The A to Z of Mod
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Paolo Hewitt and Mark Baxter

Foreword by Martin Freeman
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Legendary British jazz drummer
Phil Seamen lost in the moment
Foreword

The comedian Lenny Bruce had a bit where he listed various people, things and places as being ‘Jewish’ or ‘goyish’. As memory serves, the first group included Ray Charles and Count Basie, the second white bread. The implication was that one group, ‘Jewish’, was soulful, authentic, complex. The goys, I’m afraid, were plastic, trivial.

Well, substitute ‘Jewish’ for ‘Mod’, and I think you’ll have a fair idea of what this book, this code, this thing of ours is about.

There are many people, songs, paintings, films, books, motor vehicles, even coffee bars that would not see themselves or be seen by their creators as ‘Mod’, any more than Count Basie was Jewish. Did any of the writers, producers or singers of the thousands of obscure Northern Soul tunes that we love think of themselves as Mods? Nope. They weren’t even making ‘Northern Soul’. Do Peter Blake or Bridget Riley consider themselves Faces? Did Truffaut or Godard?
Well, no.
But somehow, they are.
That, to me, is part of the Mod genius. Having great taste. Knowing where to look and, more importantly, what to look for.

Dance music that you won’t hear on the radio but which will blow your mind and burst your heart? Art that is about now, in the language of pop culture? Cinema that has to be sought out, in that sense elitist, and still looks heartbreakingly cool? Check, check, check.

Cut to 50 years later.

Each new wave of people who have identified themselves with Modernism have had something new to bring to the party. New clothes, music, moves, details. I think the basic influences, from the originals, stay pretty firm. But they didn’t wear Gazelles. Nor had they been through punk. Or (and I’m with Il Scrivo here) hip hop. The barnets currently seen on Messrs Weller and Gallagher.
are absolutely Mod, but ‘64 at The Flamingo they ain’t.

It develops. It moves on. When it doesn’t, it’s fancy dress. Costume. It’s Dressing Like A Mod. And that’s not for me, brother.

It’s also personal. And not easily understood. Many’s the time I’ve had people question my sanity over things I’ve worn, records I’ve bought, moves I’ve made. As with belief of any kind, it requires and engenders commitment. That can be a lonely road. That’s why when we identify a brother or sister, our hearts beat faster; we want to share music, coffee and talk about shoes. Not that we usually do that. A quick nod tells the other that we understand, and serves as the all-purpose stylist salute.

Above all, I think Mod is a rejection of the obvious. The authors of this book recognise that, and have included entries that will inform as well as confirm. They themselves have pretty
eclectic tastes in matters of weft and wax, and can hold forth on loving The Fabs, or the joy of an obscure detail of a shirt cuff from October – no, December ’66. Not obscurity for its own sake, which is deeply tedious, but a recognition that we can do better if we make the effort, dammit. It’s not a uniform, it’s the (highest) common denominator.

So enjoy reading about the genesis of your favourite shoes. Or be outraged at the omission of the best underground Freakbeat/psych B-side you’ve ever heard.

As long as we keep caring.

The world thinks we’re mad anyway.

Martin Freeman
New Zealand, 2012
Introduction

Mod moves in mysterious ways and so it is right and proper that its birthday, its history, is still somewhat shrouded in mystery. For me, Mod began in 1958 and ended in 1963. For others it was the opening of the Club Eleven on Soho’s Great Windmill Street in the late 1940s that acted as the catalyst for Mod. Some will argue that Mod means Carnaby Street and Union Jack jackets, others will point to coffee bars and jazz. I would consider the novel *American Psycho* by Bret Easton Ellis a Mod book and Martin Scorsese’s *Mean Streets* a Mod film. I always thought the hip hop and acid house scenes were totally Mod. Others think I must be pilled out of my head to make such assertions. Mod defies all categorisation and so it should: that is one of its great strengths. What is certain is that Mod has flourished for over 50 years now and shows no sign of abating. That idea of creating a world within a world, based around cool clothes, music
and attitude – of dressing smartly or in a unique way to remove oneself from the herd and then aligning this style with a music that makes you dance to keep from crying – still holds as strong as ever. That is why in this book we have sought to cover all aspects of Britain’s greatest youth movement, from Miles Davis to Colin MacInnes to Bradley Wiggins, from Pete Meaden to Acid Jazz to Stone Foundation, with fanzines, films, clothes and books also taking centre stage. W is for the work we have put in, and H is for – we hope you really dig this book.

Paolo Hewitt
White Hart Lane, 2012
A young Mod couple getting it all right on the back of a Lambretta in 1963
I first became aware of the world of Mod through a combination of the film *Quadrophenia* and the group The Jam in 1979. After being exposed to the music and the imagery I was hooked. I began to dress the part and not only bought the music of the period, but also began digging back into a pile of classic 45s owned by an uncle of mine. There I found music from The Who to Wilson Pickett and all the stops in between. I found the history of the movement fascinating and still do, hence this book. The word ‘Mod’ conjures up different things for different people and that is part of its long-lasting appeal. There is something for everyone here.

I hope you enjoy reading this book as much as I did researching and co-writing it.

Mark Baxter
The Den, 2012
Written by Colin MacInnes in 1959, and published over the years with covers featuring the work of photographer Roger Mayne and artist Peter Blake, *Absolute Beginners* provides an invaluable insight into the origins of the world of Mod. Set in 1958, this key novel follows a Modernist who works as a freelance photographer and inhabits a world made up of coffee bars, scooters and modern jazz. Through the adventures of our unnamed hero, the novel explores many themes, not least that of the teenager’s urgent desire to break from staid, boring Britain and build a much hipper and freer world. Racism, the 1958 Notting Hill riots and the contributions of the Caribbean community to London are also detailed.

During the writing and researching of this book, MacInnes lived on Soho’s D’Arblay Street and visited Ronnie Scott’s jazz club many times. Consequently, his eye for the clothing detail and the language of the young hipsters he

*Opposite: Actress Patsy Kensit as ‘Crepe Suzette’ in the 1986 film *Absolute Beginners*
encountered is spot on, as is his understanding of the Mod mind set. The second of a trilogy of London books by MacInnes (the other titles are *City of Spades* and *Mr Love and Justice*), *Absolute Beginners* was adapted to film by Julien Temple in 1986 and starred David Bowie and Patsy Kensit.
Acid Jazz Records

In 1987 influential radio and club DJ Gilles Peterson teamed up with second-generation Mod-about-town Eddie Piller to form Acid Jazz Records. Fellow DJ Chris Bangs is credited with coming up with the phrase ‘acid jazz’, a play on the highly popular acid house music that was starting to take off at that time. Acid Jazz Records sought to sign musically interesting acts who were also clothes-conscious, and many well-known musicians got their start at the label, including Galliano, Jamiroquai, The Brand New Heavies, Mother Earth and Corduroy. When Paul Weller wished to release a funk track under the name ‘King Truman’, it was Acid Jazz the Modfather approached. The label also published the definitive Small Faces biography, Small Faces: The Young Mods’ Forgotten Story by Paolo Hewitt. Piller’s mother, Fran, had been the band’s fan club secretary back in the 1960s. Peterson left the operation in 1989 and despite challenging
Top: Cover of Acid Jazz News (Summer 1995) featuring Mother Earth
Bottom: An Acid Jazz flyer
economic conditions, Piller has managed to keep the label afloat. Modwise, the label is testament to Piller’s ability to apply Mod sensibilities within a contemporary framework. The man knows his past (witness the label’s sought-after Rare Mod compilations) but keeps his eye on the present. Thus he has recently released a new album by the veteran singer Tony Christie and signed the Janice Graham Band and The Broken Vinyl Club.
The Action

Originally named The Boys, The Action came together in North London in 1963. One of their first gigs was backing singer Sandra Barry. In 1965 they struck out on their own. With Reg King on vocals, Alan ‘Bam’ King on rhythm guitar, Mike ‘Ace’ Evans on bass, Peter Watson on lead guitar and Roger Powell on drums, their energetic live performances and stylish image soon attracted a dedicated Mod following. A lot of their success was due to King’s vocal prowess. Many now consider him one of the finest ever ‘blue-eyed’ soul singers. His commanding voice was best heard on The Action’s great cover versions of Motown classics such as ‘In My Lonely Room’, ‘Since I Lost My Baby’ and ‘I’ll Keep Holding On’. In 1965 George Martin, producer of The Beatles, signed them to Parlophone Records but despite their many fans on the live circuit, chart success was to elude them. In 1967 they began writing and recording their own material, including their
landmark songs ‘Never Ever’ and ‘Shadows and Reflections’. However, despite smashing the record for crowd attendance at The Marquee Club, Soho, on several occasions, the band were dropped by Parlophone and a disillusioned Reggie King quit the band to pursue a solo career. His former band mates continued as Mighty Baby but soon ran out of steam.

In the late 1970s, thanks mainly to a Paul Weller-backed compilation, The Action were rediscovered by a second generation of Mods. They later reformed for a few Mod rallies and a gig at The 100 Club in 2004. King also guested as a vocalist on producer Andy Lewis’s album *The Billion Pound Project*. Sadly, Mike Evans died in January 2010 aged 65 and Reggie King followed him to Mod heaven in October of the same year.
Amphetamine

Otherwise known as speed, amphetamine was the perfect drug for Mods. Its ability to keep the user awake for lengthy periods of time allowed Modernists to literally speed through a whole weekend of clubbing and shopping. The drug was first discovered in 1887 and came into its own during the Second World War when British soldiers used it to fight combat fatigue. At war’s end, it became readily available on London’s streets. In fact, such was its popularity among the Mod fraternity that top Mod band The Small Faces wrote a celebratory song about it titled ‘Here Come the Nice’. In the 1964 BBC Panorama documentary on Mods, one pill popper shocked the nation by casually admitting to taking something like 30 pills over a weekend. Amphetamine’s high usage eventually attracted front-page headlines, which in turn prompted police raids on many Mod clubs.
Other sobriquets for the drug include Blues, Bennies, Purple Hearts and Dexys. The last two names were appropriated by groups, The Purple Hearts and Dexys Midnight Runners. In the 1970s the drug was popular in the growing Northern Soul scene.

In the UK speed is classified as a Class B drug. Side effects include dilated pupils, a dry mouth and insomnia, and the ‘come down’ can include deep mental fatigue and high anxiety, as many Mods will testify.
Nesuhi Ertegun (C), President of Atlantic Records, with Vice Presidents Jerry Wexler (L) and Ahmet Ertegun (R)
Atlantic Records

Founded in New York City in 1947 by Ahmet Ertegun and Herb Abramson (with a $10,000 loan from Ertegun’s dentist), the music of Atlantic acts such as Ray Charles, Ruth Brown, Aretha Franklin, Otis Redding, Wilson Pickett, The Rascals, Solomon Burke, John Coltrane and Charles Mingus, to name but a few, has always been highly regarded and revered by Mods past and present. Through the guidance of producer and A&R man Jerry Wexler, Atlantic Records placed itself at the heart of American black music for many years, whether blues, jazz or soul. Key records among a sea of many would include Doris Troy’s ‘Whatcha Gonna Do About It’, Joe Tex’s ‘Hold What You Got’, Solomon Burke’s ‘Everybody Needs Somebody to Love’, Don Covay’s ‘Mercy Mercy’, Deon Jackson’s ‘Love Makes the World Go Round’ and John Coltrane’s ‘Olé’, a nine-minute freeform jazz instrumental that was often played at The Scene Club,
according to regular attendee Alfie Wyatt. Atlantic also brought the famous Stax label (see Stax Records) under its umbrella, while famously unleashing the incredible Aretha Franklin on the world in 1967, the same year Warner Brothers bought the company for $17 million. The next year Atlantic signed the rock band Led Zeppelin, signalling the company’s highly successful move into rock music. They also later signed The Rolling Stones.

Ahmet Ertegun later co-founded the New York Cosmos soccer team. He died in late 2006 at the age of 83.
Pain in his heart: soul singer Otis Redding giving it plenty in the year of his death, 1967, aged just 26
Austin’s Clothes Shop

Austin Ltd was one of London’s first true Modernist shops, a classy operation situated in Piccadilly at the end of Shaftesbury Avenue, opposite the Trocadero. Austin’s stocked classic, imported Ivy League clothing such as seersucker jackets, button-down shirts by companies such as Arrow and Enro, and knitwear of every hue. The shop’s own range of suits were made by Dougie Millings, who shot to fame later on in life as tailor to The Beatles. Described as having a ‘dowdy’ interior, the shop window was anything but and the likes of writer Nik Cohn could often be found drooling over the clothing it displayed. Austin’s charged top prices for their goods, but the young and obsessed were prepared to pay them. In fact, it is said that Charlie Watts, drummer with The Rolling Stones, would spend almost his entire wages in there on a Friday night. Georgie Fame and a young Eric Clapton, two of London’s leading Modernists, were also regular.

Magazine advert for Austin’s, late 1950s
visitors. The shop was owned by one Louis Austin, a former musician from the 1930s who displayed impeccable Mod instincts by living in a top hotel. The shop survived until the early 1970s.

Top: The Yardbirds in 1964. Eric Clapton, far right, is wearing a buttoned-up Baracuta G-9 Harrington (see Baracuta’s G-9 Jacket)
Bottom: Georgie Fame goes ‘three-piece’ in 1967