

the ray of sound





Closer in time to D-Day than the present day, The Pop Group film is, nevertheless, instantly recognisable as the modern world. It shows a world of drum-kits, amplifiers on chairs, singers holding microphones, bands facing an audience, a desire for something to happen.

They had rented a Chapel - Hope Chapel on Hope Chapel Hill - which was disused at the time. It was in Hotwells, where ideas come up from the earth, like the hot water which bubbles up from underground. It was the perfect location for the film we wanted to make - a 'promo' film for their first single. Dick O'Dell had me on the lowest of low budgets. That was a good thing, it prevented any form of cinematic excess. It was one camera, one lens, and a few lighting ideas stolen from Hammer horror. I had promised them a film from the inside, without knowing how I was going to achieve that. So I drove down from London with Phil Reynolds, in a rented car with a load of rented gear in the back. We had both just graduated from LCP.

Cinematic discipline, the careful synchronisation of the film to the music track which was playing back on 1/4" tape, went out the window in the first five minutes. I was standing in the middle of the audience and things were happening in a different way. I realized the only way to shoot this was to go with it, just to look for good footage, good angles, good light, and hope it would fit together later on.

It was a good performance, and not just by the band. The lack of a stage meant that everyone was on the same level, so there was an atmosphere of a happening rather than a gig. Their audience, their friends and fellow travellers, all played their part, some in costume. Back then, all this was alternative culture, now it is the mainstream. We might have done four or five separate takes; they became increasingly abstract.



The fire scenes were set up across the river in the woods. They had built 'Beyond Good + Evil' as letters supported by long staves. It took a while to get it all burning at the same time. A few people took the staves and used them as torches, spinning them round. All that was improvised.

About a week later, I set off for Bristol again, a couple of big silver tins of cutting copy under my arm. I had hired an editing suite down by Temple Meads. This time I was staying on Simons' sofa. He was playing Eric Dolphy, alternating with slabs of Ornette Coleman. The next afternoon, when I finally got to the cutting room, I had Eric Dolphys' fingers. I cut and cut. People would drop in from time to time, to see what was taking shape. When they left, I would cut and cut again. It became a mosaic of footage, more like a stained glass window made out of tiny coloured fragments. I eventually ran out of material to stitch into the seven minutes or so running time, so I took it back to the negative cutters, who translated my battered cutting copy - which I still have - into the master negative. Some of the shots are no more than six frames long : a 1/4 second.

Looking at the film again, what stands out, in comparison with most other work in this genre, is the lack of a fixed perspective. Every shot is from a different take or a different angle. The time-line is inconsistent, it meanders, it's disorientating, it's raucous. But everything is as it should be; that is The Pop Group.

That was how it happened.

Michael Calvert 2019

Phil Reynolds took the b&w photos shown here for the first time.

















FILM

5000



88

7





The pop gro-

The pop gro-

The pop gro-

The pop gro-

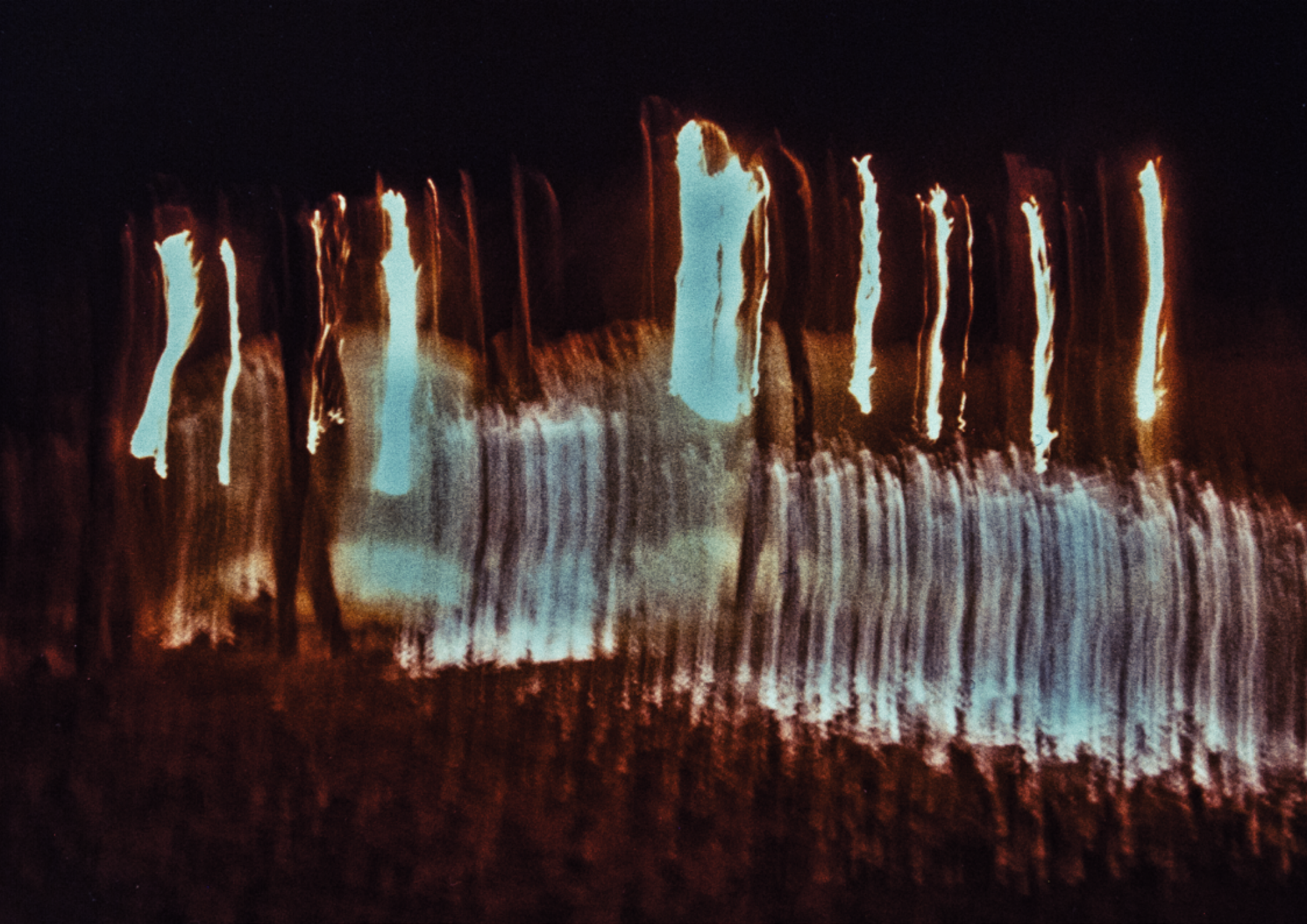
The pop gro-

The pop gro-

19

8







All images & this publication © michael calvert 2019
Free to download