NOW THEN

IS A FREE, INDEPENDENT MAGAZINE PUBLISHED IN SHEFFIELD AND MANCHESTER. IT IS ALL ABOUT SUPPORTING INDEPENDENCE IN ART, TRADE AND CITIZEN JOURNALISM. LOCAL PEOPLE ARE STRONGLY ENCOURAGED TO CONTRIBUTE AND EACH MAGAZINE INCLUDES ARTWORK FROM A DIFFERENT FEATURED ARTIST.

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EDITORIAL.

Regular readers may have already noticed the extra thickness of this magazine compared with previous issues. We’ve increased the page count to 52, which means plenty more content for you to peruse, including interviews with Sam Amidon, Akkord, Rob Ward and this issue’s featured artist, Robbie Porter. Elsewhere we have the usual spread between the political, satirical, literary and geographical, so don’t waste time reading these words, dive in.

We’re out and about again on 5th and 19th December – flick through to the listings in the music section for more info.

Enjoy the read.

IAN.
ian@nowthenmagazine.com

Our world is increasingly unequal, characterised by apathy, disconnection and the interests of the few. We can do better.

Now Then is a platform for independent art, trade, music, writing and local news.

It’s about supporting the things that make a community what it is – creativity, cooperation, collaboration, conscience and consciousness.

Anyone can contribute to the magazine, both online and off, remotely and in person, in support or in opposition – the discussion is what matters.

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Forget getting away to the seaside. This summer has seen most of the multi-million pound private finance initiative (PFI) contract to regenerate Miles Platting quietly moved offshore to the Channel Islands as investors make huge profits.

The PFI to finance the refurbishment of 1,520 council houses and flats, redesign the estate and build 1,080 new homes was intended to create a “spectacular transformation” of the inner city area after decades of state sponsored neglect, according to Manchester City Council, who signed the contract in 2007.

Six years on, refurbishment has finished but only 53 new homes of the promised 1,000 – most of which were intended for private sale, with many people’s existing homes being compulsorily purchased and demolished to make way for them – have so far been built. Taxpayers and council tenants will pay back nearly £500m over the 30 year contract, more than twice the £240m allocated in the original contract, according to Manchester City Council, who signed the contract in 2007.

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But on 27th June the London-based construction company Morgan Sindall announced a huge £4.4m profit when it sold its 33% stake in the PFI consortium Renaissance Miles Platting, owned through its subsidiary Lovell, to the Guernsey-based infrastructure fund HICL for £8.4m.

Just two weeks later, another chunk of the Miles Platting PFI scheme moved offshore when Investors In The Community (IIC), a partnership between Britain’s largest property developer Land Securities and project managers the Mill Group, sold its own 33% share to PFI specialist company John Laing, also registered in Guernsey. The Mill Group will continue to manage the overall project.

Secondary market trading, where companies cash in by selling on contracts to specialist funds once most of the risky business of getting a PFI project up and running has been dealt with, was worth £10.8bn over the last decade, according to research by the European Services Strategy Unit. Average profits were a massive 50.6%, with the research warning of “increased use of tax havens” to squirrel away money ultimately funded by the public.

Work to refurbish council properties in the area and then place them under the supervision of housing association Adactus, the third partner in Renaissance Miles Platting, had finished by 2010 according to Lovell. However, nearly all new housing contracted to be built within a 12-year period has still not materialised and some Treasury figures put the scheme’s total capital value at as little as £83m.

Of the 53 new properties which have been built, 11 are for social rent through Adactus, 20 for shared ownership schemes and 22 for outright sale by Lovell. The 2011/12 annual report for the scheme (which does not include figures for the accounts) states that any further homes built will be for “outright sale”. But despite the unfinished nature of the job, any potential risk investors may bear seems mitigated by generous public assistance.

Manchester City Council was contracted to hand over land to Renaissance Miles Platting for its own private development, but the council’s 2012/13 accounts state that, “due to the prevailing state of the housing market, it was more logical to make a payment to the contractor to represent the value of the land. A payment of £920,000 was made in 2010/11.”

The handful of houses that have been built so far were helped on their way with the government’s Kickstart programme, a state bailout of stalled developments carried out under New Labour which contributed £1.03m of the £7.3m finance for new housing.

The Department for Communities and Local Government paid £160m upfront for the project, over half the initial promised £300m investment in the area and far in excess of the initial proposed upfront public cost of under £60m according to the National Audit Office.

The project was hit by extraordinary delays, with a target agreement date of May 2003 overshot to an actual launch date of March 2007, and faced accusations of “spiralling out of control” from opposition Lib Dem councillors when it was revealed in 2006 that the council had spent over £1m on staffing costs and consultant payments before the contract had even been signed.

PFI is notoriously opaque, with backbench MPs in Parliament’s influential Public Accounts Committee complaining in 2011 that “the taxpayer’s position is made worse by poor transparency of investor and contractor information [...and] we suspect that initial investors are able to make excessive profits from selling PFI shares, but we lack the information to know for sure”. Invoices between Manchester City Council and Renaissance Miles Platting requested by Mule for 2010/11 have only been handed over once payment details had been blacked out with permanent marker.

Every penny of PFI is ultimately paid for by the public, but the growing transfer of the ownership of assets offshore leaves profits increasingly out of reach of the taxpayer. HICL, who hold Tameside Hospital and Salford’s Hope Hospital buildings among a wealth of other assets, paid £0.6m corporation tax on £55.4m pre-tax profits in 2013 according to their accounts. John Laing’s accounts show that the firm made £65.6m profits while paying £2.2m in tax in 2012.

Through Manchester City Council’s Housing Revenue Account, council housing residents in Miles Platting will ultimately be helping to bankroll such private benefit with their rent payments. The ward isn’t a wealthy one, with the council’s annual State of the City report finding that around half of the children in the area grow up in poverty and hundreds recently hit by the Coalition’s bedroom tax. Nevertheless, there’s a great deal of money to be made there.

MULE is a Manchester based non-profit independent media project, looking to promote social justice by getting out the news and views you won’t find elsewhere, from the rainy city and beyond. They are currently recruiting volunteers for various roles, from editors and writers to campaigners.

manchestermule.com
In 1914, the Russian city of St Petersburg became Petrograd. In 1917 it was the centre of the Bolshevik Revolution and when Lenin, the leader of the revolution, died in 1924, it became Leningrad. After the USSR collapsed in 1991, it went back to being St Petersburg again and caused a dilemma for Manchester.

For 50 years Manchester has been twinned with the city and in the 1960s named a square (well, more of a circle) Leningrad Square. There isn’t a street sign, but it’s the bit outside the Forum at Wythenshawe Civic Centre. Leningrad reciprocated by calling a main thoroughfare Manchester Street. But now Manchester is worried that visitors from St Petersburg might be offended by this reminder of their communist past every time they pop to the Civic Centre’s pound shops.

People, cities and whole countries often change their names in Eastern Europe. In Russia in 1961, Stalingrad, which had been Tsaritsyn, became Volgograd, only to half-change its mind in 2013 and for six days per year be called Stalingrad again, commemorating its role in the Second World War (or Great Patriotic War, as the Russians call it). Lenin and Stalin were not the real names of the first two leaders of the USSR, but Ulyanov-grad or Jugasvili-grad didn’t sound as snappy. Red Square could go on being Red Square, as it was called that before the revolution.

Manchester is twinned with ten cities, including Karl-Marx-Stadt in Eastern Germany, which went back to being Chemnitz, although it did keep its seven-metre tall statue of Karl. Manchester didn’t name anything after Marx, even though it was here that he and Friedrich Engels developed the theory of communism. Little did they know that within a century and a half, their writings would lead to the problem of what to call a bit of Wythenshawe Civic Centre. Manchester City Council attempted to solve the problem by having a competition to rename Leningrad Square, because we already had a St Peter’s Square.

The council likes competitions. After the demolition of Manchester City’s Maine Road football ground they held one to name five of the streets built on the site. One winning entry, Blue Moon Way, recalled the club’s anthem, and was submitted by a United fan. In the newly named Eastlands area of the city, the new City ground, originally built for the 2002 Commonwealth Games, changed its name from The City of Manchester Stadium, reflecting who owned it, to The Etihad Stadium, reflecting the name on the club’s shirts.

Place names change for much the same reasons people change their names. In 2008, half of boring York Street near Piccadilly became more vibrant as New York Street. Meanwhile, developers Urban Splash tried to forget ingrained social issues in their stalled redevelopment of Ancoats, and rebranded half of it the very New Labour-esque New Islington. In Liverpool, they cleansed a street known for its porn cinema and radical political bookshop by changing its name from Manchester Street to Old Haymarket.

The same thing was tried in Benchill in Wythenshawe. When it was named the country’s most deprived council ward in 2000, the ward disappeared and the voters were divided up between Sharston, Woodhouse Park and Northenden. Residents in Northenden later persuaded the council to lose a road sign that described it as being in Wythenshawe.

Whilst Manchester spent money on street signs, canny Poznan in Poland found a solution to erasing communist street names without changing signs. Dabrowski Street, named after the hero of the Paris Commune General Jaroslaw Dabrowski, would from now on be called Dabrowski Street, after the founder of the Polish Legion General Jan Henryk Dabrowski.

Back in St Petersburg, a delegation from Manchester celebrating the 50th anniversary of the twinning of the two cities found their hosts passing discriminatory anti-gay laws and a petition at home called for an end to the twinning. St Petersburg is known as ‘the Venice of the North’ for its many rivers and canals, so perhaps it could be persuaded to rename one of its thoroughfares Canal Street, after the heart of Manchester’s gay village. Canal Street’s signs change with Eastern European regularity, to ‘CaRnal Street’ or ‘_anal _treet’. Whatever it’s called, it’s near the St Petersburg Russian Restaurant on Sackville Street, which has a statue of Alan Turing, the computing genius who committed suicide after being persecuted for his sexuality.

The name of the circular square outside the Forum at the Civic Centre in Wythenshawe may have changed. The council doesn’t seem to know. Some addresses read Leningrad Square, others Forum Square. At the moment it’s closed whilst a Metrolink tramline is being built, and Metrolink has a history of giving stations misleading names. For example, Withington station isn’t in Withington.

David Dunnico is a documentary photographer from Manchester. He has an exhibition called First and Last at Stockport Art Gallery and War Memorial from 11th January to 11th February.  
dunni.co.uk
People are really embracing food in a way they haven’t in decades, a trend enabled by technology and social media. Food to most consumers is as much about enjoyment, passion and love as it is about nourishment. We’ve become a nation of eaters, but not necessarily cooks. Many are reliant on manufacturers and retailers to do the work for them. Instead of cooking, what some seem to prefer is ‘composing’ – taking semi-prepared components and combining them. We’re lazy cooks, essentially.

For those who are in the food and drink industry, it isn’t such a bad thing. It’s been great for Manchester eateries. The domestic kitchen torpor has created a thriving dining out scene, helped to pull Manchester out of recession and made the city more exciting. So why do I still find that I’m eating the same dish at different restaurants? I believe many people, and indeed some chefs, rely on far less variety throughout the year and reproduce the same bland formulas that seem to sell. This has led to an unsustainable level of consumption, dependence on imports and a lack of understanding of how to cook ingredients that might help reduce environmental impact. What happens to the bits of the animal that are not prime cuts? Eat these too and we would save money, help the environment and slaughter fewer animals.

The moral imperative: if you eat meat, then the idea of eating intestine, tongue or feet shouldn’t distress you any more than tucking into a chop or a steak. It’s all flesh and blood. Shelves of disembodied, boneless, velvety chicken breast and lean steaks stacked high in supermarkets create a weird visceral disconnect. Where’s the rest of the animal and why aren’t we eating it? Killing an animal, sacrificing one life to sustain another, is not to be taken lightly. We don’t need to do it to survive, so if we make light of our livestock we devalue their worth and the sanctity of life in general.

The creative imperative: I find the prime cuts tend towards the same texture, consistency and taste, with only small differentials in flavour – more ‘lamby’ or more ‘beefy’. If we’re truly fans of variety then we must turn to all the more interesting cuts – the creamy liver, the velveteen underbelly, the smooth, melting flesh of the feet or knuckles, combined with the fibrous crunch of tendon. These far exceed the monotonous masticating of mince, steak or breast.

One of the few areas in the city where one can find massive meat diversity is Chinatown. The eateries in Chinatown truly are independent, varied and interesting, if a little more challenging or inaccessible. The menus aren’t always in English, so find a Chinese friend (I’ll be your friend if you’re paying for dinner!) There is a tiny grocery run by an elderly couple known only to me as ‘Uncle’ and ‘Aunty’. They can be found behind a screen at mealtimes, perched on makeshift furniture to cook up a riot in their rice steamer and kettle, using produce straight from the shop. It is sights like these that beatify Chinatown. There is nowhere else in Manchester today that one can share something so personal, intimate and evocative. Uncle and Aunty are not au fait with technology. They’re not on Twitter or Facebook, so they’re probably missing out on some customers and they’re not raking in millions. In any case, they would probably find it difficult to communicate the origins, artistry and creativity behind many ingredients and dishes in Chinatown in a mere 140 characters.

It is difficult to convey the cultural delight of the slow, convivial, ‘pick for hours’ dining style that is common amongst the Chinese. Chinatown is aged, interesting and complex. It’s not new and shiny, not a hipster haven. It’s nostalgic, personal and familial. It’s a neighbourhood to an older population that don’t tweet, that have always eaten things other people have not, and have menus which look like War and Peace. For decades, the more interesting ingredients shunned elsewhere have been popular and commonplace at Chinese dining tables. The glories and subtleties of steamed chicken feet, pork knuckles, fish heads and braised pig’s blood were previously unknown. Chinatown offers a more sustainable example of eating.

I want prosperity for my community but I’m sometimes secretly thankful that, in a world of technology and information, there are still places and gastronomic experiences to be uncovered. Places where appreciative foodies can eat quality food without having to battle with the droves of glitterati for a table. But in an age of foodie fashion, there are growing voices of dissent that demand accessibility from Chinatown, insisting on being handed everything ‘on a plate’ – access to feet, knuckles and heads too. The fist of modernisation is beating at the gates of Chinatown. But for now let’s try to stop a while, take a seat, enjoy a cup of steaming tea, ponder the subtleties of life and food, and suck on a duck tongue or two.

MEAT WASTE.

HEADS, SHOULDERS, KNEES AND TOES – ON A PLATE.

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Such is the UK’s obsession with gardening, thanks to a plethora of TV shows and a growing interest in making the most of our outdoor spaces, that the annual retail garden market is estimated to be worth in excess of £5 billion. The days when a trip to the garden centre resulted in a few bulbs and a packet of seeds have well and truly gone. Now, shoppers are tempted by every aspect of gardening, from designer lighting and all-weather furniture to complex water features and numerous brands of garden clothing, not to mention upmarket wellington boots. Seeds, plants and trees are one part of a much more glamorous proposition which usually includes additional spending in a restaurant and café.

All of which, if you ask me, is just a tad depressing because it marks yet another aspect of our lives that has succumbed to aggressive consumerism. So it is with considerable delight that fighting its own individual corner in this growing market is Hulme Community Garden Centre (HCGC) which is, quite frankly, the complete antithesis of the modern consumer-driven garden-centric day out.

Occupying a small corner site on a former car park in the heart of the regenerated Hulme area, HCGC is quietly and confidently branching out on its own as a not-for-profit resource that genuinely believes in being part of the community.

The day I arrived to meet the HCGC nursery developer, Tim Knight, the centre was awash with excited children and their parents preparing for a tree wassailing ceremony to mark the planting of a new orchard at the far end of its site. Don’t get me wrong, the garden centre grows and sells a wide range of seeds, shrubs, trees and plants, but this is supplemented by a very active engagement programme that is designed to encourage visitors to become active participants in a wide range of projects. There are educational programmes around subjects, including making your own compost, growing your own vegetables and so on. Apart from its visitor education programme, the centre also plays an important therapeutic role in helping people affected by mental health issues to find their centre of equilibrium among nature.

Also, unlike many modern garden centres, which have a distinctly commercial and premeditated design aimed at ensuring you wander past as much merchandise as possible, HCGC has a decidedly organic feel, with a meandering mix of outdoor rooms and buildings, as well as a more familiar space for displaying plants for sale.

Taking me round, Tim explained that part of the site has yet to be developed but will eventually include some new eco buildings to supplement the newly-completed straw bale cabin and another structure which houses Manchester’s first public green roof. This can be examined more closely by climbing a wooden staircase.

During my visit, autumn well and truly in full swing, the focus of the day was very much towards the end of day tree wassailing ceremony with a range of build-up events including an apple juice making workshop, a try and taste session exploring old ‘heritage’ varieties of apples and a cider stall from another community-based producer, The Moss Cider Project, whose market proposition is simply to “take donated apples and turn them into free cider”. Again, the absence of hard-nosed commercial gain in this venture just adds further weight to the community spirit of the garden centre. Mirroring HCGC’s former origins as a car park, The Moss Cider Project was borne from a very simple vision, namely to create cider in an urban area where there is no evidence of an orchard and no previous history of cider making. Again, this is a classic case of an altruistic project aimed at engaging with the local community in creating a simple product that captures so many contemporary issues – local provenance, minimising food waste, community entrepreneurship, not-for-profit, and so on.

Finally, to the tree wassailing. Tim explained that the idea to conduct this pagan festival, aimed at bringing bountiful future harvests to the newly planted fruit trees, was pretty much a last-minute whim to try to create an event that would resonate with visitors. And indeed it did, with around 40 to 50 people, including a good representation of young children. The ceremony was a surreal but energising spectacle that captivated the young and old, who took part in a mix of poetry, noise making (an eclectic mix of pots and pans) and a final gesture that involved pouring cider over the roots of the new trees. Personally I thought this really captured the essence of HCGC – helping its customers and visitors to engage with the natural world around them free of any commercial motive, simply to celebrate the importance of nature and its role in providing us with the food we eat. Not bad going for a garden centre that is now rising, phoenix-like, from the grounds of a former car park.

hulmegardencentre.org.uk
themossciderproject.org

Photo by Tom Warman
PORK & APPLE WINTER CASSEROLE.

SERVES 2.
RECIPE BY PHILL JAMES.

2 pork loins or steaks
Streaky bacon, 2-3 rashers per person
1 cooking apple
1 onion
2 carrots
150g wild mushrooms
400ml chicken stock
200ml cider
Fresh sage
Crème fraîche
Sweet potato
Green beans

Heat some olive oil in a frying pan and brown the steaks before putting to one side. Add the chopped onions, carrots and bacon to a large casserole dish and cook until the onion starts to colour. Next add the mushrooms and the pork steaks back in. Slowly add the cider after a minute. Bring to the boil and then add the stock. Season to taste with sea salt, black pepper and sage leaves.

Cover the dish and place in the oven at 180°C. After two hours, return to the hob on a low heat and boil off some of the stock if there’s too much liquid. Stir in the crème fraîche and taste the pork. Cook for longer if desired until the meat is nice and stringy.

Serve with sweet potato mash and green beans, saving some of the sauce to pour over the top. Accompany with a nice glass of red wine.
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-CHILI PIECES
-RED ONION

-MOMBERO
-JALAPENO
-GRILLED PEPPERS
-PEPPERONI

-BEAT THE MEAT
-CHILI BEEF
-GRILLED PEPPER
-RED ONION

-SAUCE SAUSAGE

$15.00
Earlier this year we had the pleasure of recording interviews and performances of poets involved in the University of Sheffield’s Lyric Festival. We’ve created an online poetry resource featuring Simon Armitage, Helen Mort, Lavinia Greenlaw, Paul Farley and Jacob Polley. This month we thought we’d give you a taster of what’s online. Go to lyriconlinesheffield.com for the full interviews, as well as readings from each poet.

LAVINIA GREENLAW.
What started you writing and who were the first writers to really grab your attention?

I think the most important poets to me were the poets I discovered for myself, rather than the ones I discovered at school, so it was the Americans and Europeans – [George] Herbert, Robert Lowell, Elizabeth Bishop. In those times, America felt very far away indeed. I felt like I was reading a different language written by different people in a different world. I always wrote as a child, and then when I was a teenager I wrote these deep, angsty, melodramatic poems, which have all gone into a deep, dark hole. I began to understand that the poem has very little to do with the poet in the end, that I thought there was more to do with writing than simply ‘spillage’.

HELEN MORT.
When writing about a subject, do you try and harness your personal connection to it or look for a level of distance?

I think you need both definitely. You can’t write about something if you’re too close to it. I’ve always been a believer that to get close to the poetic truth of something you might have to lie, or it’s necessary to diverge from the real world truth. I think it’s more interesting to say you can be true to an experience by telling it from a slant. You need to know why you’re writing about something, why it matters. I think it was Ted Hughes who said you need to work out the things in your life you’d die to be parted from – not just the things you read in the papers that are a passing curiosity, but what’s a deep part of your life. That investment in the poem is really important.

The best example for me is a poem about the miners’ strike. It took me a while to work out why I needed to write that poem, rather than other people who might be more qualified. It took a while to realise I wasn’t just writing about Orgreave but other places I’d been, especially living in Cambridge – that juxtaposition of two different worlds and that idea or feeling like you were a traitor from where you originally came from. So that’s personal, but I also needed some abstraction too, and looked at it through the lens of a film called The Battle of Orgreave.

SIMON ARMITAGE.
What are you working on at the moment?

In 2014 I’m publishing a new Selected Poems. The old collection is about 10-12 years old now. I thought it was time to reassess what had gone on and regroup before the next phase.

The book after that will be called The Unaccompanied. As the title suggests it’s about going solo, solitude, distance, existing outside of a mainstream. They look like my early poems. There’s a lot of quatrains. From about five yards away they look like a hymn sheet. I sometimes wonder if that was an early model for my work. There’s poems about my parents, poems about this part of the world, but that’s been a constant really. But the whole book is still taking shape, so it’s hard to say too much at the moment.

JACOB POLLEY.
Are you interested in working with poetry in collaboration with other artforms?

It’s really interesting when you come in conjunction with another art form. I’ve been working with a composer. Music and words, and writing something for a voice to be sung, is very different. When a singer says, “I don’t understand what this means,” you realise you have to do something to the words to make the audience understand it. It makes me take a step back and think about how much clarity is in the piece. When you’re writing you want to add as much clarity as possible, and so working with a musician and singers has been really interesting.

PAUL FARLEY.
Do you have any advice for new writers?

When I get asked this, I try and wonder what I would have said to myself when I was starting out. I mean, it’s important to read a lot, and widely, but it’s important to fall in love with poetry, or poets, or a kind of poem. That is quite vague, but I think it needs to be. You need that connection, that love affair, and if that doesn’t happen then it can feel like you’re wading through treacle when you’re trying to write. It can feel too much like hard work and you’re only going to fall in love by reading a lot, and also by reading out of your comfort zone.

lyriconlinesheffield.com
IT WAS MANY AND MANY A YEAR AGO.

IN A KINGDOM BY THE SEA,

IT WAS A CHILD AND SHE WAS A CHILD IN THIS KINGDOM BY THE SEA.

O, BUT WE LOVED WITH A LOVE THAT WAS MORE THAN LOVE.

WITH A LOVE THAT THE WINGED SERAPH OF HEAVEN GOVETED HER AND ME.

IT WAS THE REASON THAT NOW, LONG AGO, IN THIS KINGDOM BY THE SEA,

A WIND BLEW OUT OF A CLOUD.

AND THIS MAIDEN SHE LIVED WITH NO OTHER THOUGHT THAN TO LOVE AND BE LOVED BY ME.

AND THAT MAIDEN THERE LIVED WHOSE NAME YOU MAY KNOW

THE ANGELS, NOT HALF SO HAPPY IN HEAVEN, WENT ENVYING HER AND ME.

BY THE NAME OF ANNABEL LEE,

YES!—THAT WAS THE REASON AS ALL MEN KNOW IN THIS KINGDOM BY THE SEA

A WIND BLEW OUT OF A CLOUD.

SO THAT HER HIGH-BORN KINSMAN CAME AND BORE HER AWAY FROM ME.

CHILLING.

SO SHUT HER UP IN A SEPULCHRE BY THIS KINGDOM BY THE SEA,

BY BEAUTIFUL ANNABEL LEE.
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Do any of you ever have those hypothetical discussions, whereby one enjoyable thing must be given up in favour of another? You know, things like: beer or wine, baths or showers, radio or television, sex or tinkering in the shed. All pretty tricky, eh? Let us concentrate on the penultimate. For me, there is no contest. I would, with a musical in my heart, slowly and methodically dismantle a television set into its individual parts (as a certified yet still at-large nutcase might), and post each piece separately back to the factory where it was assembled, rather than live without radio. “Are we able to watch DVDs and the like if we give up television?” I hear you ask. Well, I’ve wrestled with this and no, you may not. You may of course go to the cinema, if you like that sort of thing. Unless cinema was paired with sitting in the spandrel for three hours, scratching yourself. Preferable, I fancy.

When playing this game the other week, my rather excitable paramour upped the stakes even further. “Would you,” she asked, “give up radio or tea, forever?” So shocked was I by the difficulty of this choice I had to go for a lie down in the spandrel. Emerging a week later I asked if that included all tea or could I still have the odd cup of jasmine. “All tea,” she uttered senatorially, like a baddie from Star Trek. Quivering, I retreated to the safety of my consulting rooms, under the stairs. A life without tea! It was almost inconceivable. I mean, I’d have to give up cooked breakfasts for a start, another thing I’d gladly spend hundreds of pounds shipping bits of televisions back to Samsung instead of losing. But, life without radio! That was inconceivable. Sweating, hairy and dehydrated, I gave my answer. “T-e-a,” I sobbed. Oh, how I sobbed.

Unlike aching joints, hangovers and voices that shouldn’t be there, the radio has always been with me, and so, employing the same rationale to radio as I did to television, I would have to endure the agony of never hearing Hancock’s Half Hour, I’m Sorry I Haven’t A Clue, The Goons and many other cherished programmes which have been with me since I stopped using the potty, or six months before I bought my first scientific calculator.

When I started secondary school, I had a voracious appetite for these programmes. For some reason they used to be on during the day, when I was at school learning maths and how to use the lavatory. Bearing in mind this was an aeon before the advent of iPlayer, before going to school I would call on a couple of elderly neighbours at dawn, stand in their threshold and, with a copy of the Radio Times each, they would circle in pink highlighter the programmes I wanted. On my return from school, even before greeting my mother, I would call upon them, hopping and salivating on the doorstep, eager to receive my TDK 90. Then, come the night, I would settle into bed after my supper ration of warm milk and toast with Marmite, fire up the Walkman and chuckle in the dark.

Then as now, it has always been Radio 4. Sure, I’ve flirted with other stations, like Radio 4 Extra, which is, I’m sure you know, a digital station. Now there is nothing wrong with digital radio per se, but there are plans afoot to convert entirely from analogue to digital radio, as there were in the bright, glorious, sadly missed days of analogue television. Remember? Remember when you used to be able to watch whichever programme you wanted without the picture freezing, stamping your little feet, futilely reinstalling all the damn channels, then reaching for a DVD instead, where the picture would freeze and you’d stamp your little feet and go to bed in a fume?

For a lot of people, digital is not good, it is not better and for many it is a wholly insufficient replacement for analogue. Analogue televions had their own problems, but nothing compared to digital and the grotesquely dismal network coverage on which it relies. We as consumers have been hoodwinked and forced to accept this fiasco with no recourse. It was another case of an idea being in place before the technology was ready. Before allowing radio to follow the terrible route of its deformed half-brother, I would gladly have the skin flayed off my back like St Bartholomew, on the velum of my own rind inscribe ‘I DARE YOU!’ and flap it in the face of whoever is responsible, filling them orally with compressed air from my own anus, until they explode like Yaphet Kotto in that Bond film, where Bond has sexual intercourse with a croupier after a Butlin’s holiday rep with a tin opener for a hand is bundled off a train after hiding in a sack.
Our economy is not “turning the corner”. We are not on the “road to recovery”. We are certainly not on a “path to prosperity”. After three years of stagnation, the Coalition is in a boastful mood as growth gradually returns to our economy. But let’s look at what is really happening.

**EMPLOYMENT.**

More than five years after the recession began, there are still 2.5m people unemployed and 6m underemployed. In fact, unemployment is still higher today than when the Coalition took office in 2010. Of the new jobs being created, 9 out of 10 pay below a living wage and more than 1m people now have a zero hours contract. Real wages are 9% lower than their 2007 level with 4.8m people – 20% of all workers – now earning less than a living wage, up from 3.4m in 2009. More than 1m young people remain not in education, employment or training. Meanwhile, our working rights are being systematically eroded as employers have greater powers than ever to fire at will and cuts to legal aid funding make it harder to challenge these decisions.

**GROWTH.**

Our economy is currently smaller than it was in 2006 and the so-called recovery is officially the slowest in over 100 years. In fact, it has been calculated that GDP would be 3% higher today without the effects of ‘austerity’. Of the modest growth that we are experiencing, 77% is coming from the services sector, with only 13% from industry and 8% from construction. The vast majority of this services growth is provided by the very same finance sector whose speculation caused the global economic meltdown. UK business investment, a key driver of any sustainable recovery, is now 159th in the world, just behind Mali.

**DEBT.**

Far from reducing national debt, total government debt is on course to overtake GDP in 2015 and ‘austerity’ has barely reduced the deficit at all (£118bn in 2011 to £115bn in 2012). The Coalition has borrowed more in three years than Labour did in 13. Total personal debt has now reached a record high of £1.4 trillion. That’s £54,000 per household. More than 8m households, a quarter of the total in Britain, have no savings at all.

Almost half of families in the poorest tenth of the population spend more than a quarter of their income on debt repayments and 3.9m families do not have enough savings to cover their rent or mortgage for more than a month. Last year, 34,000 houses were repossessed and more than 5,000 people were made homeless. The Help to Buy scheme is ploughing yet more debt finance into the economy and creating another artificial house price bubble.

POVERTY.

About 1 in 10 children are eating less than half the calories recommended for their age and 500,000 people are using food banks. Their use has tripled in the past 12 months alone. The Red Cross is also now delivering emergency food aid for the first time in 70 years. In the UK. In 2013. We are experiencing the return of absolute poverty in the UK on a large scale for the first time since the War.

Now consider that the majority of public spending cuts, which fall hardest on the poorest, have still not been implemented. The Tories have recently pledged that ‘austerity’ will become permanent if they remain in government. Meanwhile, Britain’s 1,000 richest people have made gains of £155bn in the past three years.

The aim of this article is not just to paint a bleak picture of the future of our nation, but to highlight the fact that if we accept this is the path we must take then we are actively choosing this bleak future. But there is another path we can take. We can choose a road to recovery based on equality, wellbeing and sustainability, not inequality, overconsumption and debt.

Even if we experience a period of strong GDP growth, this is not an accurate measure of the prosperity of our nation. GDP values the volume of guns and bombs we produce, the number of locks we need on our doors and the amount of pollution in the air. GDP fails to value the health of our nation, the quality of our education or the strength of our communities. Meanwhile our planet is quickly running out of the resources needed to produce the ‘stuff’ on which growth depends. Our pursuit of perpetual GDP growth is not sustainable or desirable. It is destroying our planet whilst failing to improve the lives of the vast majority of citizens.

Instead of accepting this as our only option, we need to change direction. We need to move our economy away from one which is solely dependent on growth and towards one which values the things that really matter to people, like health, happiness, equality and meaningful employment. Our mainstream politicians are not likely to facilitate this transition. But we, individually and collectively, have the power to do this ourselves. We can choose not to spend money we don’t have on things we don’t need. We can choose to spend locally and ethically on the essential things we do need. We can choose to work less, consume less and spend more time with friends and family. We can choose to protect our community and environment and not support those who don’t. We can choose.

neweconomics.org/publications/entry/surviving-austerity falseeconomy.org.uk/blog/austerity-isnt-working-but-osborne-will-extend-it
Robbie Porter is a Scottish illustrator currently based in London. After studying visual communication in Leeds and working for a printmaking studio for a couple of years, he did an MA in Illustration at Camberwell, where he completed his first children’s book, The Librarian’s List. Since then he has been making his way in the world of freelancing.

Robbie’s work is witty and eye-catching – two qualities that he has honed through his editorial work for the likes of New York Times, Random House and New Scientist. Certainly it was the sense of humour conveyed in his illustrations that caught our attention when browsing his work for the first time, as well as his immediately identifiable visual style which combines digital work with good old fashioned pen on paper.

Why did you start creating art?
I guess I’ve always made art. What I wonder is why didn’t I stop. I know a lot of people who are incredibly creative and talented but for whatever reason they stopped making things. I think that I’m quite stubborn and that probably helped. I was never the best at drawing but I always wanted to get better. For me that is one of the most driving factors. Loving the process and the environment is one thing, but just wanting to develop is key.

What is your working process? Does everything start from hand-drawn ideas?
For me the starting point is usually the idea. Whether it’s a professional project or a personal one I’m interested in communicating something. I usually start with brainstorming and research into themes, then I’ll do little rough sketches to get a more solid idea of where the piece is going. From there what I usually do is work from photographs – a mixture of pictures taken by myself and found online or in books. I copy from the pictures in pencil then trace them with a 0.1 pen – I make a lot of mistakes at this point – then scan the inked image into the computer and clean it up in Photoshop. Once it’s in the computer I feel a lot safer and find it easier to experiment and add colour, generally finishing the image and making it look professional. I also try to make it look less digital by adding textures I’ve found over the years.

What inspires you?
My friends mainly, usually by making me jealous.

When I was little I really loved the comics Calvin & Hobbes and Tintin, and although I generally don’t make narrative work I do like there to be a hint of a story within my pictures. I also really liked surrealism when I was young. There is something about the weirdness that appeals to kids I think. I still want my art to appeal to children. If kids like something it’s probably a good sign.

When I finally figured out what illustration was I geeked out on people like Craig Frazier, Guy Billout, Brendan Monroe, Marco Cibola, Paul Blow and Andrew Rae. Now that I’ve been doing illustration for a while I kind of look elsewhere for inspiration. I watch a lot of movies and series. I also listen to a lot of music whilst I work. Oh, and podcasts. I listen to a lot of them too – This American Life, The Moth, RadioLab, The Nerdist, WTF.

Humour seems to be important to you as an artist. Do you find yourself drawn to humorous art?
I actually start every day by watching a half-hour comedy show, so maybe that is affecting my work. If the first thing you encounter in the day is an episode of Arrested Development or Parks and Recreation then it probably adds a tone to the day. One of the perks of being your own boss I guess. I also love the artists Maurizio Cattelan and David Shrigley because they poke fun at the art world whilst being in it.

How has your approach to art changed over the years?
I guess it has become more commercial purely because I need to pay the rent. I hope the tone of voice within my work is still my own though. Even if the balance of personal and professional projects is changing I still want it to be obvious that it was made by me.

Are you currently working freelance? Do you find it challenging?
Yeah I am. I’ve just gone back to freelance work after studying for an MA last year. Freelance is challenging. You’re basically running your own business so there is a lot of organisation. You have to do your taxes, not to mention you have to find the work in the first place. It gets easier with time but starting out can be tough and work isn’t always regular. It helps to diversify by doing commissions, selling prints and cards, having exhibitions.

I remember not wanting a ‘normal’ job when I was little because I thought the idea of working 9-5 and getting a few weeks holiday a year was terrifying, but now I work longer hours than most of my friends and I haven’t been on a proper holiday for years. I love it though.

Tell us about your children’s book.
The book is called The Librarian’s List and it’s about a librarian who’s read all the books in the library and knows all the stories off by heart. But he doesn’t have a story of his own, so he makes a list of all the places he wants to go and all the things he wants to see, then sets off on an adventure.

Do you plan to make more?
I’d love to make more. I’m going to look into getting it published and if that goes well I’d like to try it again. The only problem is having the time to do it.

What are you working on at the moment?
An editorial piece for an American university magazine. It’s about interviewing techniques. That might not sound like the most fascinating subject, but what I often enjoy – and what illustration is good at – is taking subject matter that can be a bit dry and trying to look at it from a new perspective, to add content and liven it up whilst helping to explain the article.

Good advice you wish you’d been told earlier?
Go on Youtube and watch Ira Glass talk about storytelling. I don’t want to try and summarise it because he explains it so well in his utterly charming voice. He’s the best.
In 1943, the poet, art critic, and anarchist Herbert Read wrote an essay entitled *To Hell with Culture*. In it he stated his ideas for a civilisation based on mutual aid and cooperation in which culture would no longer be separated from society as a commodity, to be bought and sold for profit. Instead he thought that creativity could form the basis of a society where culture freed us from capitalism’s hegemonic tendencies. I would like to come back to some of Read’s ideas to talk about the ‘art world’ and our notions of culture, consumption, and creativity within Manchester.

In Owen Hatherley’s book, *The New Ruins of Great Britain*, he reminds us that in the 80s and 90s Manchester’s creative subcultures gained notoriety as a centre of punk and rave. This, Hatherley says, has been traded on by people like Tony Wilson, the property developer, to regenerate Manchester into a ‘cultural city’. Although I think Hatherley’s statement that, “Manchester […] has produced virtually no innovative music since A Guy Called Gerald’s *Black Secret Technology* in 1995,” is a bit harsh, I can see his point that a once creative city has merely become a creative consumer city. As we speak, a new cultural quarter is being constructed with a multiplex cinema and luxury hotel, rather than a space for non-commodifiable artistic creativity. Words like ‘success’, ‘ambition’ and ‘talent’ have seeped into our artistic language. The “drive to succeed within the market”, as one curatorial project recently stated, seems to be the ultimate aim of the artist in this city.

But that is certainly not my vision of creativity. Is it yours? Read, who set up the Institute of Contemporary Arts and became a trustee of the Tate, was certainly a contradictory character but syndicalist at heart. He wanted workers to have full control over the means of production, and with this would follow full control to create their own culture. But in 1968 he died and became modernism’s last influential anarchist. Since then it has been a struggle to find people in positions of power who share Read’s egalitarian hopes. The poet Stephen Spender would write a poem for Read’s memorial symposium called ‘Imagination Seizes Power’ – Read’s phrase that Spender imagines French students shouting from the barricades, if only they knew who Read was.

How can we rekindle Read’s ideas if we want to live in a city that doesn’t trade creativity through a market place? Well, we could follow Read’s example, and begin by saying:

“To hell with culture; and to this consignment we might add another: To hell with the artist. Art as a separate profession is merely a consequence of culture as a separate entity. In a natural society there will be no precious or privileged beings called artists: there will only be workers. Or, if you prefer Gill’s more paradoxical statement of the same truth: in a natural society there will be no despised and underprivileged beings called workers: there will only be artists. ‘The artist is not a special kind of man, but every man is a special kind of artist.’”

I would argue that we have unwittingly become the class unconscious workers of a creative industry in which a select few ‘make it’ and the rest of us work to support them. Read’s idealistic words are relevant to our contemporary art world in which, as ‘underprivileged beings’, we should seek to create solid alternatives, and a form of cooperative creativity outside the marketplace that the art world has become. Read’s cry might seem outmodishly idealistic, but it is as relevant today as it was in 1943. Our politicians have lost their post-war idealist sentiment, but why do we have to follow?

We have become complicit in the idea that you need to be an ‘artist’ to ‘create’ culture. You don’t. We must make sure art is not absorbed by neoliberal notions of culture by opposing, through debate, the kind of language and attitudes that make us feel like consumers, struggling for ‘achievement’ in a global marketplace. We need to use informal support structures and artist networks that work together cooperatively and are linked to a global struggle against elitism and hierarchy. We need to challenge the idea that the commercial art world is the only place of the reception for artwork. We need to be vigilant that we don’t get fooled into believing competition is inherent within everything we do.

To Hell with Culture is still in print today, and its ideas live on through the clusters of artists – or shall we call them workers – cooperating to demand that creativity does not become tangled up with “a drive to succeed within the market”, but rather a drive to succeed together, outside of the market.
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As Bob Dylan once reportedly said to his audience during a show, “I don’t change anything, you do”.

In the late 60s in bereft Berlin, a group of musicians decided that music should do something more than just entertain. Following street protests in 1968, an underground movement of political activism and radical music began to form. Their motivating force was to exonerate the stigma of National Socialism. Groups like Amon Düül and Faust sought to find a voice that could convey their intentions. They were using industrial machines and electronics as a new language. This would become one of the driving forces of their time and inspiration for later generations of musicians in the northern industrial wastelands of cities like Sheffield and Manchester.

In the Manchester of the mid 60s, police closed down music venues. In 1972 a group of musicians established a defiant collective that organised its own gigs, established its own venues, promoted them and even had a signature magazine that circulated the city. They were known as Music Force and this helped to launch a whole new flow of Manchester bands. As the 70s progressed, Band on the Wall, not to be outdone, was soon to launch the Northern Jazz Centre Society, not only in reaction to the paucity of jazz gigs in the city, but also to the London-centric jazz scene clique who were not known for booking northern musicians. This particular aspect of the Manchester music scene, and the subsequent sense of isolation, only served to fuel the defiant attitude. These attitudes, whilst being typically northern, were central to the Manchester scene and are found throughout the timeline of Manchester music.

Manchester at the end of the 70s, as we know, saw a new generation of musicians not only carry this attitude forwards, but also find new allies in a strange, almost violent, new voice born in Detroit and New York: punk. Once again new collectives of musicians formed bands, made their own gigs, posters and fanzines. Some, like Joy Division and Sheffield’s Cabaret Voltaire, embraced the ethics of the early German industrial and electronic music and carved out their own bleak vision. They were not laden with the quest to exonerate the stigma of National Socialism, but it was theirs and it was a direct result of what a dark, oppressive and empty place the city – and sometimes life – seemed destined to be.

As decades evolved and trends came and went the city began to slowly get its mojo back. Manchester’s popular music has often drifted into seemingly mindless hedonism, but even the freaky dancers represented what Martin Price of 808 State described as “the spirit of the people... the fight back of the inner cities”. It remains that the musicians who provided the soundtrack for that party were just as determined, opinionated, reactionary and organised as those who smashed the ban with Music Force or stuck two fingers up to London through the Northern Jazz Centre Society.

With the proud traditions we have, can we expect a new force to rise and sit in that fine tradition? Manchester music needs to re-engage and organise. It is too easy to say that politics is redundant. Light a fire under consciousness and reclaim the agenda. This is not a question born from simple retrospect. We now have technologies, systems and abilities that previous generations could only dream of. It might be hard to find the inspiration to create this new wave, as people like Chuck D now sell expensive earphones at Glastonbury, but at least the spirit of the city and the attitude should be a start. Manchester should be “stroppy and talk back,” like Mark E Smith once said. Music may work on many levels but I do not hear anyone working on this one loudly enough. No-one is standing up and annoying the right people.

We have new scenes and networks, new ways of doing things. Can we sense within these new worlds a brave new music, a product for these times? Can we see a deployment of the infinite potential that the web and social media holds in the same way that the musicians in Germany, Sheffield and Manchester utilised the tools at their disposal?

Many important historical changes have occurred in Manchester: the formations of the Trade Union Congress, the Musicians Union and the Professional Football Association to name a few. And more bands than we care to mention. Let’s see a new catalyst make the city stand up and do what we do best. Because what Manchester does today, London does later. Political activists need a soundtrack, because as the old bugger once said, “I don’t change anything, you do”.

PAGE 33
LIVE.

SAVAGES.

THE RITZ.
9TH NOVEMBER.
REVIEWER – ROBERT PEGG.

It’s getting to that time of the year pretty soon, when reviewers start to round things up and making lists of the year’s best gigs and albums. Mercury Prize nominated Silence Yourself by Savages will undoubtedly feature in most of those lists.

Advance word is good, anticipation is high and the crowds pouring into The Ritz from the driving rain are starting to look like The Clash’s ‘Last Gang in Town’. The crops, the stiffs, the spikes, the quiffs and the old soul rebels all come looking around for some new school punk sound. Placed strategically around the venue are signs to the audience reading: “Our goal is to always discover better ways of living and experiencing music. […] We believe the use of phones to film and take pictures during a gig prevents all of us from totally immersing ourselves. […] Let’s make each evening special. Silence your phones.” Quite right.

Less John Lydon’s Flowers Of Romance and more Charles Baudelaire’s Fleurs Du Mal – “My youth was but a tempest, dark and savage...” – Savages take the stage and true to their promise totally immerse themselves in the highlights of their debut album. Much of the set is backlit by harsh white spotlights, giving the band the striking appearance of monochrome silhouettes. Only lead singer Jehnny Beth breaks the theatrical fourth wall to engage directly with the audience, at one point demanding: “I want something new to listen to.”

The extraordinary rhythm section of Ayse Hassan on bass and Fay Milton on drums make full frontal attacks on singles ‘She Will’ and ‘Husbands’, while Gemma Thompson’s guitar is blisteringly determined, forceful and appropriately savage. If you could set Albert Camus’ The Outsider to guitars and drums, this is what it would sound like. The closing number, ‘Fuckers’, is so gloriously brooding and menacing it’s the closest you’re going to get to an anthem from this band. Happy will be the day when their lyric, “Don’t let the fuckers get you down,” rings out across the nation.

Like any band, Savages have their critics, but mostly without merit. Some say they’re not bringing anything new to the party but that isn’t fair. Savages are post-punk, all-in-black existentialist philosophy and killer Christian Louboutin heels. If you find anyone else doing that then, please, get me a ticket. A lyric on the album’s title track asserts that, “The world used to be silent, now it has too many voices”. Savages are one of the voices that deserve to be heard.

KLANGKARUSSELL.

GORILLA.
15TH NOVEMBER.
REVIEWER – CHARLES VEYS.

Capitalising on the end of an unexpected hiatus taken by legendary house club Sankeys, Gorilla has presented a rather impressive calendar of late. In the space of one month, they’ve hosted the baroque pop sounds of Clean Bandit, electronic duo Mount Kimbie and the poetic verses of Akala. The bookings are ticking a vast array of boxes and I haven’t even mentioned the renewed array of residential nights.

Manchester promoter Drop the Mustard hosts tonight’s gig on Whitworth Street.

First on the stage this time was up-and-coming Yorkshire boy Kidnap Kid in support of equally fresh Austrian house duo Klangkarussell. Kidnap Kid went beyond the call of duty for a warm up act, playing what has become a signature mix of concealed pitch-perfect gems transitioned with clean vocal melodies. He is definitely one to watch out for in the future along with a long list of other potentials on Black Butter Records.

Klangkarussell took the baton with abundant vitality, transforming the relatively small attic space into a hive of European electronica. Livewire Tobias Rieser tested the smoke alarm on numerous occasions, but to no avail, whilst production partner Adrian Held appeared customarily absorbed in the music. Converging their popular original track ‘Sonnentanz’ with the UK charted version, including vocals from Will Heard, kept both old and new fans happy. Their laidback continental outlook was contagious and it wasn’t long before the audience seemed to forget the shortage of floor space. As the UK debut for Klangkarussell this will definitely go down as a success, with follow-up visits to Glasgow and London scheduled for soon after.

A first-rate line up in such a small-scale setting was a combination that was measured only too well by the fervent crowds queuing outside. With further notable gigs lined up this festive period I recommend a visit to Gorilla before acts begin to seek capacity over experience.
JARBOE.

SACRED TRINITY CHURCH.
21st NOVEMBER.

REVIEWER – TILLY SHARP.

Salford Trinity Church saw the collaboration between Jarboe and P Emerson Williams take place amongst moving projections and highly cast shadows that weaved between the church's stained glass windows.

The atmosphere was set by support act Leda and the Swan, whose performance edged into the realms of the mythical. With some seated on pews and others standing, the audience could tell from the intimate setting that the evening would be filled by stories with dark and mystical undertones. Next on the stage, Die Hexen put on a theatrical performance, as always. It was both visually and musically engaging, with the moon projected onto the church’s back wall, booming drums and exaggerated, fluid movements. D Lucille Campbell’s distinctive, harrowing voice was emphasised by the theatrics that she added to her tales of loss and loneliness.

The venue was fitting, as the dark and haunting atmosphere created shone Jarboe’s acoustic re-workings of Swans’ songs in a different light. The duo took the audience through past Swans and World of Sin material as well as Jarboe’s own solo tracks, all with Williams’ acoustic guitar and the two voices on stage. The guitar was crafted brilliantly to each song, the frenzied acoustic strumming and drumming providing a platform for the stories that Jarboe had promised as she walked onto the stage. Occasionally Williams’ low reverberating voice accompanied songs, intensifying Jarboe’s emotional and complex vocals to make them sound like raw, unaltered epithets of emotion. The song that really stood out was Jarboe’s take on Swans’ ‘Blood On Your Hands’, which took on a more intense and powerful temperament than its 2003 counterpart. Williams worked up a frenzy on his guitar while Jarboe was freely throwing everything into her voice. It was difficult to believe the sound was coming from two people and a guitar.

The evening as a whole lived up to its expectations from the outset. As an audience we saw tales told in a variety of forms, tied together by a unique and interesting venue. Jarboe and P Emerson Williams make for an inimitable and interesting partnership. Each certainly brings something different to the other’s music.

LISTINGS.

RECOMMENDED BY NOW THEN.

NOW THEN SOCIALS.
Deaf Institute Bar / Free.

Continuing our run of Socials in Deaf Institute’s main bar, we have two lined for December. On Thursday 5th, we’ve invited the Delia Derbyshire Day curator Caro C to book in some DJs, and then on Thursday 19th we’re having a Yuletide knees-up with Debt Records.

STRANGER SON.
12th Dec / Kraak / £3.

The moody Salfordians are launching their album (reviewed on the next pages) at the Northern Quarter arts space and venue.

EXTRA LOVE.
13th Dec / Antwerp Mansion / £5 adv.

Dub Smugglers’ huge soundsystem is at the ready to dictate the Mansion’s grooves at this one, while downstairs Extra Love’s reggae dectet are joined by London’s General Roots. Make sure you arrive in time for Djembeklan’s amalgamation of blues, African drumming and electronica.

PHIL FRANCE.
14th Dec / First Chop Brewing Arm / £8.

The Cinematic Orchestra co-writer, arranger and producer heads up a gig at the newly sprouted Salford venue-cum-bar-cum-brewery, home of the First Chop Brewing Arm. Suitably ambient and ethereal, France’s pensive tones are topping a quietly phenomenal bill ahead of Denis Jones and Mr Scruff. At the same venue on Friday 6th there’s a label launch show for Dogface Records – a cracking pair of gigs to signal the venue’s intent.

BADLY DRAWN BOY.
14th Dec / Tiger Lounge / £10.

Chorlton based acoustic troubadour Damon Gough takes his guitar into town for this charity show at Tiger Lounge. All proceeds go to the local Mines Advisory Group cause, whose work is always worthy of your support.

PSYCHMARE BEFORE XMAS.
19th Dec / Soup Kitchen / £5.

If you’re still full of Xmas spirit after our Debt Records Social on Thursday 19th then head over to catch local Anton Newcombe worshiping fuzz-mongers Kult Country and Base Ventura in support of The Oscillation at this psych-rock themed show.

IN THE LOOP XMAS THROWDOWN.
20th Dec / Roadhouse / £3-5.

Local hip hop group Ape Cult and in-demand tune selector Metrodome join the In The Loop residents. The open mic cypher contest carries an early Xmas present of £50 for the winner.

THE CAULBEARERS.
21st Dec / Matt & Phreds / £5.

The reliably superb Caulbearers are back at the Tib Street jazz club Matt & Phreds for three more sets of soulful jives.
HONEYFEET.

IT’S A GOOD JOB I LOVE YOU.
DEBT RECORDS.

REVIEWER – OWEN HEWSON.

In a quantum leap forward from the lo-fi Little Boat EP, Honeyfeet’s long-awaited debut album is a darkly atmospheric work full of textural colour and ambience. It’s a Good Job I Love You draws on the familiar Honeyfeet elements of blues, jazz and folk, anchored around Rioghnach Connolly’s captivating jazz blues vocals, all carefully refracted through a production filter of trippy, experimental studio effects. The result is a bewitching soundworld, full of languid beauty and dreamy sensuality.

On ‘All I Know’, a loping three-note bassline sets the mood before the flute and guitar introduce a catchy minor key hook. Connolly’s vocals ruminate, full of bluesy anguish and soulful inflection. The feeling of weary lethargy is heightened with the trip hop tinged echo delays, bassy gurglings and glassy handclaps.

‘Shadow’ is a ghostly blues number coloured with distorted harmonica and deep glissandos from the horns. The effect is eerily surreal, like you’ve entered a strange dream sequence from a David Lynch film. On ‘Rolling Around’, the band alternates between the breezy harmonica-led theme and a waltzing guitar melody, looping endlessly with a Radiohead-like restlessness. On ‘Harlequin’, the only instrumental of the album, the band breaks out with a pleasing mix of mournful Ethio jazz modes and Latin rhythm, with open spaces for solos. With its sexy, bluesy swagger, ‘Buried My Husband’ could be a forgotten soundtrack to a Bond film.

The album closes with something rather special. At almost eight minutes in length, ‘Gather Me’ luxuriates in a deep, downtempo groove of which The Cinematic Orchestra would be proud. Connolly’s vocals are exquisitely nuanced, full of soulful fragility and grace. The same falling chord sequence which opens the album then draws things to a close, the band subsiding into an exhausted jazzy dissonance.

For years Honeyfeet were one of those special bands you might come across by chance and rave about for weeks. But on record there just hasn’t been anything to really capture their sound until now. With help from the likes of John Ellis and Paddy Steer, one of Manchester’s best kept secrets have finally released a record which truly does them justice.

NICK CAVE & THE BAD SEEDS.

LIVE FROM KCRW.
BAD SEEDS LTD.

REVIEWER – ROBERT PEGG.

Nick Cave has long held the mantle as the dark poet of the underbelly of rock, and as such any new release is anticipated not just as an event, but as another glimpse into the murky soul of one of the finest lyricists of our age. This live session, a carefully curated balance of dark and light, is Cave’s fourth official live album, featuring a stripped-down Bad Seeds line-up performing four songs from the most recent album, Push the Sky Away, and half a dozen from the back catalogue.

Opening with tentative guitar chords before building into a rumbling contemplation on mass, matter and the birth of love is ‘Higgs Boson Blues’. Citing Hannah Montana doing the African Savannah while invoking the original rock and roll soul-selling legend Robert Johnson shows Cave has not lost his ability for an ambiguous lyric. ‘Far From Me’, the second track taken from The Boatman’s Call, is the most beautifully worded cautionary tale of a former lover since Dylan’s ‘Positively 4th Street’.

A third of the way into the album comes ‘Mercy Seat’. Expecting all the unrepentant ferocity from Cave’s condemned man, it comes as a sublime surprise to see the anger and defiance of the original album version replaced by a plaintive death cell prisoner in what is for me the highlight of this release. While you’re still musing on the regretful memoir of a murderer, the gorgeous trinity of ‘And No More Shall We Part’, ‘Wide Lovely Eyes’ and ‘Mermaids’ follows.

The set closes with ‘Jack The Ripper’, which doesn’t quite seem to sit right. Personally, I would have welcomed ‘Into My Arms’, which is apparently only available if you buy the vinyl version as well – an intensely annoying record label policy that becomes no less annoying the more it’s used as a marketing tool to shift more units.

Inscribed inside Nick Cave - The Complete Song Lyrics 1978-2001 is the biblical quote: “….And I only am escaped to tell thee.” His faith constantly tested by God as the just man in an unjust world, Job has everything he holds dear stripped away from him and survives only to tell his cautionary tale. Or, from the Book of Cave and the aforementioned ‘Far From Me’: “In a world where everybody f*cks everybody else over.” Live at KCRW is a collection of cautionary tales told by a just man in an unjust world.
Patterns’ debut is an empowering piece of work which sees the Manchester-based four-piece create soaring, ethereal music from a combination of lo-fi textures. Walking Lines is a seamless record which feels exploratory and expansive, and follows through on Patterns’ desire to craft something whole, as opposed to ten separate songs. ‘This Haze’ and ‘Street Fires’ reveal themselves to be the beating heart of Walking Lines, displaying Patterns’ adept use of beefy percussion and economic looping at their best. Elsewhere, the title track shows off Ciaran McAuley’s flawless vocal in minimal settings that mount to one of the album’s best crescendos. This album earmarks Patterns as an exciting new band who have proven themselves capable of conceiving an otherworldly musical experience.

A free online exhibition is the best way to describe this compilation. With refits of previously released tracks on the Dutch Fremdtunes label, each christened with artwork by various graphic designers, you are taken on an audio-visual journey. Manchester-based duo Big Mister Doom feature with a mellow remix of ‘Mind Reader’ by Planes, taking out the hip hop drum backing and replacing it with a trance-like progression and distorted lullaby. The outcome is a completely different kettle of fish to the original and a good way to showcase the label’s talents. Big Mister Doom then receive a taste of their own medicine as Baron Retif & Concepcion Perez remix ‘Flourish’, a track from BMD’s latest EP, Disconnected Repeater. The remix sees bass overlaying the delicate melody, supported by a cross-stick tempo, giving a darker shade than the original.

“So this is it, running hard into a wall,” utters Gareth Smith in deadpan verse at the start of the title track. It’s a paradoxically forceful phrase for music that shimmers as it lumbers to the twilight of its life, and by recording at Victoria Baths the breadth and density of their synthetic soundscapes is accentuated. Equally solemn is ‘French Playground’, coining the synthetic chord changes of The Chemical Brothers’ ‘Alive Alone’, but with Beth Orton substituted for Smith’s deep, grave tones, this time documenting the Algerian War. He’s a more restrained, subdued version of his namesake, Mark E. Perhaps it’s the lyrics or the themes embedded within them, but there’s an air of authenticity here that many local bands of a post-punk persuasion fail to capture. While others run hard into that wall, Stranger Son scales it.

Written, recorded and produced entirely by singer-songwriter, qualified doctor and all round talented fella, Sukh, Kings is a delicate record, awash with experimental folk pop and upbeat, jangly guitar melodies. The title track exemplifies this – delightfully arranged, bouncy and cheery. ‘Just What I Thought’ is another chirpy, accessible track, but the true talent of this Manchester-based solo artist is in the more ethereal moments, particularly the dreamy ‘St Cats’ and the hazy soundscape of ‘Den’, both featuring the gorgeous vocals of collaborator Sarah Williams. The highlight, ‘Now/Tomorrow’, is a swooping, majestic piece that soars from gentle acoustics and ghostly vocals to a momentous orchestral storm of strings, before calming. Though not an extraordinary album of groundbreaking song writing, Kings is certainly beautiful and a fine start for one of Manchester’s best new talents.
In recent years, ‘folk’ music has begun to gain more attention in mainstream media, but with every new, chart-friendly iteration it seems to become more diluted, more distanced from its foundations. While ‘folk’ originally meant traditional songs passed down orally, in the 60s it came to mean contemporary songs written in a traditional style, often carrying a broad socio-political message. Not long after, it came to mean almost any song played on an acoustic guitar.

Sam Amidon, born in Brattleboro, Vermont is truly a 21st century folk musician, breathing new life into old songs with modern arrangements, re-written melodies and a unique vocal delivery. Adapting mainly Appalachian and Irish folk, his music is both adventurous and restrained, as showcased on his newest album, Bright Sunny South, named after a heartbreaking song about a young man leaving his family to fight in the Civil War, and its predecessors All Is Well and I See The Sign, released by Icelandic collective Bedroom Community in 2008 and 2010 respectively. Sam’s approach is both traditional and fiercely forward-thinking, and his story is fascinating.

What has brought you to this point as a musician?

I was sitting in music class in seventh grade, age 12 I guess, and my friend Alex was sitting next to me. Suddenly he looked at me and said, “Jimi Hendrix is the greatest guitar player ever.” This was very helpful information for me, because he said it with such certainty. And then when I went to listen to Jimi Hendrix and his music, I found that it was true.

When I was 16 I was at a folk music camp in upstate New York and I was working on my fiddle playing. One of my favourite fiddle players was a local musician named Sue Sternberg. She played at a quiet volume but with incredibly powerful rhythmic drive. We were talking and somebody mentioned a fiddler named Tommy Peoples. I said, “Who’s that?” and Sue said, “You’ve never heard Tommy Peoples? You must listen to him.” In that moment, just hearing his name, I had a premonition. I knew exactly what his playing would sound like and how it would affect me. I went down to the little CD shop and bought his album High Part of the Road, took it back to my tent and lay down to listen to it, and sure enough, it changed my life.

Then when I was 23 years old, I went to hear a free jazz saxophone player, singer and songwriter named Arthur Doyle. He played a 15-minute long solo set at Tonic in New York City - saxophone, recorder, mumbuling and singing. It changed my life again.

What drew you to the guitar as a main instrument for composing?

My main instrument is still the fiddle, second after that the banjo. I’m not a very good guitar player but it is the most useful instrument for composing and singing over and also I enjoy playing it because I am still learning how, so each concert is like practising.

These days most people think of the acoustic guitar as being the key instrument in folk music, but I imagine it wasn’t a big part of your musical upbringing.

Very minimal, primarily as an accompanying instrument for Irish or Appalachian fiddle tunes. But not as a dominant instrument at all. ‘Folk music’ in the sense of ‘acoustic singer-songwriter music’ was the one genre that I really hated growing up. It wasn’t until recently that I understood what was great about Joni Mitchell, Bob Dylan, Neil Young. And even then I am less excited by their songwriting and more by their guitar playing, band leading, improvising and personal intensity.

What you do is quite unusual for a singer-songwriter these days, but actually strikes me as more ‘folky’ than writing material that is entirely your own. Is it often a case of matching up music you’ve written to lyrics that fit?

That is more or less it. I just love to sing, but I’m not that interested in songwriting. Also, most of my favourite musicians didn’t really write that much of their own music – Tommy Peoples, Miles Davis, Dock Boggs, Bonnie Raitt – but were more focused on just playing music in a way that was deep and personal to them, regardless of where the songs originally came from.

Are you consciously trying to strike a balance between straight covers and re-written material when you put an album together?

I don’t worry too much about how much I’m changing the music of the song – just whether it seems to fit to me. But of course I do enjoy composing little guitar parts and messing around with things musically, so the more radically reworked process happens more often than a straighter rendition.

Do you have a process for exploring possible source material, or are they mostly songs you’ve learnt from other people, songs you’ve grown up with and so on?

I am not really an expert in folk songs and I have just a few favourite folk singers – my parents, Bessie Jones, Dock Boggs, Jeff Davis, Lucy Simpson – so I tend to steal from them repeatedly.

The new record has much more of a live sound. How did the recording process differ from your last two records?

I wanted to make an album that had a bit more raw sound. That is why I hired Jerry Boys. I loved the way he recorded Martin Carthy in the 1970s and Ali Farka Toure and Toumani Diabete in the 2000s. Unadorned documentation.

How did Jerry’s approach differ from other producers you’ve worked with?

‘Producer’ can mean a million different things these days. This album didn’t really have a producer. I was the producer in the sense that I was making all the decisions about how things should unfold, who was going to be involved, and the shape of the album as a whole. Thomas Bartlett was the producer in the sense that many of the songs were developed collaboratively with him and he was extremely active in an arrangement sense on many crucial tracks. Jerry Boys was the producer in the sense that he recorded and mixed the whole record, frequently gave feedback on how things were progressing in the studio, and was the only person other than me who was involved in the recording process from start to finish.

Without Nico Muhly doing arrangements like on your last two records, did you find yourself taking on new roles during recording?

Nico’s beautiful arrangements have always been recorded at a totally separate time and without me present (he doesn’t even play me what he’s going to do before recording!). So my role in the studio was not different here, because it is always me plus a few other people building the basic tracks. But yes there was a difference. Knowing that what we were recording that week would be all that was on the album made us more focused to create the whole album right there, instead of just putting stuff down and waiting to see how it would develop.

I haven’t seen you perform, but from what I’ve seen online you seem to enjoy keeping the audience on their toes. Are you aware of wanting to do something different from the standard singer-songwriter format when playing live?

Performing, especially when you are on tour, is a very strange intersection of risk, comfort, fear, and boredom. Anything I do on stage is a response to the fundamental oddness of standing in front of a group of people every night and watching them stare at you.
Joe McBride and Liam Blackburn have enjoyed much musical success as Synkro and Indigo, both together and separately, and have most recently been making a new breed of techno as Akkord. After two highly acclaimed 12” releases and a subsequent EP on Houndstooth, they’re now ready to unleash a full Akkord LP on the world.

You guys have made tunes together for quite some time. What caused you to go for the name change and anonymity with the Akkord project?

Joe: When we started the tunes we didn’t think we were making them for a project. We were just making tunes. When we finished we decided that they weren’t really Synkro and Indigo tunes.

Because of the distinct sound of them?

Joe: Yeah. It was mainly because it didn’t sound like anything we’d made before.

So what made you decide to give up the whole ‘anonymity’ thing?

Liam: We got forced into it. Basically, websites and doing a Boiler Room set!

Joe: We just decided that we didn’t want to wear the masks anymore. It wasn’t originally planned, it was just something we thought we’d do at the first gig and after a couple we stopped. Once the Boiler Room happened everyone knew it was us.

Liam: People twigged but we’ve never said it. It was just all the media who tagged our names – even though we asked a few not to – so we just gave up on it. People wanted to find out who we were rather than listening to the music, which is the opposite of what we wanted to happen. It basically proves why we did it in the first place.

Joe: Because people are more bothered about who made a tune than the music itself.

And when it becomes bigger than the music, there’s no point?

Liam: Yeah, it made an impact but we didn’t intend it that way. We just wanted to put the tunes out and see what happens. There was never a goal.

Joe: That’s why we put the records out ourselves and we didn’t try and sign them to anyone else.

Liam: It’s been fucking good fun really, watching it all.

Joe: Again, we didn’t even plan to do any gigs or anything at the start, we were just making tunes. It got to a point where nearly every agency wanted to sign us and we decided to do some gigs.

Liam: That’s why the whole mask thing happened. We just thought we’d do it for the first gig.

Joe: We never really took it too seriously.

The Akkord project seemed very conceptualised from the very start, with the early blog full of posts about theories of sound and nature. Do you draw these theories and concepts of pattern and vibration into the music as well?

Liam: I wouldn’t necessarily say directly.

Joe: If anything it’s subconsciously incorporated, but we don’t sit there with books or equations or try to fit in the resonant frequency of a leaf being flicked!

Liam: It’s just a story to put around it. We are very interested in that area, but not obsessively. Music is all mathematical anyway. All art is. We’re just trying to use that to make people think a bit more.

Are all your tracks made together in the studio? How do you typically start and culture an Akkord track?

Joe: There’s not really a set way of making tunes but we make virtually all of the Akkord stuff together. I think it’s better for a collaborative project when you can work in a studio and not over email.

Liam: It’s quite spontaneous most of the time. When we say, “We need to get in the studio;” nothing will happen, but if we’re chilling and just start jamming around that can really grow into something.

I think your music could fit into quite a few movie soundtracks. If you had to pick any film to re-score which would it be?

Liam: I’m not a big movie buff, but probably something like Baraka or Samsara. They’re documentaries with no dialogue, just music and really good cinematography. Or Enter The Void or one of those Gaspar Noé films.

Joe: I’d probably like to score an anime film. Maybe a Studio Ghibli one like Princess Mononoke or one of the earlier ones.

Your first two releases were both self-pressed independent EPs. Was there always a plan for an album? What made you sign up to Houndstooth for the LP?

Liam: It just made sense really.

Joe: Yeah, self-releasing 12” records is one thing but doing an album in various formats, with a whole campaign, is very different. With the label we just did the music and had a say in the art but there’s lots of others working on the different aspects of the release.

Liam: It was good to work with Houndstooth too for our own growth. To have an album and an EP on there is great. We’ve built a good relationship with them. They’ve done a lot more than we ever could have done.

Joe: Obviously with Rob Booth [of the Electronic Explorations podcast] backing it there’s some good taste there. When we signed we knew the direction they were taking it and that they had a similar artistic view to ours.

Liam: They were very understanding with letting us do what we wanted. I think we might be hard to work with sometimes, so they’ve been really good with us.

The tunes are incredibly hard to describe to other people. I think they retain an influence of early dubstep. How do you think the Akkord sound has been shaped and influenced in terms of your own inspirations?

Joe: Tough one. I think a lot of people shy away from dubstep because it has changed so much from where it started. When the first dubstep tunes came out nobody knew how to describe that because it didn’t have a name. The influence we draw from was the really early stuff – early Planet Mu, Tempa, DMZ – from when it barely had a name.

Liam: We’ve tried our best to not sound like someone else. Obviously other things will influence us but it’s hard to pinpoint.

Joe: A big influence to the Akkord sound is in other 90s electronica. There are tunes out there that are from way before dubstep but with similar sounds. There’s a Boards of Canada tune called ‘Basefree’ which sounds like that, but it’s from the mid 90s.

Liam: And there’s always jungle and drum and bass.

Finally, can you give me five albums you think that nobody reading this will have heard, but should check?

Alva Noto’s Univrs, Minidisc by Gescom, Xela’s For Frosty Mornings And Summer Nights, and two by Tool – Ænema and Lateralus.

Akkord are launching their eponymous debut album at 2022NQ on Friday 6th December. The album is out now on Houndstooth.

akkordmusik.net

Gary Brown is a music photographer under the name GB Multimedia. He has worked with local clubnights including Hit & Run, PYC, Ballin’ On A Budget and Project 13, as well as Outlook and Hideout festivals in Croatia.

gbmultimedia.co.uk
Dodo
from the extinct pet series
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<td>For Those About To Rock 2013</td>
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For full listings check out: [www.manchesteracademy.net](http://www.manchesteracademy.net)
There are fundamental similarities between football and theatre. Years of training and preparation are concentrated into just an hour or two of performance, there are heroes and villains who are driven onwards or under as the story unfolds, and it all happens under the eyes of a crowd who pay to be entertained. But in some ways they are very different. Football is a working class pastime, but this cannot be said of theatre. Theatre can have an educational agenda, reaching out to people, while football is a capitalist free-for-all where the crowds are customers, not patrons. Homosexuality rarely raises an eyebrow in the arts, whereas there are currently no openly gay footballers in the English Premier League.

“It’s so vicious and tribal – it becomes obvious ammunition,” says actor, writer and football fanatic Rob Ward, ruminating on the subject of homosexuality in football. “Any way you can attack the opposition, certain fans will do that. But you’d like to think that it is talent that counts, not sexuality, like in the rest of society. That pure thinking needs to be translated into football.”

These thoughts inspired Rob to write about the subject in Away From Home, which premiered at 24:7 Festival this year, in which he also plays the main character, Kyle. Well-built and good looking, it is not hard to imagine Rob in the role of Kyle, a rent boy who begins a tangled and tumultuous relationship with a Premier League player. The play is the result of a partnership with writer and director Martin Jameson, who Rob had worked with the year before on another 24:7 play, Loaded.

“In the initial stages I wasn’t that involved,” says Rob on the topic of Loaded. “I was going around Italy stuffed in a fat suit dressed as Friar Tuck, but once it was on the stage we got talking. I said I’d always wanted to write something about being gay and a football fan, as it is something that doesn’t get touched on much.”

The idea was a good one, but fraught with possible problems. It is easy to make an issue play, especially about sexual identity, but far harder to do it in a subtle way. You can end up beating the drum and forgetting about the importance of story, character and, well, the play. After all, people go to the theatre to be entertained, not preached to. So how best to approach the topic?

“Martin had the idea of playing it from the angle of someone being involved with a gay footballer, and that way it makes people the heart of it. It’s much more human, about human gain and human loss. And I decided that I didn’t want it to be about coming out, so Kyle’s mates knew he was gay. His family did too. That left us free to focus on the other issues.”

The ‘other issues’ being the role of gay people in professional football and the choices we make between our careers and our loved ones. In this case, the footballer must choose between Kyle and the game that has given him so much, as he assumes that he could never come out without killing his career. But is this assumption true? Rob and the team at Working Progress wanted to put it to the test by trying to reach new audiences. “With football fans we’re taking the play to the clubs, because they might not want to go to theatre. Your non-traditional theatre-goers can be worried about the etiquette of the theatre and might feel intimidated about how to behave, so we have to make the effort to take it to them. We want to get people talking, and I reckon football fans will be more understanding than people give them credit for. If you don’t close your own mind to who can see and understand your play then there’s nothing to stop you reaching new audiences.”

It is all very well having these aspirations for a play, of who it can reach and what it can do, but it still has to be performed. Given the physical nature of Away From Home – Rob plays all of the characters – this requires a sportsman-like dedication to fitness. “When you start preparing for performances you start thinking about ritual and routine. In this case, I had to look like someone who would want to spend £80 to have half an hour with. So I was on a strict diet, strict fitness regime. I bought into that ritual. I’d do the same things every day.” At this point Rob starts laughing as he recalls his preparations: “I’d got this thing about salmon being good for the brain, so each day I’d be stood in the toilets of New Century House [where the play was performed], topless, having scars drawn on me, with workers from the Co-op coming in to use the toilets while I ate a tin of cold salmon.”

The preparation certainly paid off, with Away From Home winning prizes for the production and for Rob as an actor. However, the 24:7 audience is largely made up of regular theatre-goers and people who work in the arts. It remains to be seen whether this success will translate into the proposed football club performances. Rob is upbeat about their chances, citing the realism of Kyle’s character: “Kyle is flawed and maybe he’s not likeable either, but I think those characters are the ones that make for the best stories, the ones that anyone from any background can relate to. In our own lives we all have flaws. We all make mistakes. Kyle makes mistakes, but does he deserve the consequences of those mistakes? That’s the question we’re asking the audience. We’re giving them the story, not the answer. If you reward the audience’s intelligence then they can have that debate themselves.”

Away From Home will be showing as part of re:play Festival on 30th January and 5th February.
workingprogresstc.com
Halloween always reminds me of Christmas. You go along with the inevitable build-up for a bit of seasonal entertainment and then experience sensory overload. In this instance it wasn’t a case of too many Santas but way, way too many zombies. This was hardly a surprise, given that the first of the Grimm Up North double bill at the Dancehouse Theatre featured the 1979 blood and guts spectacle that is director Lucio Fulci’s *Flesh Eating Zombies*. This was followed by two other zombie variations on a theme – a 2013 short *Samuel and Emily vs the World* (Nick Gillespie) and George A Romero’s iconic 1985 film *Day of the Dead*.

Since I’m fairly new to this genre I had a fairly open mind as to what was coming my way, but was initially taken aback by the hardcore Grimm groupies who arrived with an all-too-vivid array of blood spattered outfits. With Manchester’s A&E department less than a mile away, it could easily have been a more appropriate venue for the screening.

As the story unfolds, the hospital setting becomes ever more relevant. Starting aboard a boat in New York harbour, where a patrolman uncovers the first flesh eating zombie of the night, we’re soon heading out to the remote and sinister island of Matul to track down a scientist whose work ethic in studying and trying to contain this nightmare medical phenomenon is an exemplar case of foolhardy service beyond the call of duty.

It’s thanks to his sense of conviction that we’re presented with the main thrust of the plot as we follow the efforts of his former colleague’s daughter, her friend, an ethnologist and his wife to get to the bottom of this zombie infested island. There is a tokenistic attempt at trying to thrash out a conundrum over whether this very local medical epidemic is caused by South Caribbean voodoo or a bacterial infection, but clearly the distractions of contending with an never-ending upsurge of flesh eating zombies wreaking havoc in all corners of the island means that is never resolved. But are we bothered? Of course not. We want hammed up, flesh eating zombies, not Lancet research papers. But, trust me, if this small island’s trauma wing was operated by an NHS Trust its emergency strategy would slide into meltdown within five bites of an arm or a leg. Once the spurting blood vessels and flesh gnawing starts, it never stops.

Make no mistake, victims of the island zombies’ insatiable appetite for flesh provide a truly exhaustive and unrelenting litany of blood spurting gore which, far from leading to ripples of disgust from the hardcore audience, often generated guffaws of satisfied laughter. All of which revealed to me the ironically strange aspect of this hugely popular film genre, namely that it’s phenomenally good at sending itself up. Many set pieces felt like soft pastiches of scenes in other iconic films. Take, for instance, the scene where a zombie makes his unwelcome entry into a bathroom via a shower curtain – Bates Motel in *Psycho*, methinks.

Fast forward three weeks and the Dancehouse Theatre was the return venue for a triple bill with a specific focus on the vampire genre, featuring *Nosferatu*, the iconic 1922 German expressionist film by director FW Murnau. Relying on the most rudimentary of filming techniques and focused around just a single camera, Murnau’s unofficial reworking of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* is without doubt the foundation stone on which all modern aesthetic references to this vampire are based.

Whereas Flesh Eating Zombies was created with the benefit of decades of cinematography and special effects, the visual genius and vision of Nosferatu relies on melodrama and the crude device of silent movie storyboards to drive the narrative, and is all the more poigniant given that it was almost destroyed due to a dispute with the estate of Bram Stoker over the rights to the story.

Despite this, the movie is spellbinding in the way it not only builds suspense but creates a sinister sense of the macabre through some quite disturbing images which, decades later, have kept even the most cynical of cinema audiences on the edge of their seats. The visualisation of Orlick (Count Dracula), with his gothic facial features, elongated fingers and rigor mortis addled body movements, is now such an intrinsic element of the never-ending popularity of Dracula and vampire culture in general. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and all the various modern reincarnations of a tried and tested franchise owe so much to this film which, as we saw at the Grimm evening, also inspired two further variations on the theme. These were Sean Smith’s 2013 seven-minute short *The Gloaming*, a low-budget but powerful creepy narrative based around the 1848 Great Famine, and director Francis Ford Coppola’s big-budget, erotic and lavishly costumed 1992 production of Dracula.

The Grimm Up North gothic season in collaboration with BFI continues with themes of Ghosts at Ordsall Hall on 13th December and Monsters at John Rylands Library on 10th January.

grimmfest.com/grimmupnorth
While I am a lifelong admirer of old Hollywood stars like Rita Hayworth, Dorothy Lamour and Greta Garbo, I am not usually the reliably glamorous type. But that little girl from eons ago who wanted to be like those stars got her wish for a day. There are many makeover studios in Manchester, but there is one with a difference, one that has a motto of celebrating uniqueness: the award-winning Alt Studio on Lever Street. A team of professional makeup artists, stylists and photographers deliver stunning shots full of imagination, creativity and originality. I saw great shots of men, women, families, couples, beautiful showcases of body art – everything you might imagine. I knew I was in good hands, but could they really transform me, ravaged by the stresses of the modern life – as well as the pleasures, like an occasional cocktails blowout – into a luscious vintage vixen? In short, yes they could. I was nervous to start with, but the lovely makeup artist Collette Gartland and photographer and owner Simon Hunt put me at ease and I was soon enjoying myself more than I expected. Collette skilfully created two different looks – a softer pin-up look and a darker, more seductive Christmas look. She also gave me some great expert tips on some products. Simon gave great direction all through the shoot, which is invaluable if you are not used to being a model. He caterers each shoot to the individual model, so your personality does come through and no shot is ever the same. The result speaks for itself and you can see more of the shoot on the Alt Studio Facebook page. Also, there is a great offer from the studio to all the Now Then readers – to claim your voucher for a free photo shoot, all you need to do is text your name and ‘Now Then Vintage’ to 07901776892. Go and enjoy yourself!

Part of this is less a favourite than an obituary. All of a sudden, we were notified of the closure or change of ownership of three renowned live music and theatre venues in and around Manchester city centre. It was announced via the local press that Jabez Clegg would be closing its doors, and then the teams running two of the area’s beacons for fringe theatre, the Black Lion (whose events were run by Chapel St Studios) and the Lass O’Gowrie, swiftly followed in announcing that they’re calling it a day. Of those three, the Lass has appeared stoically opposed to those initial reports, so it remains to see whether or not they’ll follow the trend. As for Chapel St Studios, they’re intending to stick around in one way or another, most likely in a nomadic capacity until they can find another venue to settle at. So far they have moved some events to The Eagle pub, which is just around the corner from The Black Lion. The director at Chapel St Studios, Jenny Tretheway, believes there’ll be a silver lining from moving on, once they find the right venue to work with. She points out their business model is sustainable, but unfortunately the pub’s wasn’t. “What the last ten months has made obvious to me is that it’s really important that we start to create new sustainable business models for theatre and arts, particularly at the grassroots and fringe level. That’s why I’m moving and re-housing us.” “Chapel St Studios became a space people could make their own, try out performances for the first time, make mistakes and take risks – because I took a fair ticket split for room hire,” she said, before adding that, “Ultimately, the fringe needs support and supportive venues – not ones that are counting up the hours they’ve spent and finding additional costs to add on.”
FAVOURITES.
OUR PICK OF THE BUNCH.

MEMENTO MORI.
DUNNI.CO.UK.
STOCKPORT ART GALLERY, SK3.
The author of the ‘Nowhere Fast’ articles featured in recent issues of this magazine, David Dunnico, will be exhibiting a pair of his photography collections to be displayed at Stockport Art Gallery from 11th January to 11th February. The first is entitled Memento Mori, which means ‘remember you must die’ in Latin and was originally commissioned by Salford Art Gallery in 2007 to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the city’s municipal cemeteries. It was most recently displayed at Nexus Arts Café and looks at the Victorian romantic vision of grief and mourning, a topic well-suited to Stockport Art Gallery that also houses the town’s war memorial.
The second exhibition, A Tree Made of Real Wood, was previewed last year at the Waterside Arts Centre in Sale and depicts wry scenes of nature infiltrated by concrete suburbia and technology, felled trees next to dual carriageways and tokenistic attempts to implant a greener world in city life, from billboards full of luscious trees to solitary shrubs nestled into brick walls for show.

DEBT RECORDS.
DEBTRECORDS.NET.
If there is any one of Manchester’s record labels that you can guarantee to get into the festive spirit, it’s Debt Records. Closer to a musical collective than the 20th century major label bank loan model, Debt has staged Xmas shows for the past few years, plus there’s their compilation, Debt It Snow, featuring rewraps of carols and hymns from ‘Shite Christmas’ to ‘Do-Wap In A Manger’. They record and release music with the support of WR Audio and have overseen several recent projects, including Honeyfeet’s long-awaited debut (review on page 36), Richard Barry’s Diffident Fecund Album, and upcoming launches for a Louis Barabbas’ Youth LP and an EP by TE Yates. They’re planning to celebrate the passing of 2013 by showcasing Louis Barababbas & The Bedlam Six (plus friends) at Platt Chapel on 7th December and TE Yates at Castle Hotel on 8th December, before finally teaming up with us for a Yuletide Now Then Social at Deaf Institute’s main bar on Thursday 19th December.

WARBURTON STREET.
OFF WILMSLOW ROAD, M20.
Tucked away down the side of the Dog and Partridge pub on the East Didsbury stretch of Wilmslow Road is one of south Manchester’s hidden treasures of independent trade, Warburton Street. Between its cobbles and residential terraces lie the premises of a collection of traders that are well worth your time. There’s a physio, restaurant, bookshop, jewellers and gift shop – all shunning the chains and brands all too familiar to the high street round the corner. Sadly, the Wendy J Levy Gallery will be moving on after Xmas, but you can browse its farewell exhibition, The Grand Finale, until 21st December.

THE CHALLENGE NETWORK.
THE-CHALLENGE.ORG.
The Challenge Network is a charity that aims to strengthen communities by staging summer and autumn activity courses to teach young people a variety of skills and inspire them to become more involved in their local community and wider society. The core premise is to connect people across all ages and walks of life by valuing our differences rather than letting our differences divide us. There are positions available in both paid and voluntary roles. To apply, visit their website: www.ncsthechallenge.org/jobs.

RE:PLAY FESTIVAL 2014.
LIBRARYTHEATRE.COM/REPLAY2014.
THE LOWRY STUDIO, M50.
The turn of the year brings much drama. Among them is any combination of resolutions, regrets, hangovers and hopes, all potentially encompassed within the line-up of re:play Festival 2014. Turn to page 44 in this issue for our interview with Away From Home’s Rob Ward, but he’s not the only one to be invited to repeat his production after being interviewed in these pages. Manchester-based comedy duo Norris and Parker will be there to perform All Our Friends Are Dead, which they successfully took to Edinburgh for this summer’s festival, and Lucia Cox, who was interviewed in issue 3, will direct her adaptation of Anthony Burgess’s One Hand Clapping. There are plenty more of 2013’s best received plays from the local fringe scene, plus the Pitch Party, which offers budding playwrights the chance to pitch their idea to a panel of theatre industry experts in front of an audience. The whole festival runs from 20th January to 1st February.

CUE.
CUEMCR.TUMBLR.COM.
4 PICCADILLY PLACE, M1.
From 6th to 21st December a group of award-winning Manchester artists will be exhibiting work in one of the disused office spaces at Piccadilly Place. Expect an eclectic mix of work on display, ranging from photography to sculpture, from painting to film. It’ll be free to go along and browse and is open daily between 10am and 7pm.
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