

RECORD AND FILM PRODUCER JOE BOYD was born in Boston in 1942 and graduated from Harvard in 1964. He went on to produce Pink Floyd, Nick Drake, Fairport Convention, REM and many others. He produced the documentary *Jimi Hendrix* and the film *Scandal*. In 1980 he started Hannibal Records and ran it for 20 years.

Joe Boyd lives in London. His podcast, 'Joe Boyd's A-Z', and links to his talks and radio shows can be found at www.joeboyd.co.uk. He is currently working on a book about 'world music'.

White Bicycles received the 2007 Deems Taylor 'Music Book of the Year' award and has been published in seven foreign-language editions.

praise for *White Bicycles*

'As a memoir of the enchanted '60s, *White Bicycles* is among the elite. It isn't just that Boyd was among the era's movers and shakers, he has a rare recall of events... and a fluid, engaging style. The book bristles with evocative anecdotes... exhilarating' *Observer Music Monthly*

'One of the most lucid and insightful music autobiographies I've read' Michel Faber, *Guardian*

'Terrific... This engaging and readable book is an important addition to the history of its time' Hanif Kureishi, *New Statesman*

'A rock memoir that shuns the usual '60s clichés... while providing insightful character studies of Brit-folk's future stars... refreshing and cleverly observed' *Uncut*

'Among the musical anecdotes are thoughtful observations on the era... Boyd remains a true believer, for whom it was a joy to have been alive in that permissive dawn. At 40 years' distance, his prose still conveys the hues of the sunrise with startling vividness' Nigel Williamson, *The Times*

'Impossible to put down' Q

'Boyd is one of that select group of rock luminaries, like John Peel, or the American producer Rick Rubin, who didn't have to pick up a guitar to shape the evolution of entire genres of music. And this book is the perfect literary echo of a lifetime's subtle facilitation... Boyd's pages abound with astute observations and fascinating personal detail... a transport of delight'
Independent on Sunday

'A vivid eye-witness account... pulses with the mad enthusiasms of its period and its author' Robert Sandall, *Sunday Times*

'Boyd's account far exceeds the breadth of most rose-tinted ruminations... detailed and lucid... A wise, thoughtful and engrossing account, *White Bicycles* is one of the best 1960s essays of recent years' *Scotsman*

'Boyd writes in a dry, assured style about remarkable times, and he achieves the goal of any music book: to make the reader want to check out the music he writes about' Will Hodgkinson, *Guardian Guide*

'Reading Boyd's cracking account of the Sixties, you wonder if his life since hasn't been one long disappointment... It's a colourful story, beautifully told... You are left relieved that such a central figure wrote this exceptional memoir'
Mark Ellen, *Observer*

'A fascinating book overflowing with entertaining and insightful musical anecdotes' *Morning Star*

'Compulsive quirky detail, rare sanity and razor sharp recall... puts it in the same bracket as Simon Napier Bell's *Black Vinyl* *White Powder* or Julian Cope's *Head On*. A delight' *The List*

'Packed full of funny, telling anecdotes and wry, insightful observation, it takes us on a fantastic musical adventure'
fRoots

Joe Boyd

White Bicycles

MAKING MUSIC IN THE 1960s

With a new foreword by Hanif Kureishi



A complete catalogue record for this book can be obtained from the British Library on request

The right of Joe Boyd to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

Copyright © 2006 Joe Boyd
Foreword copyright © 2017 Hanif Kureishi

First published in 2006 by Serpent's Tail
First published in this Classics edition in 2017 by Serpent's Tail,
an imprint of Profile Books Ltd
3 Holford Yard
Bevin Way
London WC1X 9HD
www.serpentstail.com

The cover photograph was taken at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival by Jim Floyd and includes Joe Boyd (hat), Tom Rush, Geoff and Maria Muldaur, and Eric Anderson (back of head above Maria).

The candy-stripe script is from the first UFO poster in January of 1967 by Hapshash & The Coloured Coat (Nigel Waymouth and Michael English).

Designed and typeset by sue@lambledesign.demon.co.uk

Printed by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Coydon CRO 4YY

ISBN 978 1 78125 794 4

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

acknowledgements

MANY FRIENDS HAVE GIVEN ME support, encouragement and advice. I owe a huge debt in particular to Lucy Bailey, who edited the final drafts with unerring eye and whose unsparing critiques improved it immeasurably. The book's shape and scope are largely the result of advice from Melissa North and Pierre Hodgson, for which I am very grateful. After some early setbacks, Deborah Rogers' belief and support gave me the energy to stick with it. A thoughtful response to the first draft from Rose Simpson made it clear what I needed to improve in the second. The musicians and colleagues without whom there would be no story to tell will, I trust, find their acknowledgements in the text that follows.

*Saturday sun came early one morning
In a sky so clear and blue
Saturday sun came without warning
So no one knew what to do.
Saturday sun brought people and faces
That didn't seem much in their day
But when I remembered those people and places
They were really too good in their way.
In their way
In their way
Saturday sun won't come and see me today.*

*Think about stories with reason and rhyme
Circling through your brain.
And think about people in their season and time
Returning again and again
And again
And again
And Saturday's sun has turned to Sunday's rain.*

*So Sunday sat in the Saturday sun
And wept for a day gone by.*

Nick Drake

foreword

HANIF KUREISHI

THE KIDS WHO DISCOVERED black music, sexual freedom, dissent and feminism in the 1960s are the people who have been running the West until recently. If anyone asks why we should continue to pay attention to what a bunch of hippies did during a period as idealised and mythologized as the 1960s, it is because the former heads have become the Headmasters running a failing school. Soon they will be entirely replaced. Perhaps, if we look hard enough, we will learn how the great corruption occurred and what has been lost.

When it comes to music, Joe Boyd has lived through a good deal of the most lively and original stuff. His story is almost exemplary and he knows how to make it sound like a lot of fun, declaring early in *White Bicycles* that his ambition is not to be a star or even a singer, but a 'record producer'. And, despite what appears to be a sweet and intelligent nature, he isn't someone who can bear not to follow their passion. He was there. He made things happen.

After some luck in avoiding the Vietnam draft, Boyd travels across America with forgotten, usually blind, black musicians, around the dangerous time of de-segregation. Then Bob Dylan fucks his girlfriend, and Boyd works at the 1965 Newport Jazz and Folk festivals, where Dylan plays

'Like A Rolling Stone' accompanied by Al Kooper, Mike Bloomfield and the Butterfield Blues Band. Alan Lomax orders the sound to be turned down; Pete Seeger walks away, broken. Following this brilliantly described, almost pastoral episode, everything changes in music. Folk and white pop, now mixed with blues, give way to the rawer and weirder sounds of the experimental 1960s, and 'protest' music, in the 1970s, would turn into punk and the accurate prediction of 'no future'. Soon there would be no more possibility or utopian ideas.

Having moved to London, where he suspects the new action might be, Boyd gets involved with the UFO, one of the first 'superclubs', based in a former low-ceilinged ballroom in the Tottenham Court Road. The Pink Floyd were the house band. Boyd and his freaky friends put on Arthur Brown, The Move, and the Bonzo Dog Doodah Band. Hendrix, McCartney, and Christine Keeler all attended. When the club shifted to the Roundhouse, which was a bigger space, he was responsible for flying Arthur Brown, with his hair on fire, across the venue and over the amazed crowd.

Boyd produced the Pink Floyd's first single, 'Arnold Layne', written by the-soon-to-go-mad Syd Barrett, which got into the Top Twenty despite a BBC ban for 'indecent lyrics'. But Boyd's musical preferences were not really for psychedelia. 'Why does England hate its own folk music?' he asks. 'In England, the mere thought of a Morris Dance team or an unaccompanied ballad singer sends more natives running for cover.'

Boyd went to some trouble to make the Incredible String Band and Fairport Convention as significant for the public as they were for him. Later he produces Sandy Denny and Nick Drake. Boyd writes eloquently about how the nature of recording has altered, and how it has changed

music. Not that it wasn't difficult to sell records then, before the underground became the mainstream. Boyd, along with other important innovators like the white Jamaican Chris Blackwell at Island Records, struggled to square the circle of keeping afloat financially while doing good work. Boyd just about did both, and for longer than most.

Unlike, say, Greil Marcus or Nik Cohn, Joe Boyd isn't an analyst of this great renaissance but rather a story-teller with an eye for detail, and as pleasantly gossipy and informative as any memoirist of this extraordinary time ought to be. He was a witness, and although he liked acid and dope, he was only 'a modest consumer' of drugs, and has an excellent recall of the details.

White Bicycles is an important addition to the history of its time. There's enough 'who-was-fucking-who', but Boyd is never cruel or even intrusive, and more importantly he describes what it was like to be involved in a period which shaped our present world.

Boyd describes an internationalist era when people were less hyper-excited and frantic than they have to be now. Drugs were used to explore new mental states rather than increase one's ability to work and 'perform'. Culture, politics and one's personal life overlapped. You could dance to the good tunes, even as music in particular became an outlet for conflict, where important things like patriarchy, imperialism and conservatism were argued over. There was a collective, if not generational sense. There was less competitive aggression and more dreaminess, drift and collaboration; more talk, experimentation and creativity.

It all opened out. Unlike now, young people could realistically imagine a better time which they worked to formulate. Universities were crucibles of ideas. New forms of relationships were discovered: sexual, familial. These are the people who did capitalism a remarkable favour, by

saving it from itself. It would be awhile before the system became too powerful and over-tipped into mayhem and self-induced collapse.

If we don't have so much newness now – when everything is precarious if not broken – we can learn about how difficult and reactionary things were once, what we have lost, and how, through struggle, organisation and intellectual work, we might get back to an important state of mind: the wish to alter the world for the better by making art and questioning everything we think we know.

White Bicycles

prologue

THE SIXTIES BEGAN in the summer of 1956, ended in October of 1973 and peaked just before dawn on 1 July, 1967 during a set by Tomorrow at the UFO Club in London.

John Hopkins and I had launched the weekly UFO events at an Irish dance hall in Tottenham Court Road just before Christmas 1966, and they had quickly become the hub of psychedelic London. By April, our resident attraction, Pink Floyd, had outgrown us, so I was always on the lookout for new groups. I saw Tomorrow at Blaises one night and thought they were pretty good. When they made their UFO debut on 19 May it was love at first sight between them and our audience. Steve Howe, later to make his name and fortune with Yes, played guitar, while Twink, a key figure in the genesis of punk, was the drummer. I don't know what became of Junior, the bass player, but his mad-eyed, don't-give-a-fuck presence in a string vest was a key element in their appeal. Lead singer Keith West had a solo hit that summer with 'Excerpt From A Teenage Opera, Part 1' ('Grocer Jack, Grocer Jack, please come back...') and did his best to maintain a pop-star presence while around him the group was morphing into something quite different. 'My White Bicycle', a tribute to the free transport provided by Amsterdam's revolutionary *provos*, was their new theme

song, while Howe's solos got longer and Twink's drumming ever wilder.

A month or two earlier, I would never have gone to Blaises and Tomorrow would barely have heard of UFO. Everything was accelerating that spring: new drugs, clothes, music and clubs. The psychedelic underground and the pop scene were starting to overlap. UFO crowds were bigger each week, and it was getting hard to maintain the original atmosphere. It was also difficult to ignore the increased attention from the police: the longer the queues, the more customers were getting frisked and busted.

Hoppy ran UFO's light tower, playing records between shows, putting on Kurosawa samurai films at 3 a.m. and troubleshooting around the club while I stayed near the entrance and trousered the money. When plainclothes policemen asked to have a look around, I would state our policy: no search warrant, no entry. (There was nothing to prevent them from merging with the crowds and paying their way in, of course; UFO's ads often touted a 'spot the fuzz' competition.) As for Mr Gannon, our landlord at the Blarney Club, he felt the case of whiskey delivered to Goodge Street police station every Christmas should take care of them well enough.

A few weeks before Tomorrow's return visit on 30 June, a uniformed bobby turned up, asking to be allowed in to collect clothes left behind by a man being held in custody. This made sense: half an hour earlier, a naked guy had bolted past me up the stairs and disappeared into the night. Hoppy and I agreed that an exception could be made, so I told the audience we were going to let the fuzz in to look for the clothes and turn on the overhead lights (murmurs and booing). As the crowd spread out in a wide circle, some garments could be seen scattered around the floor. The young bobby seemed to blush as he glanced at the crowd, a

vivid cross-section of 'London Freak' *circa* May 1967: long hair on the boys, flowered dresses on the girls, Arabian or Indian shirts, a few kaftans, jeans, even a few white shirts and khaki slacks. Many were tripping; most were laughing or grinning.

The laughter grew as it became clear that the bobby's hastily gathered armful contained more than was required to make his prisoner decent: two or three pairs of underpants (gender undetermined), a couple of shirts, a bra, several socks, etc. As he made his way to the door, the working-class constable regarded us with amazement, not hatred. We, in turn, regretted that he could not grasp why we took drugs and danced in the lights, lived for the moment and regarded our fellow man with benign tolerance, even love. That was the theory, anyway. Tested, it would come undone in the ensuing years, even as the bobby's mates donned kaftans, rolled joints and joined the crowds at festivals.

The first man I knew to take hallucinogens was Eric Von Schmidt. (You can see Eric's photo on one of the record jackets beside Sally Grossman on the cover of *Bringing It All Back Home* and hear Dylan blurt, 'I learned this song from Ric Von Schmidt' on his eponymous first LP.) Mail-order packages of peyote buds from Moore's Orchid Farm in Texas arrived periodically at the Von Schmidt apartment near Harvard Square. He would cook them up in a pot and invite friends over to drink the soup. They would stack some LPs on the record player – Ali Akbar Khan, Lord Buckley, Chopin, the Swan Silvertones, Lightning Hopkins – then drink the potion and try not to be sick. If you couldn't keep it down you weren't, in Eric's view, calm enough ('centred' had not yet been used in this context) to deserve the high. It was an experience meant for an intellectual and spiritual elite, not the masses (although he certainly would

never have put it that way).

The market is too efficient, of course, to limit transcendence to people who can stomach peyote. Down the street from Eric's flat in 1962 was the laboratory of Professor Timothy Leary, who advertised in the Harvard Crimson for volunteers to take LSD at a dollar an hour and was determined to become the Johnny Appleseed of hallucinogens. By 1967, pure, powerful LSD tabs were still available while adulterated, amphetamine-laced concoctions were starting to be widely distributed. Few bothered about how elevated the experience might be.

In June that year, a *News of the World* reporter tipped off Scotland Yard about a 'drugs-and-sex orgy' at Keith Richards' place and was rewarded with a ringside seat at the raid. It has become the stuff of legend: Mars bars, threesomes, Marianne Faithfull naked under a fur rug, etc., a symbol of out-of-control decadence. The media stopped winking and grinning about 'Swinging London' and started wallowing in horror stories about teenagers being led astray. *Sgt Pepper* was the world's soundtrack that month and powerful Establishment figures were horrified by the implications of influential pop stars' open fondness for drugs.

For the UFO audience, the Stones' bust represented the sinister collusion of circulation-seeking editors, treacherous grasses and killjoy drug squads. Jagger and Richards may have been wealthy superstars, but they were counter-culture heroes, too. Hoppy had also been busted that spring (after a plainclothes man reached, conjuror-like, behind his sofa and pulled out an evidentiary plum) and had just been sentenced to eight months in Wormwood Scrubs. Ads and editorials in the *International Times*, posters around UFO and graffiti in Notting Hill Gate reminded everyone of the injustice. A bucket was circulated at the club, the money

going to a legal defence fund for drug busts.

One Friday, just before Tomorrow took the stage, I found myself in conversation with Twink and a few others. Hoppo's jailing outraged us and the behaviour of the *News of the World* seemed like the last straw. We decided to close the club after the first set and parade through the West End, finishing off with a protest in front of the *News of the World* building in Fleet Street. The West End at 1 a.m. on a Friday night was nothing like as busy as it is today, but there were quite a few 'normals' about, and they gaped as we rounded Piccadilly and headed for Leicester Square, then down through Covent Garden towards Fleet Street. Our destination was a letdown: the *News of the World* building was dark and silent. Firebrands among us started planning a blockade of the Sunday paper and an assault on their vans the next night.

The long walk in the night air, the hostile stares from the 'straights' and the threats from the police had energized everyone, so the club was packed and buzzing when Tomorrow hit the stage about 4 a.m. The unity of spirit between audience and musicians was tremendous: Twink had been at the head of our two-hundred-strong column. Tearing into 'White Bicycle', they had never sounded tighter. At some point Skip from The Pretty Things took over on drums as Twink grabbed the microphone and plunged into the audience. Howe's playing moved to another level of intensity, sending the dancers leaping into the cones of light as Twink crawled along the floor, hugging people and chanting 'Revolution, revolution'. Everyone was high – on chemicals or adrenalin or both. You really did believe in that moment that 'when the mode of music changes, the walls of the city shake'. The tide of history was with us and music was the key.

The bill for this glorious moment was presented a

month later. The *News of the World* may not have known who we were before that weekend, but they certainly did afterwards. The fruits of their plotting burst forth on the last Sunday in July: beneath a grainy, out-of-focus shot of a bare-breasted girl, the front page screamed that she was fifteen years old and that the photograph had been taken at the 'hippy vice den' known as UFO. Our normally stoic landlord buckled under police pressure and evicted us.

A recording may preserve elements of a great musical moment, but bottling the energy of social and cultural forces is impossible. Without realizing it, we had started on a downhill slope that was mirrored in New York and San Francisco. The *agape* spirit of '67 evaporated in the heat of ugly drugs, violence, commercialism and police pressure. In Amsterdam, people began stealing and repainting the white bicycles.

There was music still to be made on the way down, of course; and on the way up, I had heard wonders.