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SONGS TO LEARN AND SING¹

Understanding the Use of Singing at Liverpool FC Football Matches



Based on over 50 years of the author watching Liverpool FC (LFC) football matches, this article examines the use of songs in and around such matches, locating this within wider debates about the use of song at football matches. The development of modern media's relationship to football will be considered in three main areas – the importance of television in the modern age, the availability of songs on the internet and the use of the sound systems to control fan behaviour at matches. The article aims to provide some insights in to one of the most important – but often neglected – aspects of football fandom.

Introduction

“Oh, I am a Liverpudlian and I come from the Spion Kop”²

The words above come from “Poor Scouser Tommy”³, a song sung by fans of Liverpool Football Club (LFC). The song presents an idealised version of a Liverpool fan, a male who goes away to fight in a war against fascism and whose dying words after being shot are a paean to the LFC and its fans. This song is emblematic of the many Liverpool songs which I have sung in and around LFC games since I first saw them playing live in 1969. In what follows it will be hard for me to apply what I hope is my customarily academic impartiality. I *am* a Liverpool fan, it is part of my identity – and not always in a good way. Writing about LFC is like writing about my loved ones. I can try to be impartial and critical, but I will do it through a particular lens – I *am* a Liverpudlian⁴ and I get to the Spion Kop as often as possible. Part what follows is an attempt to understand my own fandom, perhaps as a form of exegesis.

The article falls in to five sections. The first introduces LFC and its home city. The second examines the impact of media on modern football. Football fandom is then explained, followed by a section on why people sing at football matches. Finally, some LFC songs are considered.

I will mainly write about LFC from 1969 to 2023, from the perspective of a white, heterosexual, male of 65 who still plays football. Moreover, my focus is narrower than that adopted by those such as Laing and Linehan (2013) who

1 The title comes from the title of an album by Liverpool band Echo and The Bunnymen whose lead singer, Ian McCulloch, is a longstanding LFC fan. In 2020, the band released a special t-shirt to celebrate LFC winning the English Premier League. See <https://www.facebook.com/389488111105848/posts/to-celebrate-liverpool-fc-winning-the-premiership-trophy-we-have-released-a-limi/2987904501264183/>.

2 The Spion Kop, or more usually simply the Kop, is the main stand for singing at Liverpool FC's Anfield stadium. It is named after a battle in the Anglo-Boer war (1899–1902) which took place between 23 and 24 January 1900 at a place known as Spioenkop in Afrikaans. Over 300 British soldiers were killed, many from Liverpool and nearby Lancashire.

3 A “Scouser” is someone from Liverpool and “tommy” is slang for an ordinary soldier. The song can be found in numerous places on the internet. See, for example, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=puHt8Gb9za8>, which features Jamie Webster who has now made a career out of playing LFC songs.

4 In terms of the football team I support rather than it being my birth place.

look at the use of music in stadiums. I concentrate on LFC songs and, as far as possible, in songs which *only* Liverpool fans sing, rather than more generic tunes. While finding it hard to maintain objectivity here, I hope that I can still remain analytical. So, while this is a personal account, drawn from my experience and memories, I will also provide context. I am *not* trying to collect all the songs ever sung about Liverpool Football Club, rather trying to put *some* of them in to context. This is an attempt to explain – not least to myself.

Liverpool and LFC

Located on England's north west coast, Liverpool is a city of around half a million people. With a past based on shipping (including slavery) and cotton, the city fell in to some decline following the second world war. The most vivid demonstrations of that decline came with the inner-city riots in 1981 when the harsh policing of local youths led to widescale rioting in Toxteth/Liverpool 8, long the home of many ethnic minority groups. Various regeneration plans have since helped to turn the city round. This has included it being European Capital of Culture in 2008 and hosting the Eurovision Song Contest in 2023.

Formed in 1892, LFC has had a remarkable history. Its record of 19 English Championships is beaten only by Manchester United, it has been Champions of Europe more times than any other English team (6), won 8 FA Cups, 9 league Cups and been FIFA World Club Champions. The club is “the most successful in the history of English football” (Kerr & Emery 2011, 882). Within this the role played by Liverpool's Anfield⁵ ground and in particular the singing by fans on the famous Kop stand – which once held around 27,000 standing people – became part of the club's legend.⁶

However, by the early 1990s LFC was falling behind its rivals, having failed to come to terms with the global era of football. The English Premier League (EPL) formed in 1992 and the millions of pounds which its clubs received in selling television rights ushered in a new footballing era. This was one of rapidly increasing revenue, rising ticket prices, an influx of foreign players, managers and – vitally – owners. LFC was ill-prepared for all this. By the late 1970s, as it continually won major trophies such as the English Championship and the European Cup, its Chairman, John Smith, described the club's financial situation as “absurd” and declared it to be “broke” (Williams 2012, 429–430). In order to catch up Liverpool began the move from being owned by a local family (the Moores, owners of the Littlewood football pools, mail order and retail outlets) to securing international investment. A long-drawn-out process was completed in 2007 when Americans Tom Hicks and George Gillet bought the club. Initially welcomed by LFC supporters – hungry for the proposed investment in order to boost on pitch performances – the relationship soon soured. Eventually financial problems forced Hicks and Gillet out and LFC was bought by the Fenway Sports Group (FSG). Under its stewardship LFC went on to win their first English title in 30 years in the Covid-ruined season of 2019–2020, as well as another European Champions League in 2019.⁷

While every football fan thinks that in one way or another their team and its location are “unique”, it is not unfair to say that objectively there are things which mark Liverpool out as a city, something examined in previous academic work (Belcham 2006). When I lived there (1990–1994), I was aware that I was living somewhere whose residents debated the state of their city more than in any other placed that I'd previously lived in. The state of the city featured in

5 An adapted version of the Irish folk song, “The Fields of Athenry”, as “The Fields of Anfield Road” is a particular favourite of LFC fans of a certain age. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AgLysspS0xo>.

6 See www.youtube.com/watch?v=XNboU_PbZMY for footage from a game against Arsenal from 1964. The commentator notes the Kop's uniqueness saying they behave like no other fans and that he has never seen anything like it – 28,000 people who begin singing together. Songs sung by the Kop in the footage include The Beatles' “She Loves You” and Cilla Black's “Anyone Who Had A Heart”, performances of pride in the city's musicians. Notably the crowd seems to be entirely male and the amazing swaying is, of course, only possible on terraces – not seated accommodation.

7 Prior to its purchase of LFC, FSG was best known as the owners of Boston Red Sox. It owns various other sports companies. See <https://fenwaysportsgroup.com/the-fsg-family/>. While on the surface, having the club owned by an American multinational might go against the declared ethos of many fans, success on the pitch since the takeover by FSG has tended to mean that any criticism of the company has remained largely muted.

daily conversations in ways which I was unused to. Certainly “Liverpoolians fondly regard their city as unique, particularly by comparison to the rest of England” (Power 2011, 100). This is often proclaimed in assertions that the



Image 1. Anfield stadium in Liverpool. Photo: Arne Mueseler / arne-mueseler.com / CC-BY-SA-3.0.



Image 2. LFC logo and the Kop sign on the wall of Anfield. Photo: [Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Anfield_Kop.jpg) / author Rodhullandemu.

city's inhabitants as "Scouse not English", something sung and visualised in and around Anfield (Rookwood & Millward 2011, 41). John Belcham has suggested that Liverpool is "in the North of England but not of it" (cited in Power 2011, 100). Local fans "often consider themselves 'better' or 'more loyal' supporters... than those who are geographically distanced from the club's home ground" (Rookwood & Millard 2011, 37). In addition, fans are expected to show allegiance to Liverpool alone, with one example of this being booing of the national anthem when it is played at Cup Finals and royal occasions.⁸ A certain uniqueness about the city has been identified in previous literature. For example, Evans and Norcliffe assert:

Would Liverpool FC and Everton⁹ FC be as popular if they were exactly the same as all the other teams? No. It is the *specific* football space created in Merseyside that has contributed to the global following of those teams. (2016, 229, emphasis mine.)

Henderson and Oates (2022, 7) refer to "Liverpool's distinctive history". That distinctive history is captured at Anfield and the singing culture which surrounds it. It should also be noted that "Football is an integral and cultural life of Liverpool" (Evans & Norcliffe 2016, 223). It is also a vital part of the city's economy with a large percentage of stays in the city's hotels based on football (ibid., 223–224) which has also become "a key plank of the City's economic base; it is a city building itself for football" (ibid., 229).

Meanwhile two terrible – but very different – events came to mark LFC in the modern era. The first of these came on 29 May 1985 at a European Cup Final match between LFC and Juventus at the Heysel Stadium in Brussels. This was a badly-maintained stadium which in places was literally falling apart. Prior to the game LFC had complained about the state of Heysel to European football's governing body UEFA which ignored the club's pleas to move the match to another venue. My recollection of the day – during which I was present at Heysel – is of increasing tension between rival fans and some goading. Meanwhile fans inside the ground were able to pass their tickets to those outside, through the actual dilapidated wall of the stadium leading to more fans entering, resulting in crushing inside the ground. Inadequate crowd control measures meant that when clashes between rival fans escalated, some Liverpool fans were able to breach the flimsy dividing line between them and the Juventus fans, resulting in escaping Italian fans being crushed under a wall. 39 people died. Later 14 Liverpool fans were found guilty of manslaughter. English clubs were subsequently banned from all European football competitions, at first indefinitely, then for a further three years, with Liverpool given an extra two.

On 15 April 1989, Liverpool were due to play Nottingham Forest in an FA Cup Semi-Final at Sheffield Wednesday's Hillsborough Stadium. Crowd crushing outside of ground led the police to open an extra gate to the ground, with an ensuing rush in to the ground by supporters. At this point standing on terraces remained many fans' preferred way of watching matches and – following Heysel and other football disturbances – leading English clubs were obliged to have fences which prevented standing fans from entering the pitch. This "penning" meant that when fans already located on terraces at the Leppings Lane end of the ground became crushed by the incoming fans there was no escape. The result eventually led to the deaths of 97 people. Unlike Heysel, where the match was played, this game was abandoned. In the aftermath Liverpool fans – their reputation tarnished by the terrible events

8 See www.youtube.com/watch?v=-s1g-iCxSlk and Henderson and Oates (2022, 4).

9 Everton are Liverpool's "other" Premier League club. Formed in 1878, they were originally based at Anfield, but left in a rent dispute in 1892, something which also led to the formation of Liverpool FC. Rivalry between the two clubs has waxed and waned over the years, with games between the two being known as the [Merseyside Derby](#). As support of either club can vary within the same family, the match is also known as "the friendly derby". In recent years in what appears to be a move to cast Liverpool FC as "aristocrats", Everton has branded itself as "The People's Club", even having a lounge with this name at its Goodison Park ground.

at Heysel – were immediately blamed for the disaster and demonised in the press.¹⁰ It was to take 27 years for the truth to emerge – that LFC fans had been subject to unlawful killing, a verdict delivered at the High Court on 26 April 2016.¹¹

The verdict came after years of campaigning by those in and around the Hillsborough Family Support Group and is perhaps the greatest victory ever achieved by football fans. Meanwhile the rise of the new global era in football fans across the UK mobilised to counter such things as rising ticket prices and lack of fan representation within clubs. In LFC's case such mobilisation included the [Reclaim The Kop](#) movement centred on perceived the decline in atmosphere on the Kop LFC's and the one which came to be the most important, [Spirit of Shankly](#)¹² (SoS), formed in January 2008 by supporters angered at broken promises from Hicks and Gillet.

Football and Media

There is a sense in which EPL football clubs *are* media companies. Their every move is undertaken under a media glaze and closely allied to the needs of television companies. The rebranding of the English First Division as the EPL in 1992 and the partnership it made with Rupert Murdoch's Sky "were key to English football's recovery from recession" (Millward 2012, 641). This was a brave new dawn following the expulsion of English clubs from European club competitions in the wake of Heysel. Nowadays, every game is covered by television and a key task for the clubs is to cultivate an international fanbase which will buy the increasing (and increasingly expensive) range of fan products. Even pre-season friendlies, once located in the UK and the domain of only hardcore fans, are now sell-out matches in far-flung places where LFC courts its international fanbase and seeks to promote its brand.

Television is by far the most important media for football. It is the money provided by the selling of television rights which has propelled the EPL in to being a global phenomenon and attracted owners, players, managers and fans from across the globe. It is also television which dictates the timing of matches, often to the frustration of fans and managers and the detriment of players. It is hard not to feel ambivalent about all this. If on the one hand I never have to miss a game, on the other I resent some of those games being played at ridiculous times. Other than the demands of television, there is no reason to stage league matches on Monday nights rather than the weekend. But television money has also transformed sides. In so far as it has helped to bring players such as Alisson, Salah, and van Dijk to Liverpool, then I obviously think it is a wonderful thing. That it has also empowered LFC's rivals is somewhat less welcome.

The sheer scale of television coverage is breathtaking. By 2019 EPL "matches were broadcast in 188 countries by more than 40 media companies" (Henderson and Oates 2022, 2). Millward (2012, 637) summarises that the EPL "has become transnational with respect to the spatial dispersion of fans across the world, its recruitment of players and managers, and interest in individual clubs from overseas investors". One result of this is that "football's big clubs now attract unprecedented interest from fans in diverse geographical locations" (Power 2011, 98). However, it is important to note here that while this hyper-commodification is new, it does have earlier roots as English top-level games were transmitted to places such as the Nordic countries, spawning

10 Particularly in *The Sun* whose disgraceful account of the disaster – wherein Liverpool fans were said to be urinating on prone fans, robbing them and attacking police who were trying to help fans – led to a boycott of the newspaper on Merseyside which lasts to this day. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coverage_of_the_Hillsborough_disaster_by_The_Sun. Songwriter Billy Bragg later wrote and recorded the song "Scousers never buy The Sun".

11 The dreadful events of the Hillsborough Disaster have been captured in a number of places within popular culture. See, for example, the 1996 *Hillsborough* television film written by Jimmy McGovern ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hillsborough_\(1996_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hillsborough_(1996_film))) and the Manic Street Preachers' 1998 song "S.Y.M.M" ("South Yorkshire Mass Murderer") which blames the police for the disaster (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mla3u7NfPkM>).

12 Named after former manager LFC Bill Shankly, whose socialism is often held to underpin the club's – or at least many of its supporters' – values. Originally Sons of Shankly, the organisation soon changed its name in order to be more inclusive. For more on Shankly see footnote 17.

a wave of international fans (Kerr & Emery 2011, 885; Nash 2000, 8), who can in retrospect be seen as the precursors of those fans who support, but do not attend, in what has been called “post-fandom” (Redhead 1997).¹³

Another key aspect of football–media interaction is the internet, to which there are two main aspects. The first is the club’s own internet profile which it uses to maintain and promote its brand. The second is fans’ use of the internet. In short this means that conversations once limited to pubs and other locations are now taking place constantly across the globe (Power 2011, 98). Importantly social media was utilised by fans – particularly those in SoS – in their attempts to oust the detested Hicks and Gillett, especially via pressuring the banks to whom they were in debt to withdraw their support (Millard 2012, 641). Hicks partly blamed “internet terrorists” for his downfall (ibid., 643). While financial problems were the main reason for the demise of Hicks and Gillett, the hostility shown by fans and their determined efforts over the internet also played a role (Williams 2011, 438).

The web is also the site of numerous fan sites where songs can be shared. Amongst other things it has been utilized to counter concern from the Reclaim The Kop group that the amount of singing was in decline: “Backed by the club, the RTK (Reclaim the Kop) campaign worked through websites, fan forums and various other avenues of advocacy to arrest this decline and restore the Liverpool fans’ singing culture to its former glory” (Power 2011, 102).

The use of Public Address (PA) systems in football stadiums is another, much older, key use of media. Their introduction in the 1920s has been seen as a key moment in the management of atmosphere in grounds (Laing & Linehan 2013, 312). While this can often offer information, the music used can also be deployed in an effort to control crowd behaviour. As Laing and Linehan (2013, 315) note:

recorded music can also be played before and after games in order to control the general environment, in a way similar to that used, for instance, in shopping malls or other public spaces where classical music is employed to have a calming and/or alienating impact.

I have not witnessed this at Anfield. However, during my time attending games the ritual of singing before the game of LFC’s anthem “You’ll Never Walk Alone” has changed from being one which fans initiated to one which is now initiated by the playing of a recording. Moreover, at “neutral” grounds such as Wembley the PA often orchestrates fans’ reactions to victories. The existent literature contains no examples of writers arguing that such interventions enhance fans’ enjoyment. As for me, if I never hear “We are The Champions” at another cup final it will still be far too soon. All this is part of an increasingly mediated fan experience. Going to all-seater stadiums with deafening PAs is a very different experience to the mass swaying I experienced on my first visits to the Kop and I felt a genuine sense of sadness in attending the last standing game on the Kop.¹⁴

In summary, EPL clubs *are* to an extent media companies, they use - and are used by - various media (especially television), fan debates take place on social media and certain media are used to influence crowd behaviour in grounds. But what of the fans themselves?

13 See footnote 9. Thanks to Tommi Römpötti for this point.

14 On 30 April 1994, in a game against Norwich which Liverpool contrived to lose 0–1. The day was labelled The Kop’s Last Stand. See thesportsman.com.

Fandom

For purposes of this article, it is important to note that fandom is not one-dimensional. Rather, it is multi-faceted. As previous work has shown, “supporters do not form monolithic groups” (Evans and Norcliffe 2016, 222). Fans have various degrees and modes of involvement. Edensor (2015, 84) suggests that some want simply to concentrate on the game and reject all outpourings of emotion. At Liverpool “the consideration ranges from that of those with little interest beyond the immediate entertainment value of the spectacle and the success of the team, to those who would sacrifice any short-term success on the altar of longer-term community, stability and ‘the Liverpool Way’” (Power 2011, 97).¹⁵

In addition: For the traditional football supporter, identification with the club they support is exceedingly close, very simply evidenced by standard use of the pronoun *we*, among traditional supporters, to refer to the team instead of *they*, as in, “we didn’t play very well today” (ibid., 100). This marker of individual and collective identity has been noted to create a situation in which some fans may resent those who do not sing (Collinson 2009, 18).

However, the “we” who support Liverpool often have only that in common. Fans are divided by such things as where they sit in the ground (only in the Kop is regular singing heard and there is prestige attached to sitting there [Evans & Norcliffe 2016, 227]), how often they attend (what does it now mean to be a “real” fan), whether they sing or not and if they do so correctly (Evans and Norcliffe 2016, 227). Such divisions do, of course, come in addition to the customary divisions of class, gender, age, race, sexuality etc. It should also be noted that expected standards of behaviour by “real” fans are constantly evolving (Evans & Norcliffe 2016, 221). One example of how LFC fans are divided was the fact that while fans were generally united in their desire to oust American owners Tom Hicks and George Gillet, attempts to replace

¹⁵ Playing “the Liverpool way” has also been celebrated in song. The song is “A Liverbird Upon My Chest” and, as with many songs, can be found in various versions. See, for example, <https://myliverpoolfc.org/003song.htm> and <https://www.liverpoolway.co.uk/classic/songsfolder/alumc.html>.



Image 3. In the Kop. Photo: [Wikimedia Commons](#) / author Simon Cooper.

them saw the development of two rival factions with “very little overlapping (membership) between the two groups” (cited Williams 2012, 437).

It is also necessary to consider the particular nature of LFC fandom and questions have arisen about what values Liverpool fans should have. Class and political affiliation have often been present here. Class is performative and football culture is one site where it is played out (Evans & Norcliffe 2016, 221). For example, Liverpool-born former player Jamie Carragher was appreciated by one fan as being – “one of us, a working class lad” (cited in Rookwood and Millward 2011, 44), someone whom another fan said was “everything every Scouser wants to be” (cited *ibid*, 46). He also enhanced his reputation by allying himself to the idea that Liverpoolians were not English but Scouse (Rookwood and Millward 2011, 45) and “his interpretation and implementation of the core working class values of the city and the club, displayed through his conduct off the pitch and his performances on it” (Rookwood & Millward 2011, 37). In terms of class Carragher wrote in his autobiography of Liverpool’s rivalry with Chelsea that: “While we celebrate our working class roots, the Londoners love nothing more than to wave £20 notes at our visiting fans. Their players are granted the luxury of behaving like celebrities and superstars. Ours are expected to abide by a different set of values – the (former manager Bill) Shankly laws – and to show humility in a city where being flash is frowned upon” (cited in Rookwood & Millward 2011, 40–41).

Recent manifestations of such values have included the fact that SoS has been modelled on trade union principles (Williams 2012, 433), describing itself on its website as a union and using there the leftist slogan “Unity is strength”. Its tactics have been said to “reflect their grounding in socialist political organizing” (Henderson & Oates 2022, 18). SoS was largely formed by those from the city (Millward 2011, 636) and was initially “a profoundly local ‘Scouse’ and ‘classed’ social movement” (Williams 2012, 433). It was also inspired by former manager Bill Shankly’s famous dictum that “The socialism I believe in is everyone working together, everyone having a share of the rewards” which soon adorned its website (Williams 2011, 434). This was soon tempered by some realism where Jay McKenna of the group said that: “It’s not about socialism; it’s not that they [the club’s owners] can’t be rich and they can’t make money. It’s about whatever decisions they make, we have all got to be pulling in the same direction. It can’t be the club at all costs, making as much money as possible, leaving the supporters behind” (cited in Williams 2012, 436). If nothing else, SoS seeks to act as a restraint on unbridled capitalism – again reminiscent of the work of trade unions.

There have also been debates about whether Liverpool fans can be Conservative voters. This is somewhere my bias will be shown as I think not.¹⁶ There are reasons why the Kop often sings “Fuck the Tories” and why it often sang songs which said that it would party when Margaret Thatcher died. It should be noted here that Liverpool is “A city with a strong sense of identity [which] had a reputation as a strongly socialist city, and one that stood apart from apart from the Conservative metropolitan centre of southern England” (Cronin 2017, 252). For LFC, the arrival of the Scottish socialist Bill Shankly¹⁷ as manager in 1959 and his subsequent success led to “supporters and professional players shar(ing) a distinctive class membership and a common experience of democratic participation, in this case in the regeneration of the modern Liverpool FC” (Williams 2012, 428). Moreover, following the 1981 riots the demonisation of the city which followed was concurrent with LFC’s successes and meant that the club “came to represent and embody pride in

16 One anonymous reviewer suggested that this was going too far. I refer them to numerous videos on the internet showing LFC fans (of all ages) singing “Fuck the Tories”. In the 2019 general election Labour received 65.2% of the vote in Merseyside, a drop of 6% from its 2017 performance. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_parliamentary_constituencies_in_Merseyside). In 2022 the Liverpool-born Wrexham striker Paul Mullin wore boots with the legend “F*** the Tories!” on them, before being told not to do so (<https://www.walesonline.co.uk/sport/football/wrexham-striker-paul-mullin-reveals-26839131>). See also LFC songster Jamie Webster singing “Fuck The Tories” at the Glastonbury festival in 2002: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hxufz0x4Myg>.

17 Space does not allow for a full discussion of the immense importance of Shankly whose most famous quote was to the effect that “football is *not* a matter of life or death – it’s more important than that”. That quote and more insight in to Shankly and his beliefs can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e_bdnGZLJps.

the city” (Cronin 2017, 252). Meanwhile enduring resentment came following the leaking of Conservative Minister Geoffrey Howe’s comment that it might be best to leave the city to “managed decline” (cited in Henderson & Oates 2022, 7).¹⁸ Another dividing issue might be the extent to which it is necessary to hate Manchester United.

One recent clash of values has been the expressions of disappointment when LFC captain Jordan Henderson – who had previously voiced support for LGBT causes – moved to play in Saudi Arabia, a country known for persecution of gay people. In all this, “our values” are often invoked, in ways which do not always make clear what those values are.¹⁹ When invoked, such values are expressed in rather vague terms such as an SoS spokesperson’s talk of “the Istanbul spirit²⁰ or the Hillsborough situation that pool of Liverpool references” (cited in Williams 2012, 435). Certainly, the move to Saudi Arabia of three players and former captain Steven Gerrard in 2023 raises questions about what values were inculcated in to them during their time at the club. If Bill Shankly had in the 1960s rebuilt LFC “on a bedrock of socialist beliefs” (Jonze 2021) then it was hard to square this with players chasing ridiculous pay-cheques. If – in the words of LFC’s brilliant marketing slogan – “This means more” what is this and *how* does it mean more?

Worldwide television coverage has made a major contribution to the globalisation of clubs’ fan bases. It is now routine for groups of international supporters to attend games at Anfield²¹ and developing a global fan base is now *de rigeur* for top clubs. As the EPL has become increasingly an international product, so the amount of foreign fans at games has risen, potentially raising tensions with “local” fans (Nash 2000; Evans & Norcliffe 2016, 227), especially those who are priced out of being able to attend (Millward 2012, 636). Indeed, Liverpool’s foreign fans have been derided by Everton fans known to sing that Liverpool Scandinavian fans should “fuck off back to Norway” (Henderson & Oates 2022, 13).

Differences between “local” and international fans have been evidenced very different interpretations of the same player, such as the local idolisation of Liverpool-born compared to more distant fans’ more measured responses (Rookwood & Millward 2011). It can also be seen in divisions about how much to deride opponents and what supporting Liverpool means to those based in the city and those based outside the UK (Evans & Norcliffe 2016, 221). Such divisions have been exacerbated as wealthy and visiting (as opposed to regular) fans have begun attending what was previously a local working class sport (Evans & Norcliffe 2016, 221). However, for today’s super-clubs ‘many team brands profit from millions of satellite supporters worldwide’ (Henderson & Oates 2022, 21) with, for example, Real Madrid earning 60% of merchandise revenue from foreign fans (Kerr & Emery 2011, 880). Television has also changed fan culture. As Nash (2000, 6) argues:

De-localisation of fandom may previously have been an ‘accident’ of television coverage, but it is now central to top English clubs’ profit maximisation, whose relationships with their communities decline as they consciously seek out the most lucrative markets for tickets and merchandise (non-local fans spend the most per capita per visit [Lee, 1999: 89]). LFC’s crowds have changed markedly since the switch to all-seater stadia in 1994, with the crowd more affluent and ticket prices up 300 per cent. The relationship of many locals with LFC is thus increasingly marked by social exclusion, with match-day at LFC’s ground Anfield characterised by the grey economy (including ticket touting) and a scramble for scarce tickets.

18 See also <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-16361170>.

19 See, for example, www.liverpoolway.co.uk/index.php/?/articles/latest-news/carragher-footballers-will-think-very-carefully-about-speaking-out-on-inclusivity-issues-after-henderson-furore-r3820/.

20 In 2005 Liverpool played AC Milan in Istanbul in the final of the European Champions’ League. 3–0 down at half time, the team made a remarkable comeback to draw 3–3 and then win the match on penalties after extra time. This match has been mythologised over the years as has the Liverpool fans singing “You’ll Never Walk Alone” at half time – an act of defiance which seemed to inspire the team. (See Jonze 2021.)

21 In 2010 volcanic dust caused flight cancellations across Europe. The result at Anfield was 8,000 empty seats (Rookwood & Millward 2011, 42).

The cost of admission has also seen the game move away from its working class base toward a more affluent audience (Armstrong & Young 1999, 203, Rookwood & Millward 2011, 41), and led to “shrinking numbers of working class fans” (Edensor 2015, 87). For example, between 1990 and 2011 “British cumulative inflation came to 77.1%, yet football ticket prices rose 1108% at Anfield” (Evans & Norcliffe 2016, 225). It has also been noted that: “Tickets and souvenirs are costly, often beyond the means of working-class fans. In the case of Liverpool FC, game attendance is increasingly difficult for locals, as profiteers buy up tickets to sell to the club’s legion of overseas fans” (Henderson & Oates 2022, 6).

It seems that what has developed is something of a divide between “local” and other fans. While Liverpool fan groups such as Reclaim The Kop and SoS have made efforts to include international fans in their activities, there also appears to be a lingering sense in some quarters that such fans might not be “proper” supporters. They may not know the words to songs or – even worse – get the words wrong. One article refers to the disdain shown to international fans who wore scarves celebrating a particular game, and featuring *both* sides. For diehards (including me) the job of a fan is to support the team, not show others’ colours. SoS has taken on something of an educational role here. In 2009, its chair, Paul Rice, said that non-Liverpool based fans had to learn the codes of being a Liverpool supporter:

If you want to support Liverpool, there are certain standards that go with that; that set us apart. And we would hope that they’re the reasons you support Liverpool. Not because we win lots of trophies but because we have a certain attitude to things and we go about things in a different way... It’s about having a bit more class and culture, and understanding where Liverpool Football Club has come from. And where it is and how it got there, and the values that are instilled in the club. (Millward 2012, 638.)

As Millward (2012, 639) notes, being accepted “was only the condition that they assimilated their codes of supporting a team”. The role of the foreign fan was to learn and fall in with existing crowd rituals, *not* to develop their own. This comes in a context where on the Kop “outsides are criticized for unfamiliarity with supporters’ rehearsed rituals” (Evans & Norcliffe 2016, 219). In short, this debate concerns what it means to be one of “us” – a “real” Liverpool fan – and how to show it. This is a longstanding issue and in my early days as a supporter I tried to fit in by adopting a Scouse accent and dressing in ways which I thought my fellow fans would approve of.

A SoS representative put it this way: “Having a Scouse core to it [SoS] was crucial because those thousands of Liverpool supporters from outside Merseyside who bought into it did so because they bought into the culture of the club – which of course is basically a Liverpool culture... If you buy into that or one element of another than fine, you’re in” (cited in Williams 2011, 435). As Williams (*ibid.*) notes: “This rather reductionist view also helped produce a basic structural philosophy for the founding of SoS – led and driven in policy terms by local, ‘authentic’ Scousers, but supplemented and legitimized by a global Reds backing”.

Finally, one key difference between “international” and “local” fans, is that international fans may feel free to change their allegiance should things go badly on the pitch. Nash (2000, 14) suggests that

the strength of feeling against fans prepared to switch club loyalty because a team was under-achieving is another indicator of the penetration of English fandom discourses, the centrality of loyalty, and investment of personal emotional and psychological capital.

Such a thing is unthinkable for “local fans” who “remain enthusiastically supporters, because there is no viable alternative; they are emotionally invested in a club that has come to be part of their own identity” (Evans & Norcliffe 2016, 229). That’s me. I am a Liverpoolian and I come from the Spion Kop.

I date my own fandom back to 1 May 1965, when Liverpool played Leeds in the FA Cup Final, which was then the highlight of the English football season. They won 2–1 and I fell in love. I first saw them live at Queens Park Rangers in 1969 and at Anfield in 1971. By the mid 1970s I was a regular attender, I got a season ticket in the 1980s, gave up later in decade and then got it again in the 1990s. I will keep it until I die. I have seen them play in 7 European Cup/Champions League finals, several FA Cups, numerous League Cups and have been present when they have won the English Championship. I have visited at least seven countries to watch them. It has been quite some, especially as I have only lived in the city for three years during that time.

Like everyone (Henderson & Oates 2022, 5), my fandom is personal. What LFC means to me is part of my identity – a key signifier of hostility or favour. I am one of those fans who “unconditionally follow their club irrespective of the ‘product’ on offer” (Edensor 2015, 87–88) – although I certainly prefer a winning product! But I cannot fathom talk of football fans as “consumers” (Kerr & Emery 2011). Whatever my relationship is to LFC is it goes way beyond simply consuming a product. It is *much* more than that to me. Objectively²² I can see that the idea of watching football could be seen as consumption, but football is not about objectivity. In a game where, to cite an oft-quoted cliché, “it’s all about opinions”, objectivity has little role to play. This is a realm where subjectivity is the norm and academic objectivity holds no cultural capital whatsoever.

It is also important to note the *tribal* nature of football fandom. For many belonging to one tribe automatically involves a disavowal of other tribes. I fall in to that. Much as I know that there are some beliefs which are simply wrong, I also *know* that supporters of other teams are simply wrong. There are some people who can watch any game of football and enjoy it. I am not one of those. Unless it is Liverpool who are playing, I simply don’t *care* (unless the outcome of the game affects Liverpool in some way). There are two exceptions: my local boyhood club Aldershot Town whom I still watch whenever I can and Manchester United – who I want to lose every time. Outside of this *other* (a term deliberately chosen for its tribal implications) teams do not matter to me.

An anecdote: A former partner once bought me Nick Hornby’s *Fever Pitch* – a very fine book. But what my partner did not understand was that it held no interest for me. She mistakenly thought that as it was about football, then I would like it. But for me it was about *Arsenal*, which meant it was *not* about football. I care about Liverpool, the fate of other teams is for *others* to care about. The fools.

22 Mumford (2012) distinguishes between “purists” who appreciate the game whatever teams is playing and “partizans”, interested only in their own team’s games. I am a partizan who thanks Tommi Röpötti for helping me understand this point.

Songs to Learn and Sing

The use of song by fans has received some academic attention. A general consensus is that fan song comes from below, while the use of music on PA

systems is an attempt to impose order from above (Laing & Linehan 2013, 308). The development of football songs is obviously linked to developments within popular music more broadly. In fact, singing at football matches is *genuinely* popular music – a key contemporary media. It is arguably *the* most democratic form of music making as *anyone* can do it. As Armstrong and Young (1999, 180) note: “As a public expression of social and cultural identity, football chants²³ have no other modern-day equivalent”. For many participants this will be the only time in their lives that they regularly sing in public. Those who would be terrified by the thought of singing in public alone do so when accompanied by fellow fans. It is also a marker of individual and collective identity and so it has been noted that some fans may resent those who do not sing (Collinson 2009, 18).

Somewhat akin to watching other live entertainment, to watch live football is to indulge in experiential consumption. It is not part of the everyday life, but part of a ritual, one whose specialness is rooted in both familiar habits (for regular fans) and escapism from daily life. Whatever problems one has tend to fade away when one is united with thousands of others whose overriding purpose is to cheer the team, *my team*, to victory. There is escapism here of the sort also found in live music audiences (Behr et al. 2016). However, being a football fan also means that there *is* no escape. I am texted almost daily about the fortunes of LFC, especially if they lose! In comparison I am rarely texted about my music fandom. Being an LFC marks my identity for others in ways that, for example, being a Bruce Springsteen fan doesn't.

Despite television's contemporary dominance of the sport it is *being there* which counts. This is what people will pay extraordinary amounts of money for. They want to *be there* at the match, to be *part* of it. That means being part of the *atmosphere* – a tricky term but one within which singing plays a preeminent role (Edensor 2015, 83). Fans create this and it is essential – to both the *in situ* and televised consumption of the game.²⁴ This was vividly illustrated during Covid. No fans present to create atmosphere meant a sense of disengagement and seeing players celebrate goals in almost empty stadiums was somewhat eerie.

Crowds can create a “buzz” and can “cheer” certain aspects of the game. But it is when they *sing* that things really come alive, when the atmosphere becomes *real*. The result of such singing is not to *add* to the “atmosphere”, it is to *be* it. Key factors affecting the production of atmosphere include: ‘the current success of the team, the importance of the match and a confident and relaxed sociability that is not usually present elsewhere’ (Edensor 2015, 85).

Armstrong and Young argue that “fans play a considerable part in creating the spectacle of the game” (1999, 181) and suggest that it is important to “explore how and why football fans chant, sing, gesticulate and dance out their obsessional support: or, just as importantly, understand when they indulge in wholesome derision of the opposition” (ibid., 173). They further suggest that supporters have never believed that it is what happens on the pitch alone which determines the results of games (ibid., 176). The role of singing is to raise the spirits of the team and unite disparate fans in one cause – victory and the concomitant vanquishing of the opposition. Armstrong and Young summarise:

Academic analyses of football chants have tended to suggest these subverting chants are vehicles for expressing nationalism, regionalism and socio-political antagonism, and at times there are traces of such concept in the songs. However,

23 There may be important distinctions to be made between chanting and singing, but these can wait for another article.

24 It should also be noted that singing LFC songs in pubs around Anfield forms an important part in building atmosphere before the match – and in continuing it afterwards. In some ways packed pubs with people standing and singing fills in the gaps in atmosphere and collectivity induced by all-seater stadiums.

chants are more than that... they can be read as vehicles to dramatize and exaggerate a cultural identification that uses gender and social differentiation to create tension, to provoke nostalgia, to show endurance in the face of defeat, to provoke ridicule and to provide intimacy. (Ibid., 204.)

25 See www.facebook.com/theENDfanzine.

Writing a year later, Nash (2000, 97) argued that previous analyses had drawn on notions of identity performance, notions of transgressions and combinations thereof. As Collinson (2009, 15) notes: “Football songs and communal singing are central to the traditions and performance of soccer fandom”. He goes on to suggest that Christopher Small’s notion of musicking (1998) – where music is an activity, rather than a thing – is an important way to understand what is happening here. In this case to take part in musicking is to indulge in the celebration of one’s place and team, while simultaneously seeking to intimidate those opponents who are seeking to ruin the celebration. As Power (2011, 107) says the use of sound, including singing, is “meant to intimidate the opposing team and its supporters and place them at a disadvantage”. Indeed, while opposition fans across England now rarely face the violence that characterised football attendance in the 1970s and 80s, then the notion of (limited) intimidation is often a key part of the Anfield experience for opposition fans and players, who enter the pitch beneath an emblem which reminds them “This is Anfield” – a place if not to fear, then at least respect. A t-shirt on sale for many years outside Anfield pictured a shaking opposition player looking on to the Anfield pitch and proclaiming “I’m not going out there”.

The development of singing at football matches has also been connected to the development of 1960s youth culture (Armstrong & Young 1999, 180; Laing & Linehan 2013, 312; Williams 2012, 428) with Collinson (2009, 23–24) arguing that “it was only during the 1960s that plainsong became a defining element of terrace life”. Laing and Linehan (2013, 307) also suggest that “popular music has been a presence throughout the modern history of football”. Importantly David Goldblatt has suggested that “it was *at Anfield* that the contact between the new pop music and football was made” (cited Laing & Linehan 2013, 311, my emphasis). One example of this is the editorship of fanzine *The End* by Farm singer Pete Hooton.²⁵

It should be recognised that singing at football matches is one of the very few *spontaneous* displays of mass public singing. Even if stadium managers increasingly try to orchestrate singing, the events (or lack thereof) on the field of play can evoke different sorts of singing – urging the team on, praising certain players, disparaging officials and opponents etc. Other than at political demonstrations and some other sporting events, I have rarely witnessed spontaneous public singing and football retains something special here, raising the questions of why this is the case.

Drawing on Foucault, Armstrong and Young (1999, 174) suggest that fan behaviour is an exercise of power – and one which the authorities have been wary of. This has manifested itself in examples such as the requirement for EPL stadiums to be all-seater and in the discouragement of politically incorrect singing. There have been attempts to police the content of songs. For example, Armstrong and Young (1999, 178) note that at some grounds “Even ‘approved’ song sheets and ‘chanting areas’ have been tried as a means to remove the strong [supporters who might disrupt the sort of atmosphere which corporate match sponsors]”. They also note that:

in this brave new clean and antiseptic world the clubs have found they are having to orchestrate chanting, or even play chants over the tannoys to provide the passion and atmosphere that has all but vanished from these all-seater customer castles (Armstrong & Young 1999, 203).

However, some improvement can be discerned here. For example, if racist chanting was once *de rigueur*, it is at least much less common now. Progress, however limited, has been made.

Meanwhile most fans harbour dreams of playing for their team. As they do not, their most important function is to help the team and the most obvious way to do that is “through song” (Power 2011, 100). Edensor (2015, 82) suggests that fans “can potentially influence what happens on the pitch”. Managers and players routinely refer to fans as the extra 12th man on the team, and their main effect comes through singing. As Edensor (2015, 85) suggests:

There is a common sense of understanding that fans can act as a “12th man” in influencing the outcome of the match, and this is often attributed as a key factor in accounting for the statistical fact that the home team is most likely to prevail across professional football.

Power (2011 101) adds that: “Not only is there a firm belief among supporters in their ability to influence events on the pitch as they are happening, that they are able to lift their team and to help them win the match, but this is also a belief frequently bolstered by players and managers, as they comment in the media that the crowd lifts the team or that they play better when hearing their name sung”.

As I can’t play for LFC, my contribution is to raise the players’ spirits via song, while simultaneously projecting part of my own identity. Power (2011, 102) notes that there is much discussion among supporters as to whether they are doing enough to help, particularly if the team is failing, and how they might improve things. For Power (2011, 100) seeing the club as part of one’s self

demands, at least in theory, that fans must also do their part in the contest, which, disallowed as they are from entering the field of play, they largely manage through song. Various techniques are used: colonization of space and construction of place through attempts at musical dominance, both of volume and wit, over opposition fans; praise and encouragement of their own players and denigration of the oppositions and construction of and celebration of (superior) identity.

A lot of writers are nostalgic for the days before the advent of all-seater stadiums as the swaying of crowds – perhaps especially on the Kop – gave rise to a boisterous atmosphere. The Kop came to be “an authentic collective cultural space for public expression and exchange among working-class people and their symbolic representatives” (Williams 2012, 427). Armstrong and Young (1999, 205) lament the rise of “individual seating that destroys the old terrace culture” and Power (2011, 102) has noted concerns amongst LFC fans that the atmosphere in the ground has deteriorated with the advent of it becoming an all-seater stadium, something which helped spark Reclaim The Kop in to action in October 2006. Power (2011, 102) explains that: “Backed by the club, the... campaign worked through websites, fan forums and various other avenues of advocacy to arrest this decline and restore the Liverpool fans’ singing culture to its former glory”.

In an article which looks at the loss felt by Manchester City fans when the club moved from their home at Maine Road to the branded Etihad Stadium, Edensor (2005, 84) critiques ‘crass strategies by stadium managers to “improve” the atmosphere’. I share that nostalgia. My first experiences on the Kop were of being part of a swaying mass and not knowing which part of the stand I would end up following during key moments of the game. Sitting is *not* the same. Safer, of course, but simply not as good. Not as exciting and enjoyable. As Edensor (2015, 88) notes, despite the inherent nostalgia,

the packed terraces on certain match days surely must have provided more potentiality for the production of greater noise, physical contact and involvement with the proceedings on the pitch, thus contributing to the generation of a thick, pressing, collective atmosphere into which fans were absorbed.

Space is key to understanding football within Liverpool (Evans & Norcliffe 2016, 219) and Anfield is the ultimate space. Many clubs – such as Manchester City, Arsenal and Tottenham Hotspur – have moved to new grounds in recent years. However, despite various plans at various points to move away from Anfield,²⁶ LFC has remained in its original home, eventually deciding to gradually increase the capacity rather than move. Owners FSG have seemingly learned the lesson that Anfield is a key part of LFC supporters’ psychology (Cronin 2017, 263). For Farred it is “the very incarnation, not simply of the symbol, of the city and Liverpool’s exceptionality” (cited in Cronin 2017, 252).

It should be noted that the new era of football has also seen the rise of fan activism. At Liverpool this has included the [Hillsborough campaign](#) which saw fans fight for 27 years to get Liverpool fans cleared for blame for causing the disaster. The use of song at the twentieth anniversary of the tragedy, with fans erupting with chants of “justice” during a speech by government Minister Andy Burnham has been seen as a key turning point in the campaign (Power 2011). The SoS group was a key part of the campaign against American owners Tom Hicks and George Gillett and, along with other supporters’ groups, was successful of forcing clubs, including LFC, to abandon plans for an elite European Super League in April 2021. This included SoS mocking LFC’s branding by using a “Thi\$ M£an\$ Mor£” meme on social media (Henderson & Oates 2022, 16–19) and utilising fan power to reverse the club’s decision to put some of its employees on furlough during the Covid 19 pandemic (Henderson & Oates 2022, 13).

Importantly, following the Hillsborough tragedy Liverpool’s sense of uniqueness was reconfigured, as Cronin (2017, 259) explains: “In the wake of Hillsborough Liverpool FC, already viewed by its supporters as something exceptional in English football, was refashioned into a club that was unique”. Williams (2012, 439) quotes prominent supporter Rogan Taylor’s view that “It is what makes people come from all over the world to here; the unique nature of the Liverpool experience”. Williams and Hopkins (2011, 170) refer to “local historical and cultural practices which produce a highly distinctive local ‘structure of feeling’ in the city of Liverpool”. Grant Farred has suggested that “there are few other communities in the world with a great football club where there is such a strong link between the club and its city’s residents” (cited in Cronin 2017, 252).

This uniqueness has been exploited by the club’s marketers in the “This is Liverpool. This means more” campaign which was launched in 2018. (Henderson & Oates 2022). The brilliance of this campaign is to build on LFC’s

26 This was especially true during the disastrous period of Tom Hicks and George Gillet’s ownership from February 2007 to October 2010 (Williams 2012, 432; Williams and Hopkins 2011, 165). Apropos having a new ground, the new owners had promised to have “a spade in the ground within 60 days” (Williams 2012, 432). Nothing happened.

history and capture the feelings of many fans. It is simply what we (by which I mean my own imagined community) all believe – that Liverpool is something else, the one team that really matters. *Of course* it means more – it's Liverpool!! The close bond between supporters and club is articulated in the campaign's video where Bill Shankly intones that "My main aim, my main ambition, is to please these people. I live for these people" (cited in Henderson & Oates 2022, 11). As part of the campaign the club's chief commercial officer Billy Hogan referred to the club's "unique DNA" (Henderson & Oates 2022, 11).

That uniqueness is expressed in song. Power (2011, 102) shows that on social media: "Fans regularly discuss an array of issues, such as uniqueness of songs when compared with those of other teams' supporters (there is a commonly voiced suspicion of homogenization of supporter songs nationally) and whether songs accurately reflect what it means to be a Liverpool fan". What is important here is not necessarily that this uniqueness is objectively true, but that it is believed in and articulated. As Armstrong and Young (1999, 179) note:

Football is... about social differentiation. It is about us against them, and their defeat. It denies egalitarian ideals, and revels in our superiority, which it sings and dances on its way to success. It denies the Christian ethic that would turn the other cheek, and rather re-emphasizes danger, victory and domination in battles against some clearly identified "other". In effect it is a celebration of ritual warfare that will claim victory in ecstatic song.

Such differentiation also entails derision and expressions of hatred to opponents. For Collinson (2009, 17) football chants can be seen as a form of symbolic violence. Perhaps the peak of this for me as a Liverpool supporter was hearing fellow fans singing a song in praise of mass murderer Harold Shipman because he "only killed Mancs" (Mancunians). I have also heard Liverpool fans celebrating the 1958 Munich air disaster in which 23 Manchester United players and officials died. The Mancunian version was a United fan who wore a top suggesting that the 97 dead at Hillsborough was not enough²⁷ and the club has recently complained about chants at other grounds which celebrate those deaths.²⁸ While such cases can be seen as being on the extreme, they do illustrate the level to which tribalism can descend.

Liverpool songs

It would be impossible to chart the length and breadth of Liverpool songs. For example, most players have a song to themselves, although some might be rarely sung. Previous analysis has examined types of music used at matches including orchestrated singing, military bands and use of music over PA systems (Laing & Linehan 2013). However, there has not been previous analysis of LFC songs. In common with other clubs, these include songs deriding opponents, songs eulogising the team and its players and managers, songs about the club's history and its city. While only the surface can be scratched here, it is hoped to provide some insight in to a particular, arguably unique, usage of song.

Supporters on the Kop have been described as "one of the spectacles of world football" and the Kop itself "a space where the culture of Liverpool FC is reproduced game after game" (Evans & Norcliffe 2016, 229). LFC's success

27 See www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/football/article-12210257/Man-United-fan-33-wore-vile-shirt-mocking-Hillsborough-disaster-FA-Cup-final-pleads-guilty.html.

28 See www.bbc.com/sport/football/65184314#:~:text=Liverpool%20say%20tragedy%20chanting%20%22has,has%20no%20place%20in%20football%22.

in the 1960s took place in front of impressive displays of fandom. Scenes of swaying fans on the Kop became famous in the 1960s. The Kop singing “You’ll Never Walk Alone” and “Liverpool” was sampled by Pink Floyd in the song “Fearless” from the 1971 album *Meddle*. An LP consisting of just the crowd singing was released in 1972.²⁹

Overall the performance of song by Liverpool fans has become iconic. For example, with the side 3–0 down at half-time to AC Milan in the Champions’ League Final in Istanbul in 2005, the fans’ singing of “You’ll Never Walk Alone” has been held to have played a key contribution to the team reviving to level to 3–3 and eventually win on penalties (Jonze 2021). Academic analysis has suggested that this notion has “reached legendary status” (Power 2011, 99). According to Luis Garcia who played in the game: “The crowd was the secret weapon, what an amazing performance of belief. They never give up, never let us walk alone through the storm that was that AC Milan side”³². As noted earlier, Power (2011) has suggested that the particular use of song by Liverpool supporters helped to achieve justice in the long-drawn-out Hillsborough campaign.

A key focus for LFC fans is the song “You’ll Never Walk Alone” (YNWA). Originally a show tune from the 1945 Rodgers and Hammerstein musical *Carousel*, its recording by Liverpool band Gerry (Marsden) and The Pace-makers went to the top of the UK singles charts in 1963. After a copy was given to Bill Shankly it went on to become an anthem for both club and supporters who according to Marsden “find solidarity with its words” (cited Laing and Linehan 2013, 311). Certainly, they suggest mutual aid and Jonze (2021) suggests that its lyrics of solidarity and togetherness made a perfect partner to an LFC being built “on a bedrock of socialist beliefs”. Following Hillsborough, the song became central to the annual commemoration events. Manager Jürgen Klopp has suggested that hearing it sung at Anfield “never stops creating goosebumps... never stops feeling really special” (Jonze 2021). Celtic fans also sing “YNWA”, seemingly following a European game with Liverpool in 1996. However the song and phrase “YNWA” are not used as regularly by Celtic fans as they are by Liverpool fans who frequently use the term to express both their fandom and solidarity with fellow fans. This is not mirrored at Celtic. It is *our* song.

Liverpool fans have also had a tradition of songs which celebrate particular events. Thus the club’s first appearance in the European Cup Final saw the song “In My Liverpool Home” changed to “We’re all going to Rome”:

We’re all going to Rome
 We’re all going to Rome
 If it’s tickets you want, then we’ve got none to spare
 We’ve even stopped drinking to share up the fare
 You can tell Mönchengladbach³⁰ The Kop’ll be there
 We’re all going to Rome

Trips to finals at London’s Wembley Stadium were often accompanied by an adaptation of “Que sera sera”:

Tell me ma, me ma³¹
 I don’t want no tea, no tea
 We’re going to Wem-ber-ley
 Tell me ma, me ma

29 See www.discogs.com/release/2963975-The-Kop-Choir-Liverpool-Clubs-Own-Football-Sound.

30 Borussia Mönchengladbach were Liverpool’s opponent in the said finals.

31 Me ma means my mother. It seems that other clubs also sing variants of this song. If the club reaches two finals in a season, the “ma” is asked to “put the champagne on ice” as the team are “going to Wembley twice”.

32 See www.liverpooecho.co.uk/sport/football/football-news/liverpool-half-time-istanbul-benitez-18282081.

Songs sung about particular players often highlight their association with the club. This is particularly important in an era when footballers are increasingly international. To give an example of this, let's look at the Liverpool starting 11's of that 1965 F.A. Cup Final which set me off as an LFC fan and the last final I went to, in 2022. In 1965, 4 of the team came from Liverpool, 7 from England and 4 from Scotland (largely drawn to the club via Scottish manager, Bill Shankly). In 2022, 1 came from Liverpool, 1 other from England, 1 from Scotland and 8 from beyond the UK. The point here is not to be judgmental, but to illustrate the changes. Fernando Torres was serenaded as "*Liverpool's* Number 9" (my emphasis) and in song Virgil Van Dijk is "*our* Number 4" (my emphasis). Now fans sing in celebration of Trent Alexander-Arnold as "the Scouser in our team", whereas the 1965 team was founded on them. LFC is now really an international corporation based in Liverpool, whose main assets come from across the globe.

Perhaps the most successful recent pean to an international player has been that to Roberto Firmino – also claimed as *our* Number Nine:

There's something that the Kop want you to know
The best in the world is Bobby Firmino
Our Number Nine
Give him the ball and he'll score every time
Si señor!
Give the ball to Bob and he will score

In addition to songs celebrating the team and the place, tributes to managers and players have long been a part of the Kop's repertoire. Williams (2012, 43) suggests that at LFC "the cult of club manager, post Bill Shankly, is arguably more profoundly rooted than anywhere else in Britain". Bill Shankly, Bob Paisley and Joe Fagan all received homage via having their surname sung to the tune of "Amazing Grace". In recent years managers such as Gérard Houllier, Rafael Benitez, Brendan Rogers and Jürgen Klopp have all received individual songs.

Liverpudlians are also known for a particular sense of humour and humorous songs have often featured. The tall Peter Crouch got "He's big/ he's red/his feet stick out the bed". Full back Djimi Traore's scoring of a notorious own goal led to a song called "Blame it on Traore" based on the Michael Jackson song "Blame it on the Boogie". Following an incident in which he threw back in to the crowd a pound coin which had been thrown at him, Jamie Carragher received the accolade: "He's Scouse/he's sound/ he'll twat (hit) you with a pound". Irishman Robbie Keane was serenaded with "He's fast/ He's Red/ He talks like (Irish tv character) Father Ted".

The Beatles were also from Liverpool and their influence is easily apparent. For example, LFC fans have long used "Yellow Submarine" to sing about living in a Red and White Kop. The song was also used to serenade Jamie Carragher as fans sang of dreaming to having "a team of Carraghers". Current Manager Jürgen Klopp has a version of "I Feel Fine" which includes the refrain "I'm in love with him and I feel fine". Ian Rush was told that "All you need is Rush". Steven Gerrard was sometimes eulogised in an adopted version of "Let It Be".

As noted earlier, a lot of singing at football is about derision – of opponents (team, players, managers, owners etc), officials and officialdom (especially the police). As Armstrong and Young (1999, 185) note, "the act of denying humanity to the opposition was so intrinsic to the role of fandom... In essence

they all faced abuse because they were not ‘us’, and our cultural identity based on this social differentiation demanded they be castigated for being the ‘other’”. Such differentiation also entails derision and expressions of hatred to opponents.

Liverpool fans are certainly no exception here, with many songs of hatred directed to opponents – especially Manchester United and, to a lesser extent some London clubs and local rivals Everton. I was present at Newcastle when every time suspected racist Lee Bowyer got the ball he was met with a chant of “You’re supposed to be in jail”. Wayne Rooney’s reported use of a mature prostitute earned him a chant of “fat granny shagger”, while John Terry was told that his mother “liked the Scouse cock” because she had once had a boyfriend from Liverpool.

On the other hand, the Kop always applauds opposition goalkeepers when they take up their positions before it – a longstanding tradition which feels at odds with the modern game’s increasing tribalism. Liverpool fans have also been acknowledged to applaud (some) other teams and fans (Kerr & Emery 2011, 888).

One issue here is what happens when ex-players – those who used to be “us” and are now “them” – come back to play. At LFC it very much depends the circumstances under which they left and who to. A young player going to a rival is hated (Raheem Stirling’s defection to Manchester City earned him cries of “One greedy bastard”), while others will be welcomed, if leave at later stage in their careers or are seen as having done enough for the club. Some are not forgiven for what they subsequently did. I couldn’t forgive Michael Owen for subsequently playing for Manchester United and found it bizarre that former United player Paul Ince signed for LFC. How could he ever be committed to us after playing for *them*? But certainly some former players have been welcomed back to Anfield via the singing of the songs which had accompanied their period playing for LFC.

Conclusion

This article has suggested that singing at football matches has become an essential part of fandom for many supporters. It has been a personal attempt to understand LFC fandom and its associated songs. It was noted that football fandom now takes place in an increasingly mediated environment with processes of globalisation and delocalisation. In this era authenticity and notions of “realness” become ever more complicated. However, Liverpool is also famous for producing the band The Real Thing and it is in songs that The Real Thing of LFC fandom is to be found.

I am a Liverpudlian and I come from the Spion Kop.

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