

a wink and a grin and then thundered his way through the song!”

The edition of *Top of the Pops* broadcast on 30 September 1971 saw one of the programme’s best-remembered performances – Rod Stewart and the Faces, performing ‘Maggie May’. With, at Rod’s insistence, special guest and long-time fan John Peel “playing” mandolin. Reinforcing the Faces’ image as the quintessential lads band, this *TOTP* has them kicking footballs all over the stage, as Peel kept his head down and “played” away. The performance, Dave Lewis wrote later, was “the perfect antidote to the doom and gloom of early 70s Britain with its industrial unrest, terrorist bombings and record unemployment for the post-war era”.

In his diary of 1971, Peel found himself during Christmas with the in-laws, managing to catch a repeat of his “performance”: “Turned over to see myself playing mandolin with the Faces on *Top of the Pops*. Very funny to sit and watch it again. God bless them for giving us such joy during 1971.”

This was effectively the performance that launched Stewart as a superstar; within weeks ‘Maggie May’ and its parent album, *Every Picture Tells A Story*, would go on to become the first single and LP by a UK act to be simultaneously No.1 in the UK and USA.

Though rather less successful, Ronnie Lane – Rod’s colleague from the Faces – also received a warm welcome at Television Centre, as Keith Altham remembered: “Ronnie had left the Faces, and was launching his solo career. He was asked on *Top of the Pops* to promote ‘How Come’ and at the time was living in a caravan. So Ronnie turns up at TV Centre in this bloody great caravan, and all the commissionaires are looking forward to putting this uppity pop star in his place. Until Ronnie produces a bottle of Scotch, ‘Alright lads?’ and the caravan is ushered into one of the very rare parking spaces inside the BBC.

“Ronnie was so popular that he once got the commissionaires to tow Rod Stewart’s Lamborghini away because Ronnie told them it was occupying producer Johnnie Stewart’s parking space!”

Teenage hysteria came to occupy the front pages once again in that period of what seemed like pop’s last vestiges of innocence. The Bay City Rollers, Osmond Brothers, David Cassidy, Jackson 5... all generated scenes of near-riot and mass adulation – the likes of which hadn’t been seen since Beatlemania.

David Cassidy ruefully reflected: “I was never allowed to perform on *Top of the Pops*, I was told there’d be too many security problems.” Certainly whenever

Top of the Pops provided the shop window that led to the gigs.

“To understand the appeal of *Top of the Pops* in the 70s, one has to remember that pop music appealed to all age groups. Artists like David Cassidy and the Osmonds were adored as much by grandparents as grandchildren, and entire families sat around the television set to see what was in the charts that week. With no music channels, it was *the* big visual outlet for the stars of the day.

“In 1977 my picture on the set of *Top of the Pops* appeared on the cover of the *Sunday Telegraph* magazine with the caption: ‘David Hamilton – Housewives’ Superstar’. My flared trousers handily covered my four-inch platform shoes and for the first time in my life I looked tall!

“By the end of 1977... I moved to Radio 2, thus ending my days on *Top of the Pops* which definitely didn’t use Radio 2 DJs! I did appear again on the 25th anniversary edition when there was an enormous off-set spat between Simon Bates and Tony Blackburn and I almost had to drag them apart... the happy sound of Radio 1!

“The show was an institution and I’m so glad I did it. As the singles chart became less important, its significance dwindled but I’m sure it could have lived on as an album chart show. Unfortunately, the BBC didn’t keep all the editions, but back in the 70s I had a home video recorder and when I moved home a while ago I found some recordings in a cupboard under the stairs – which may be the only remaining copies of some shows. The quality is almost as good as an original recording.”

* * *

Unfortunately, all too often the vacuity of the *Top of the Pops* DJs’ appearances left them wide open to criticism – and eventually parody. Because the content of the show was based on popular opinion – if enough people bought a record, it eventually made its way onto *Top of the Pops* – there was really no reason for DLT or ‘Diddy’ David to analyse or critique the records they were introducing. But the sheer persistent jolliness of the jocks, particularly during the programme’s glory days, is still capable of making one squirm. Cynics felt it was like being trapped in a lift with an unremittingly jolly Redcoat.

It was to those chirpy Radio 1 DJs that Harry Enfield and Paul Whitehouse turned in the 1990s, for their sketches as that pop-tastically painful pair, Smashie & Nicey. Their spot-on skewering of that particularly vacuous *TOTP*-type of DJ