

THE SOUNDS OF LONDON

RECORDED AND EDITED BY SAMUEL B. CHARTERS, LONDON, ENGLAND

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FD 5901

THE SOUNDS OF LONDON

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THE PRODUCE YARDS AT DAWN
- Band 2: A STREET PIANO IN
TRAFALGAR SQUARE
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PETTICOAT LANE
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SIDE II

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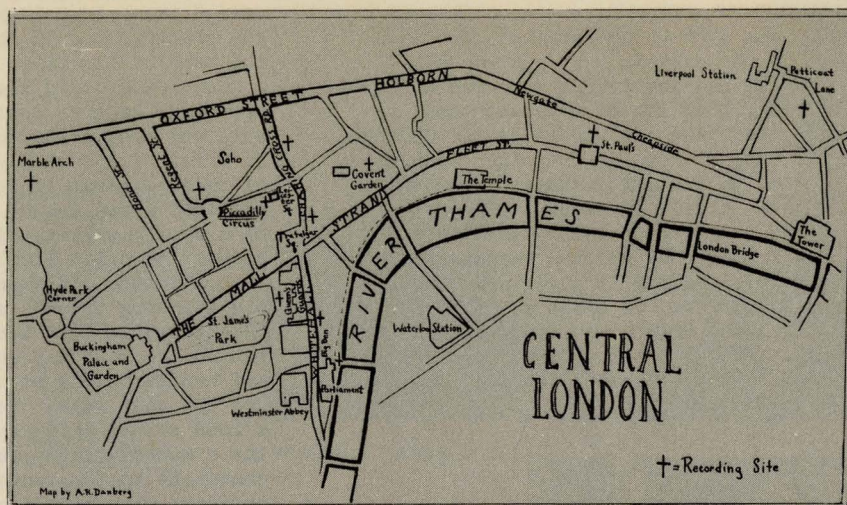
DESIGN: BOB MCCARRON

PHOTO OF PICCADILLY CIRCUS: A. R. DANBERG



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The heart of England is the city of London, but London, as a city, is unlike the England of quiet farm villages and wooded hillsides. It is a sprawling, dirty city, almost shapeless. Its buildings are low and grimed with soot, its churches hidden behind brick walls or in awkward pathways. The center of the city, around the Mall, Parliament, Westminster Abbey, and Buckingham Palace, is so spread out that it is difficult to get around it, or even to grasp its main outlines. Its streets are clogged with traffic, it is almost impossible to find smaller streets without getting hopelessly confused, and the language of most of the London neighborhoods is almost impossible to understand. At midnight the city falls silent, and the poor traveler looking for something warm to drink, or even some place to just sit down and wait until morning will find only shuttered windows and locked cafes. Away from the few good restaurants near Piccadilly, Mayfair, or the Strand, the food in the snack bars and tea rooms is appalling.

It is some of the most wretchedly prepared and clumsily served food to be found anywhere in the world. The city is expensive to live in, the weather is dreadfully bad, and every year the traffic problem grows worse and worse.

But despite all of this London is still the heart of England. It is more than a city of shabby buildings and narrow streets. It is a city of people, whose lives reflect the variety and color of the life of every part of Great Britain. It is a city where the pubs are still neighborhood social clubs, where speakers in Hyde Park can advocate any kind of idea, where musicians and dancers still perform in the streets. This is the London that is loved by its citizens, despite the grime and the pigeons. For the visitor the streets of London are a colorful world of strange voices, glimpses of great processions and ceremonies, the shouts of vendors and the blaring jazz music of a London street band. For the visitor the streets of London are the heart of London itself.

SIDE ONE

- Band 1: Covent Garden - The Produce Yards at Dawn
- Band 2: A Street Piano in Trafalgar Square
- Band 3: The Market in Petticoat Lane

Band 4: Street Buskers in Leicester Square

Band 5: The Underground and the Busses

Band 6: A Pub in Shoreditch

Band 7: "It's time, please, gentlemen!"

Band 1: Covent Garden - The Produce Yards at Dawn
2'35"

An outdoor tea van, 5 a.m., the barrows on the cobblestones near the sheds, dawn - the birds from inside the sheds.

The Covent Garden produce market is the largest in the world, sprawling in confusion around the neighborhood behind the Covent Garden Opera House. There is talk of building a newer and more efficient shed area, and doing away with some of the "barrow boys" who push the produce through the streets and the sheds, but this talk has been going on for many years, and there isn't much concern around the market. London is a deserted, silent city in the hours between midnight and six a.m., except for a few cafes near the newspaper offices on Fleet Street and the sheds of Covent Garden. Already drivers are pulling in from farms and villages hundreds of miles from London when the last, late crowds are looking for taxi cabs to get them to their homes. The drivers pull their lorries up against the curb in one of the streets near the market and sleep in the front seat until the noise of the barrows wakes them. The market is in noisy operation before the rest of London has even begun to wake up. There are a few tea vans, like this one in the recording, serving brackish tea and tasteless pastry to the drivers and the barrow boys. The vans are pulled up on the sidewalk, a bright light streaming out of the long window opening onto the dark street. There is only one spoon, and that's fastened to a chain on the side of the van. Men stand talking, exchanging remarks with the men in the van, listening to the sounds of the market around them. The streets in front of the sheds are still cobblestone, and the iron wheeled barrows make a fierce din as they are hurried back and forth with sacks of onions or crates of bananas or boxes of apples. Inside the sheds, at the first light of dawn, there is a sweeter din. The birds that have been asleep on the roof suddenly being singing and their bright twittering seems to fill the air.

Band 2: A Street Piano In Trafalgar Square
2'20"

The old street pianos - or hurdy gurdies - are seen less and less on London streets. They are awkward to push around in the heavier traffic of modern London, and the money that can be made with one is small. This piano had been set up beside the Church of St. Martin's in the Fields, in Trafalgar Square, to attract attention to a charity rummage sale that was being held in the church basement. Like most of these old pianos it was operated by turning a hand crank, but the small boy who had volunteered to turn the handle was finding it hard work. The music speeds up, slows down, or stops all together as he struggles with the crank. In front of him there are other volunteers shaking tin cans of pennies and sixpences to encourage contributions.



PETTICOAT LANE photo by A.R. Danberg

Band 3: The Market in Petticoat Lane
6'00"

Vendors selling leather gifts, dishes, slightly daring photos in a light-up case, socks and handkerchiefs, and a variety of candy.

The street markets of London have been famous for hundreds of years, but like many other London landmarks they are giving away to more modern methods of merchandising. The largest and most colorful of the street markets still flourishing is the famous Petticoat Lane market near the Liverpool Street Station, and already there are plans to replace the stalls and racks of the street with a large market shed. Petticoat Lane is only open on Sunday mornings, and it is possible to buy nearly every kind of item in one stall or another. The most colorful of the old London street cries are no longer heard, but the pitchmen still give the crowds the same kind of show that have characterised outdoor markets for generations. There is the insistence on the bargain being offered, the despairing self pity when the price is named, and the urgent impatience with everyone

in sight. The first one along the street, with his cry "There's no business like the shirt business," tries to get the crowd going by counting the change out - 19 "bob" or shillings - into the hand of his first customer. Further along a man in a crowded stall disdainfully piles up his cheap dishes, letting an assistant hold tea sets out toward the people clustered around him. In front of his stall a man with a carton full of false cigaret lighters - they light up a "daring" photo inside a peep hole - presses them on a family walking slowly along the edge of the crowd. He cries loudly, "I'm allowed to sell them," in the off chance that someone will buy one thinking there's some reason why he shouldn't be allowed to sell them. At a corner two young men in their Sunday suits hold up cheap socks and handkerchiefs to try and earn a little money for the next week. The largest crowd is around a loud voiced candy salesman who has two or three assistants to carry his bags of bargain chocolate to the customers. He livens up his delivery with ribald comments about passing girls, references to the high price of prostitutes, and the looks of the people in the crowd. The crowd around him laughs - and buys his merchandise.

Band 4: Street Buskers in Leicester Square
2'20"

A tap dancer is performing in the street to the accompaniment of an accordin and bass drum, both played by a young girl in a sailor's outfit.

There are not as many street entertainers now as there were in the years before the war, but they are still a colorful part of the life around Picadilly Circus and nearby Leicester Square. Usually they dance and entertain in the evening, when there are lines of people waiting to go into the theatres. With the dancer and the girl playing the accordin and drum there was a man in costume who went through the crowd collecting money. Usually the collector is given an equal share in the take and he works hard for all three of them. The police never bother the dancers, even though they usually dance in the middle of the street. There is a picturesque nonchalance to the way a dancer can thumb his nose at a taxi cab that has passed him a little close.

Band 5: The Underground and the Busses
1'05"

The Westminster Bridge Underground Station and a bus to Piccadilly Circus.

In a city where there are still relatively few private cars the underground and the busses are an important part of the daily life. The sharp noise as the bus is leaving the curb is the ticket machine the conductor wears around his waist.

Band 6: A Pub in Shoreditch
2'35"

The pub is one of the most characteristic aspects of English social life. Nearly everyone regards them as informal social clubs, rather than as a place for solitary drinking or amorous adventures. Usually a London working man has a favorite pub where he meets his friends two or three times a week to have a pint and talk for two or three hours. The bitter

beer is usually weak and warm, and often the pubs themselves are poor and shabby, but there is a warmth and friendliness among the people that makes up for the surroundings. In many of the more popular pubs it is customary to have at least a pianist working on Friday and Saturday nights. The pianist is expected to know the favorite songs, and even if no one seems to be paying any attention to him there are always people to join in for a "sing-song" on pieces like "Moonlight and Roses." An hour had passed between the two recordings and there is a noticeable rise in the level of conversation. It was Saturday night in a pub in a working class district east of Petticoat Lane and most of the neighborhood had dropped in for the evening.

Band 7: "It's Time, Please, Gentlemen!"
1'30"

Outside of the pub people are saying goodnight, a group of young men are deciding to take a taxi to Piccadilly, and in the background the bartenders are trying to get the last customers to leave.

At the time this recording was made the usual closing time for an English pub was 10 p.m. Even though nearly everyone tries to have a last pint just at closing time there is still an understandable reluctance to leave at such an early hour. The bartenders have to spend nearly half an hour pleading with the customers to go home. This is the complaint which T. S. Eliot used in "The Wasteland", "Hurry up, please, it's time." The third of these harassed bartenders pleads, "Make up your minds, please, gentlemen, please."

SIDE TWO

Band 1. The Speaker's Corner, Marble Arch

Band 2. A Street Band in Charing Cross Road

Band 3. The Changing of the Guard, Whitehall

Band 4. The Lord Mayor's Procession

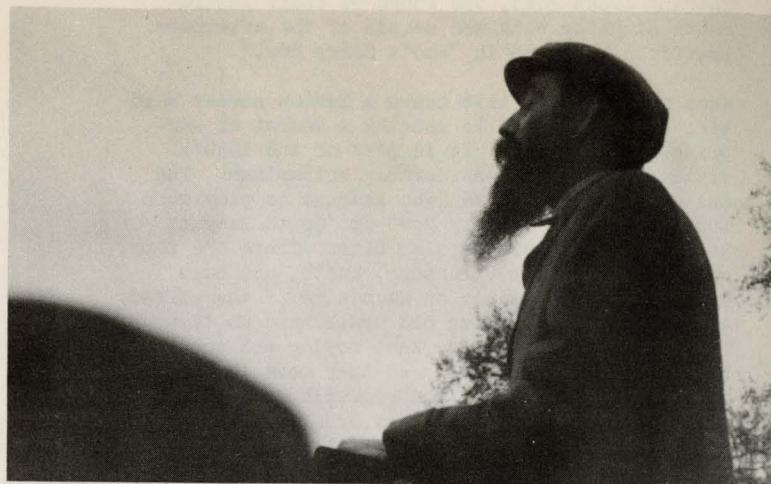
Band 5. The Armistice Ceremony at the Centotaph

Band 6. Big Ben from Westminster Bridge

Band 1: The Speaker's Corner, Marble Arch
7'25"

A religious group sings hymns while behind them a noisy argument is going on between a speaker and an atheist who declares, "I think it's a lot of rubbish", when the discoveries of Mt. Arrarat are brought into the argument. Not far from them a speaker is trying to tell a number of hecklers the "... difference between me and Dante." A young Indian student speaks about the color bar in Africa, another group is singing hymns, and an emotional ex-army officer is arguing about Hitler with a young German. In the center of a large crowd a young speaker finally wins attention as he makes a plea for disarmament.

A traditional sight on a London Sunday afternoon is the crowd of people who gather at Marble Arch in Hyde Park to listen to speakers trying to win support for nearly every political, social, and religious attitude known to the British world. There are police nearby, in case the arguments should get out of hand, but the speakers are free to say whatever they want. Sometimes this is a little difficult; since there are nearly as many hecklers as



SPEAKER AT MARBLE ARCH

photo by A.R. Danberg

speakers, but an afternoon at Speaker's Corner is still a stimulating experience. Many of the more organized groups of speakers, such as the Catholic discussion groups or the Committee for Nuclear Disarmament, have speaker's stands and large banners, but there are many individuals who simply look for an empty space, unbutton their coat, and begin talking in a loud voice until someone stops to listen. On the grassy space behind Marble Arch the park has almost the look of a medieval battlefield, with dark, struggling groups clustered around a swaying banner or an ornate emblem held aloft by someone friendly to the speaker's cause. The religious groups usually attract large, noisy crowds, but there are other groups like the singers who simply stand around a speaker who has the words to the hymns written on large pieces of oil cloth nailed to a wooden frame. Usually there is no argument, just the singing. There is always a fundamentalist Catholic group that spends the afternoon kneeling on the wet pavement with a priest who leads them in a murmured service.

The political speakers of Marble Arch have always attracted the most attention. There are fascists, anti-semites, Spanish royalists, Negro protest committees, communists, socialists, reactionaries, every kind of speaker, all trying to stand off the hecklers and attract the attention of the crowd. Occasionally a fascist or an anti-semite will have an egg or a rotten orange thrown at him, but the police are there to see that his right to speak is not impaired. The roughest arguments are usually among the Irishmen who come to the Park to discuss the partition of Ireland. Their crowd is a small one, but everyone is shouting at the same time and there are upraised fists and muttered threats. Along the sidewalk, beside the young people distributing Socialist Party leaflets, there are women from the Fenian Societies selling memorial tributes to the latest young IRA men to die in raids on Ulster. The largest crowd was around a young man speaking under a disarmament banner. His sincerity and determined attitude gradually won the attention of most of the people gathered around him, and his voice carried out over the wet grass and the shadowy trees around him. As the late afternoon darkness slowly fell over the crowds his up-lifted arms were still outlined against the sky behind him.

Band 2: A Street Band in Charing Cross Road
2'00"

A London street band passes beneath a window in

Charing Cross Road, the sound of their instruments mingling with the sounds of the afternoon traffic. The tune is "Who's Sorry Now."

When an American first hears a London street band like this one there is usually a moment of surprise at the music. It is jazz of the 1930's style played with considerable enthusiasm. The musicians are older men who learned to play when tunes like "Who's Sorry Now" or "South Rampart Street Parade" were popular hits. There are four musicians; trumpet, trombone, banjo, and bass drum, with a collector on each side of the street. All of them are wearing old brass band uniforms. The law requires them to keep moving and not block pedestrian traffic; so they move in single file along the edge of the sidewalk, walking as slowly as possible. The bass drum is played with the hand rather than with a stick; so that it won't overpower the rest of the group. The Esquire Record Company of London has released a number of recordings by the best of the street bands, "The Happy Wanderers."

Band 3: The Changing of the Guard, Whitehall
2'05"

For most tourists the changing of the Queen's guard at the barracks in Whitehall is one of the required sights of London. The ceremony is rather colorless and the usual tourist view is from behind a row of horses, but it retains a strong hold on the tourists' imagination. The sounds are more colorful than the view, with the bawling voices of the officers, the rattle of the hooves, and the ringing of the bell in the barracks tower.

Band 4: The Lord Mayor's Procession
3'25"

A group of floats depicting scenes of life in the Royal Navy are passing in front of crowds lining Cheapside, just behind St. Paul's. There are bands of every description in the Procession, and two of them pass.

There is an elaborate parade through the heart of London when a new Lord Mayor takes office. Brewery horses are pressed into service to haul the gilded coaches of the Lord Mayor and his party, military bands of every description play steadily as they march through the crowded streets, and there are usually floats. For this procession it was floats concerned with the Royal Navy, including one long float depicting a rescue at sea. A rope line had been rigged from one end of the float to another, and a young sailor was being pulled back and forth in a breeches buoy. It began raining heavily as the parade passed along Cheapside, but no one in the parade even looked up as the water soaked their clothes. A young Hussar officer in a rich 19th Century uniform, sat as motionless as a statue on his nervously capering horse, the water streaming off his furred cap and down his face.

Band 5: The Armistice Ceremony at the Centotaph
2'55"

The Guards' Band plays a slow dirge, there is a trumpet fanfare and the people around the royal party sing "God Save The Queen."

The Centotaph is a Memorial in Whitehall to the war dead of 1914-1918 and 1939-1945. It is not far from

the Guard Barracks. The royal family attended to place wreathes on the Memorial and there was an elaborate ceremony by the Guard bands and the Prelates of the Church of England. The Ceremony began with a moment of silence, and the streets became motionless. People who had come to pay tribute to members of their family, or people who had come to watch the ceremonies turned toward the memorial, their heads bared. Here and there in the crowd there were men with rows of medal ribbons across their chests. They stood in the silence, stiffly at attention saluting.

Band 6: Big Ben from Westminster Bridge
1'05"

It is raining; a dark, windy night. There are a few cabs passing along Westminster Bridge. Big Ben, the symbol of London to people throughout the world, slowly tolls the hour.

A NOTE ON THE RECORDING

Almost all of the recording in this selection was done with a small Ficord machine hidden under a shapeless English duffle coat. The microphone was strapped to the left wrist inside the coat sleeve. Although there was some loss of fidelity this made it possible to record everywhere in the city. Ampex equipment was used for the street band recording in Charing Cross Road. All recording and editing was done in November, 1960, by S. B. Charters.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A number of Londoners were especially helpful in suggesting places to record in their city. Mr. and Mrs. Bill Colyer were of invaluable assistance, and their apartment was used as a base of operations during the days that went into the recording. Bill Colyer was a companion on the visits to the shoreditch pub, and his voice can be heard as he says he'd better tie up his shoe. Bill Leader of Collett's, Ltd., was also of considerable help. A. R. Danberg, usually a technical assistant, spent the time photographing some of the areas where the recording was done.

A special acknowledgement is made to CWO and Mrs. William J. Kelley, with the United States Army in Budingen, Germany, for their hospitality during the editing of this material.



NEWSLADY ON THE STRAND

photo by A. R. Danberg

LITHO IN U.S.A.