Jimmy Savile's Speakeasy programme. The BBC explains that this was a special case, as it involved a discussion programme.

"George Jackson," by Bob Dylan, was not banned — even though it contains the word "shit." But it was not played on the Jimmy Young show or on Junior Choice. It was, however, played by other BBC deejays.

Says BBC publicity officer Rodney Collins: "We did not sleep out the word 'shit' — we would not tamper with a record."

Why ban "Give Ireland Back To The Irish" and

records take a definite political standpoint. "Belfast '71" merely comments on the sadness of the Irish situation."

BUT THE BBC is not the only organisation to ban songs. "Let The People Go" was banned by Radio Luxembourg. And the New Seekers' No. 1 smash, "I'd Like To Teach The World To Sing" was banned by ITV but NOT by the BBC.

Comments Keith Potger, who formed the New Seekers: "The song was banned by ITV because it was originally used for a Coca-Cola advert. It seems rather a strange anomaly that the BBC, which bans advertising, should play it, yet the song was not allowed to be played by ITV."

On the question of censorship in general, Keith adds: "I think it's wrong. I feel records have developed into an art form, and any tendency of this nature (banning) is probably a little old now. It's not really moving with the position of records in society and the music industry as a whole."

Other artists echo Keith's

attitude. The Melody Maker asked top artists their views on censorship. Here's a comprehensive round-up of their considered opinions:

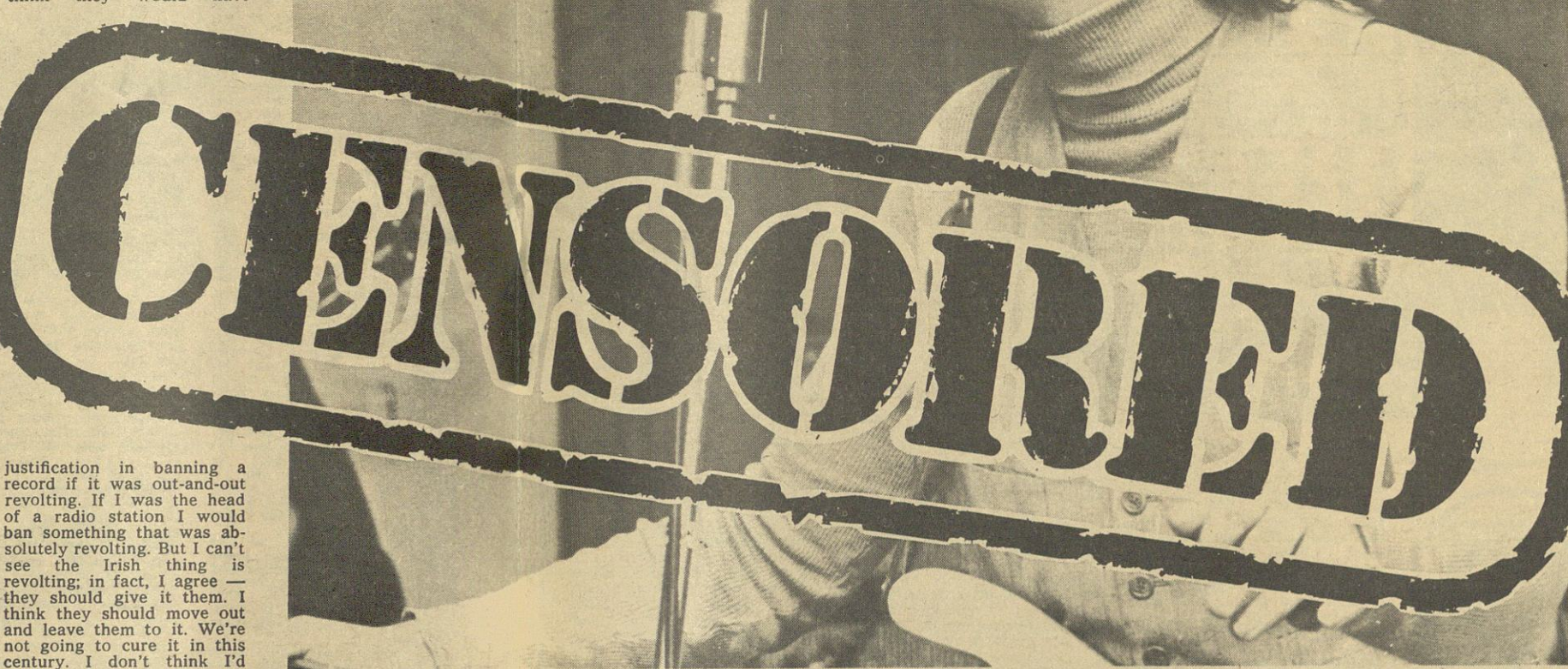
**TOM McGUINNESS:** I find it very hard to talk about censorship. I'm sure if I was a fascist dictator, there would be certain things I would censor. It's symptomatic of everybody that they think there are some things not everybody should know about. I know that sometimes censorship is necessary, even though I know it is an evil, and can be counter-productive. I can understand people who feel others need protecting, when they say you shouldn't read that book or see that film. I do see that the violent films being made could be harmful. And you only have to look at the Moors Murder case to know that there was somebody who came under the influence of reading the Marquis de Sade. I hate the idea of censorship, but I can understand the situation, that for example, the BBC find themselves in. I don't really have any question to put to them, because I know why they do it. I'm in no way surprised when they ban a record. I have nothing against the BBC because it is too big, too amorphous, too vague.

**ELTON JOHN:** I'm just against any type of censorship — against anybody who wants to tell me what I can and cannot hear. What more is there to say? There is no particular question I would want to put to the BBC when they are still banning for instance, The Beatles' "A Day In The Life." As far as the Wings single is concerned I doubt if it would have got many plays in any case, whether or not it is political. It just does not happen to be a very good record.

**KENNY EVERETT:** I've always thought the merits of any record are in

the tune and in the presentation of the whole record — not particularly in the words. The last record they banned when I was around was the Sgt Pepper thing, "A Day In The Life." It was a great tune and very well done, but they objected about "I'd like to turn you on."

Then about four months later there were a million records with that in and they just let them all be played. So in about six months there will be thousands of Irish records on the radio. It seems a little bit stupid to me — it draws attention to the record. I think they would have



every conceivable way and got absolutely nowhere. So I've given up. And they gave me up. So there you go.

**GEORGE MELLY:** I'm not absolutely in favour of broadcasting lots of heavy underground records with four-letter words in them at any one time. The reason is that people just have the radio on, they leave it on, and many of them feel assaulted by hearing four-letter words without wanting to. And I don't see why they should have to suffer, really. I am against general censorship but broadcasting is rather a special case. Because then you choose a record to buy, or go into a cinema, open a book or even go to a pop concert, you presumably know what you're doing. It's a conscious choice. I do think, though, that there should be an entirely unrestricted programme, probably late at night, in which total verbal freedom in both conversation and song should prevail. My point is simply that it's a question of invasion of privacy — shouting at people at 10.30 in the morning in their homes — although obviously the limits of what's acceptable are moving all the time. On the other hand

political censorship — which is what the banning of the McCartney record is about — is something I totally oppose, particularly as it seems so one-sided. For instance, there was no banning of that horrible record about the Green Berets or the one about the deck of cards. Personally I found those extremely offensive, but I wouldn't ask for them to be banned.

**NOEL MURPHY:** It doesn't surprise me in the slightest. It's the same crowd of bullies that are trying to bring in the Night Assemblies Bill. On the brighter side the very fact that they've banned a record has probably done it some good as far as publicity. Obviously it's a directive from the government, who want to have as much say as possible in broadcasting. It's only the start of a big brother."

**JOHN MUMFORD** (Ashton Gardner and Dyke): It's difficult to decide what's censorship and what's editing. To take a kind of parallel, I often wonder how

political censorship is exercised by newspapers on the readers' letters they print. They must do an awful lot of editing because of lack of space or suitability. The BBC must have a similar problem, someone who "edit" these recordings which aren't considered suitable. But whereas if one newspaper won't air your views it's possible another will. So there's an alternative. However, what is no alternative to the BBC. If your record is censored or edited from the airways, there's no one else to go to.

**SONJA KRISTINA** (Curved Vain): I think it's an important release such as McCartney's seems to be a waste of time as it gives every record media more reason to publicise the record, so any ban is defeating its own object. I'd like to know who draws the line as to what we hear, who they represent and just what they are so afraid of.

**AL STEWART:** I think all censorship is morally wrong. All monopolies are morally wrong and the BBC

records I probably wouldn't want played, especially those without artistic merit that are just crude, but this puts me on dangerous territory. To censor on grounds of taste is just as bad as to censor on grounds of morality or politics.

**IAN HUNTER** (Mott The Hoople): The BBC seem more than a little uninformed in the records they ban. I mean, banning "Leap Up And Down (Wave Your Knickers In The Air)" was total insanity. And the BBC still call their record department the Gramophone Department. They brainwash people morning, noon and night with rubbish. That's just as bad as political records.

**BRIAN CONNOLLY** (Sweet): I feel that the play ban is severe as neither the McGuinness Flint nor the Wings records are too inflammatory. Any way, in the case of Wings, everyone is buying it and listening to it in the clubs. If the BBC feel that any record would be unsuitable for the kids to hear over the radio (for example, "Je T'aime" and "Give Ireland Back To The Irish") and generally unsuitable for daytime playing, perhaps they could be everyone needs them. Only two of our records have been misses — the two for which we didn't have TV exposure!

The trouble is lack of competition. In America, if one TV company didn't like what we were doing, we could simply drive down the road to another station.

**RAY DORSET** (Mungo Jerry): I think the BBC are pretty liberal really. People can talk about almost anything they like on programmes. You even get four-letter words on "Woman's Hour." But it's bad for the music business when they ban records simply because they think they might be a bad influence on the public. They are a monopoly, so you just have to pander to their requirements.

**ROY WOOD:** It's like a voice of the people. Question: How long has the BBC held out before the consensus of opinion forces them into a position where they have no say at all.

A final pithy comment on the BBC's censorship of McGuinness-Flint's "Let The People Go" comes from the Daily Telegraph's satirist, Peter Simple.

In his Way Of The World column, Simple writes: "Is it just possible that the BBC has banned this song not so much for its alleged subversiveness as for its matchless irony, inanity and feebleness? It would be nice to think so."

What will happen, incidentally, to minds which are fed in youth on this kind of moronic trash?"

air their point of view. In point of fact, the BBC is probably afraid of its being a hit. Everyone knows it's unreasonable to ban these records; the BBC is symptomatic of a repressive force. It's a destructive measure with political implications. There's something fundamentally dishonest about the BBC.

**VICTOR BROX** (formerly with Aynsley Dunbar and John Mayall): Though totally opposed to any sort of censorship, I feel that the BBC could certainly ban discs that lack taste, but only from a musical standpoint. They should never discriminate against a disc just because of its philosophical contents. When a disc is banned, I don't feel much sympathy with the artist if (a) the lyrics are specifically political in intent, and (b) the music is impoverished. But before imposing any such censorship the BBC should make a serious attempt to understand the motives of the artist. Just because an artist is critical of the Establishment is not a valid enough reason for censoring him.

**ROY WOOD** (Move and ELO): It's an incredibly bad thing because the BBC is so powerful that everyone needs them. Only two of our records have been misses — the two for which we didn't have TV exposure!

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JANE BIRKIN:  
'Je T'aime'



MAX ROMEO  
'Wet Dream'



FRANKIE HOWARD  
'Je T'aime'



McGUINNESS FLINT  
'Let The People Go'



BEATLES  
'Day In The Life'

## What the BBC say...

AND what is the BBC's answer to this pretty imposing catalogue of opinions and indictments from some of the country's top names. Some who have suffered BBC censorship themselves.

The Melody Maker put a summary of the points raised to the BBC head of Radio One, Vark White. Here are his replies to seven specific questions:

1) On what grounds does the BBC consider a record unsuitable for broadcasting?

There are innumerable grounds. Each case has to be judged on its merits. What is obscene? I do not know — the law changes every day. What is drug phraseology? As soon as you think you've learned one set of terms, you find there's a new set.

2) Who decides to ban a record. Or, to use the BBC phrase, determine it is "unsuitable for broadcasting?" Is it one man or a committee?

That is not answerable as a straightforward answer. It depends on the record. Supposing a record came out with a whole string of four-letter words — nobody would ask anybody; no producer would play it. It entirely depends on the context of the records. Some records go right up to the managing director. Some go no further than Douglas Muggieridge as the controller (of Radio One and Two). Some we don't even put up to Douglas Muggieridge. Some the producers don't even refer to us, so obvious.

3) How does the BBC account for the apparent inconsistency in banning "A Day In The Life" (from the Beatles Sgt. Pepper LP) yet let other versions be played later?

As far as I know that's not the case. Instrumental versions, perhaps? I don't know of any other version being played. I'm not prepared to say categorically that none has, but I'm not aware of any.

4) It's perfectly valid as you say to ban records with offensive words — mentions of drugs, but some people have put up the point that if you are going to ban these, shouldn't you by the same token

ban records with violent themes, like the "Bonnie And Clyde" theme?

There again, each record has to be judged on its merits. I think I'm right in saying that there have been records that haven't been played on those grounds; "Bonnie And Clyde" certainly was not one, and I think probably the answer to that one is that if, as was the case with "Bonnie And Clyde," the theme was not one, violent though the theme may have been, a moral emerged in the end that it doesn't actually praise violence for its own sake, one would let it go through on the grounds that it had a moral tale to tell. If it was a record that simply praised violence for its own sake, one would probably refuse to play it.

On the subsidiary question of records with a religious theme, Mark White commented: In the past, of course, certain songs with religious themes have been banned. It's going back a bit, but I think there was a song recorded, I think, by David Whitfield in the late or middle 'fifties; I'm pretty sure there have been songs banned on those grounds. I think on the question of bad taste. But it's a long time ago. I can't think of a record with a religious theme that has been banned within the last

five or 10 years. If somebody says the BBC bans this, it bans that, it bans the other but it never bans a song with a religious theme and cases where records which have been if you like — for want of a better word — banned — in general programmes have been permitted to be broadcast in what you call late-night programmes, i.e., Sounds of the 70s. No matter how good an idea it seemed to be, we couldn't involve ourselves in any of these political records. We are simply not allowed to present a one-sided case in the form of lyrics on a record or discussion in a studio. [A discussion programme] is not the business of Radio One or Radio Two. If anybody thinks it is and it is a good idea then they should suggest it to Radio Four.

7) Why was Mungo Jerry's "Have A Whiff On Me" allowed to be broadcast live when there was a ban on it?

It was an entire mistake that the live broadcast ever got through. They did do it in a session; the producer for some reason claimed he was not aware of the ban, and the thing went on the air on that one live broadcast. That was entirely a mistake on our part — on the part of the producer.

6) Would it not be possible to allow a late-night spot for "controversial" records — a spot where artists might also be able to ventilate controversial views they put on record.

It is both a monopoly and it imposes a form of arbitrary censorship, which in the long run does more damage than good to the minds of its listeners. Pointlessness, in the light of history, will remain pointless as great ness will out. And no mortal hand will ever gainsay it.

**IAN CARR:** There is a fantastic double-think going on at the moment. For instance Heath talks about violence and deplores it, and says any more signs of it will be stopped at once — by violent means of course.

When it is sanctioned by the Establishment violence becomes permissible; when it is not, they get very heated and take up moral attitudes about it. Ireland is a perfect example in that violence is being used by the Establishment and is initiating other violence. That's what I think. I'm against political censorship. It nearly always defeats its own ends because it results in greater publicity for the things that are censored. Obviously this is a difficult subject. So far as broadcasting goes, there are