



## **Central Trail Written Content**

**pp. 2-30**

## **Northern Trail Written Content**

**pp. 31-40**

## **Explore Further Written Content**

**pp. 41-44**

# FAIRFIELD HALLS



The Fairfield Halls in Croydon has been at the heart of cultural Croydon for six decades. The halls were built on the site of the historic "Fair Field", which hosted regular fairs until around 1860, on land above a disused railway cutting which used to link the mainline railway from East Croydon to the long-gone Croydon Central station, situated on what is now Queen's Gardens.

Built in 1962, Fairfield Halls quickly became a focal point for the local and international music scene, attracting renowned musicians and showcasing a diverse array of genres. These have varied from jazz legends like Duke Ellington 1963 and Ella Fitzgerald 1965 to the harder edged rock and soul of The Rolling Stones (1963), the Stax/Volt Revue (1967) with Otis Redding and Sam & Dave (1967), The Who (on their Tommy tour in 1969), and David Bowie on his Ziggy Stardust tour in 1973. the Fairfield Halls has reverberated with the sounds of musical pioneers throughout the years.

The venue's main hall was fitted out by the same architect as the Royal Festival Hall – the only two such concert halls in the country – giving it powerful acoustics and a glorious atmosphere. It has played host to orchestras, classical virtuosos, and world-renowned conductors - the symphonic brilliance of the London Philharmonic Orchestra and maestros such as Herbert von Karajan and Gustavo Dudamel. From Beethoven to Stravinsky, the Concert Hall has embraced the full spectrum of classical music.

In the 1970s it hosted acts of the calibre of Kraftwerk, Camel and Caravan, whose album Live At The Fairfield Halls 1974 (released in 2002) features a wonderful cover painting of the halls as a beautiful mirage in the desert. An incendiary show by Sparks in 1975 was filmed – seats be damned, the kids got up and danced and the show ended in a near riot as teenagers stormed the stage. Clips can be seen on Youtube.

One especially memorable night at the Arnhem Gallery in 1982 saw the woodwind-led Ravishing Beauties (featuring Virginia Astley and Kate St John) play on the same bill as the Cambridge trio Dolly Mixture with their riot girl-inspiring girl group aesthetic. The same decade saw legends like Gene Pitney (a show which revealed how many Gene Pitney fans modelled their haircuts on their hero), Glen Campbell (who surprised the crowd by playing bagpipes) and the Monkees – at least, three of the Monkees as Michael Nesmith was sadly absent.

It may not have put on any punk shows – it was always more of a place for more thoughtful performers like Tony Benn, or Ken Dodd – but the Damned’s Captain Sensible and Rat Scabies did famously have jobs there in the 1970s. They were both cleaners, but Sensible told writer Jon Savage that “on Sunday evenings I was an usher, and Marc Bolan came down, and there were all these manic T.Rex fans. It was the policy at the Fairfield Hall not to let anyone get up and have a good time. But I got involved in this rush to the front, swept along with the crowd. I was in with all these sweaty female bodies and looked up at Marc Bolan and thought, that's the job for me. At that point I decided to make an effort and get practicing.”

The Halls have close ties to the community - the annual Croydon Schools Music Festival has provided countless young musicians with a platform to showcase their nascent talent.

The venue lost some of its sheen after decades of incremental changes, but it was closed in 2016, refurbished, and opened once again in sparkling good nick in 2019. Fairfield Halls remains a cherished landmark, a testament to the enduring power of music and the Croydon’s love of diverse music.

# CROYDON COLLEGE



Croydon College has been a breeding ground for talented musicians throughout its post-war history. Alumni include David Bowie (even though he was notoriously rude about Croydon), Stormzy, Ray Davies of the Kinks and Adelle.

Its history goes back to 1868, when the Croydon School of Art was founded above the Public Halls in George Street. It was taken over by the council in 1932 to become Croydon College of Art and would be transformed after the war. In 1941, Croydon Polytechnic (formerly Pitlake Technical College) was gutted by fire, and so in 1948 the corporation's Development Plan for Further Education decided to merge it with the art school as Croydon College. Construction started on the current Fairfield site in 1953 and the result was a building quite gorgeous in its simplicity, a symbol of post-war optimism.

Times change, though. By 1968, British youth was disillusioned; two art students at the college were Jamie Reid and Malcolm McLaren. McLaren was fascinated by Guy Debord and the Situationists in Paris and decided to use their ideas as part of an anti-establishment sit-in at Croydon College that lasted for eight days. Reid took these ideas and turned them into a fanzine called Suburban Press, all about Croydon and his horror at its widescale post-war redevelopment. McLaren channeled his energies into his Kings Road clothes shop (initially called Let It Rock, later called Sex) and formed a band to effectively promote the shop – the Sex Pistols. McLaren and Reid stayed in touch and the artwork that Reid had first drawn up at Croydon College – like the twin buses with 'nowhere' as their destination - became some of the most iconic images of the punk era.

One of Reid and McLaren's classmates was Croydoner Robin Scott who recorded the hippyish, lightly progressive album *Woman from The Warm Grass* in 1969, a year after the sit-in, and played local shows with the likes of David Bowie, Ralph McTell and John Martyn. Scott would re-emerge ten years later under the name M with the international hit, and timeless piece of electro-pop, *Pop Muzik*. New York, London, Paris, Munich... Croydon!

One of the most celebrated alumni from Croydon College is the renowned singer and songwriter, Adele. Though she was born and raised in Tottenham, Adele attended the college in her late teens, where she honed her soulful, emotionally charged sound. Her powerful voice and heartfelt lyrics have resonated with audiences worldwide, earning her numerous awards and making her one of the best-selling artists of all time.

Latter-day alumni include Jamie Fry, photographer and singer with the anarchic band Earl Brutus, and Tottenham's Adelle, who also went to the Brit School. But the most notable local musician who has studied at Croydon College is Michael Ebenezer Kwadjo Omari Owuo Jr, better known as Stormzy, the biggest star to come out of the grime movement. Known for his energetic performances and socially conscious lyrics, Stormzy has become a prominent, influential figure in British music. His time at the college allowed him to refine his skills as an MC and develop a unique style that blends grime, hip-hop, and R&B. His hits include a brace of number ones, Vossi Bop and Own It. In 2020, Stormzy pledged £10m to UK organisations, charities and movements over 10 years to tackle racial inequality, justice reform and black empowerment over the following decade. For this, and his contributions to music – truly putting Croydon on the cultural map – Stormzy was awarded the Freedom of the Borough in April 2023.

## BONAPARTE'S RECORDS & KIRSTY MACCOLL



Bonaparte Record Store and once the workplace of Croydon born singer songwriter Kirsty MacColl, possibly Croydon's favourite musical daughter.

Founded by music entrepreneur Steve Melhuish, as an independent record store with branches in Croydon, Guildford, and Bromley, Bonaparte really did bring the sounds to the suburbs in the seventies! The Croydon branch was also home to the company's mail order business and the registered address of their short-lived record label.

The Bonaparte record label only released two singles and two EPs between 1977 and 1979, but did feature Kilburn and The High Roads, an early project of one Mister Ian Drury. The label was left to lapse and was succeeded by a new Bonaparte's venture, Human Records, in 1980.

Situated on a parade of shops as you approached East Croydon Station), Bonaparte quickly became a hotspot for local punk and new wave fans and a huge cut out of Elvis Costello stretching up from above the shop front to the second-floor windows ensured its status as a local landmark.

Kirsty MacColl worked in Bonaparte's mail order department after dropping out of Croydon Art College.

Born in Croydon on 10 October 1959, MacColl was daughter of folk singer Ewan MacColl and dancer Jean Newlove. Her parents separated when she was very young, and Kirsty was raised by her mother. In 1965 Jean commissioned architect Eric Mayne to design and build a new family home on Beech Way in Selsdon, and Kirsty grew up in this classic example of mid-century, high-end residential design whilst attending Park Hill Primary School, Monks Hill High School and John Newnham High School.

Kirsty joined local R&B/punk group, The Drug Addix under the pseudonym Mandy Doubt. Signed to the Chiswick record label, the Addix released a four track EP, *The Drug Addix Make a Record*, in June 1978, with the recording attracted the attention of Stiff Records.

Although only formed in 1976, Stiff had already released what is considered the first UK punk single, *New Rose* by fellow Croydon band The Damned and by 1977 their roster included Wreckless Eric, Ian Drury and Elvis Costello. Stiff paid for the Addix to work on some demos but nothing came of the project and the band parted ways. However, Kirsty stayed with the label, recording her debut single *They Don't Know* in the label's mobile studio, The China Shop in spring 1979.

*"When they heard that I'd eventually left [Drug Addix] they called me & said: "We'd like you to come & play us anything you've got." I said: "I thought you didn't like the demos", and they said: "We hate the band, but we quite like you". When they asked if I had any songs, I said: "Oh yeah, loads!", even though I didn't at all. Then I thought: "Oh God, I'd better write something before I go in to see them." And that's when I wrote "They Don't Know". I went round with a cassette, singing to an acoustic guitar. They liked it and signed me."* **Kirsty MacColl** (taken from *Be Stiff: The Stiff Records Story* / Richard Balls)

During this spell with Stiff, there were reports Kirsty didn't get on well with the label boss Dave Robinson, and despite the record getting good radio play, Stiff pretty much canned distribution of the vinyl copies into shops and the track was left to gather dust until covered by Tracey Ullman in 1983 and reaching number 2 in the UK charts and was a Billboard top ten hit in America.

In 1987 Kirsty recorded what is probably her most recognised vocal, duetting with Shane McGowan and the Pogues for *Fairytale of New York*, one of the most iconic and biggest selling Christmas tunes of all time.

More frustration with the industry followed with a series of short tenures at various labels and stop/start projects and Kirsty was close to quitting the industry all together before finding inspiration in Cuban Latin sounds and releasing the album *Tropical Brainstorm*, featuring the single *In These Shoes*, to critical acclaim in 2000.

Tragically, later the same year, Kirsty was hit by a speedboat whilst diving on holiday in Mexico and died as a result of her injuries.

The boat had entered a prohibited zone and was travelling at excessive speed. Reports of the accident detailed wealthy business owners as being in charge of the boat, however it was a local boat hand that was prosecuted in court, leaving the actual owners free of facing any charges. The injustice, and likely corruption involved in the incident, became the focal point of a nine-year Justice for Kirsty campaign led by her friends and family.

Kirsty MacColl had one of the most recognisable voices of her generation and wrote and recorded a catalogue of music that was uplifting, had an inherent wry sense of humour but carried an emotional bite that you felt through to your soul. She was unlike any other artist, she was from Croydon, and we love her!

As for Bonaparte's, in 1981 they launched a store in New York, however, one year later the company was placed into liquidation and the retail business and record label were sold. But, for giving a generation of music fans a fantastic place to hang out and buy their music, and for creating the bold spectacle of a bespectacled Elvis Costello looking down over George Street, Bonaparte Records lives on in so many memories!

## THE OVAL TAVERN



Just a five-minute walk from East Croydon station, The Oval Tavern is a detached Victorian pub that sits on Oval Road beside the neighbouring school's playing field.

Before we talk about live music at The Oval, let's look a little at the pub's history. The Oval was opened in 1869 following the development of Oval Road on what was once a gravel pit used to source road building materials. The eponymous oval loop, which is a feature of the road, was originally planned to be a pleasure garden for the use of local residents, which would have seen the Oval Tavern as a 'pub on the green' in the heart of Croydon!

Originally, the pub had a small front bar and a snug with a stable block at the back. Changes to the pub made in the mid-1980s saw the main bar area opened out into the larger space you see today, and the beer garden improved at the rear.

Despite the occasional event, it wasn't until around 2001 that The Oval began to build a name as a live venue. The initial live music focus then was on roots and blues, with live sessions on Thursday and Sunday evenings, and The Oval quickly built a reputation on the London blues circuit with artists including Big Joe Louis, James Hunter, Wolfie Witcher, Shakey Vic, Diz Watson all regulars on the line-up, plus the odd special guest from the USA including Lazy Lester.

Other notable performers included folk-blues guitarist Wizz Jones (one of the original British Beatniks, who had grown up on Oval Road in the 1940s and 50s), and virtuoso guitar player Michael Chapman.

Whilst blues was definitely a focal point of the live scene at The Oval, there was always a rolling soundtrack of ska, funk, soul and a whole eclectic mix of music coming from behind the bar or from the DJs on a Friday and Saturday night. And that rolled over into the



occasional weekend live set, including a first re-union in decades for many of the original members of British funk legends Cymande.

There was a change of owners in 2010 and whilst live music continued, it took a bit of a back seat until current owner Esther Sutton took over in 2013 and grew the Oval's music programme both in terms of the number of events and the diversity of what you can expect to hear in the heart of CRO.

Building an incredible folk programme, The Oval has hosted the legendary Martin Carthy, Blue Rose Code and seen members of Bellowhead perform in their various projects, including Belshazzar's Feast and Faustus (in fact you could have caught the whole of Bellowhead in the pub for an impromptu jam after their Fairfield Halls gig in 2015).

There is an incredible jazz roster playing every Sunday lunchtime, and the Oval is home to 20+ piece Croydon swing orchestra that is The Big Beer Band every Monday.

Never expect the ordinary at the Oval though and be on the lookout for many a musical niche would be our best advice!

You might catch cult guitarist John Ottway, find yourself up and dancing to some Balkan folk or Klezmer with the Trans-Siberian Marching Band or just getting swept up in the whirlwind of wonderful Croydon lunacy that is Doctor Smutglove.

Esther also makes sure that the Oval is a much-needed platform for local and emerging artists. The weekly Songbird Sessions feature acoustic musicians and songwriters and a new season of monthly showcases for new young jazz talent kicked off in March 2023 in association with Tomorrow's Warriors as part of This is Croydon, London Borough of Culture.

With around five gigs a week, and live music being a feature of the pub for more than twenty years, this pub is quite possibly Croydon's longest running grass roots music venue – in fact, only the Fairfield Halls can lay claim to being a longer running venue that still programmes live music in the town centre!

For its warm welcome, diverse music programme and making sure so many 'niches' have a space in which to perform, Croydon Music Heritage Trail celebrates a one of a kind.... The Oval Tavern!

## THE GREYHOUND & THE BLUE ORCHID



Work finished on the high-rise development of St George's House in 1964. The site of the new Nestlé head office and acting as the entrance to the St George's Walk precinct, the building also housed a new pub, The Greyhound.

Named after the theatre that had previously stood on Croydon High Street, (and was demolished to make way the new development), the new Greyhound was set to carve its name in Croydon music history, staging an incredible list of concerts. And, as punk and new wave became the sound of a youth movement, The Greyhound was at the very heart of the scene.

To understand the impact of The Greyhound for Croydon, you need to begin by looking at the difference in the number of gigs bands played and the type of venues they played in, compared to now. This is an era pre-dates the big stadium concert venues, major artists played smaller venues and gigged a lot more often.

To put this in context, The Beatles played the ABC Cinema in Croydon on 21 March 1963 just two months after the release of Please Please Me. They would go on to play almost 200 more shows that year, including coming to the Fairfield Halls in April and September of '63.

Today, an artist can play one night at the O2 Arena in London and perform to an audience of 20,000 people. However, whilst they were the biggest band in the country, The Beatles had to play fifteen nights at theatres holding around 1,500 to reach the same audience figures. And 1963 was the year of Beatlemania!

So, when The Greyhound opened, Croydon had a brand new a concert space capable of holding 800 people, ready to cater for a new, young generation who wanted to see their favourite bands perform live – and those bands were all out there playing A LOT of concerts!

The first gigs at The Greyhound began in 1969 and the booking policy was simple – book bands that were about to break big, or artists that wanted to play to an audience that could stand up during the show (breaking away from theatre venues).

With the support of a promotion team from Mr Fox Records (a small shop on Station Road, West Croydon), including Brian Mason who had been integral in the blues scene at The Star in Broad Green, the roster of artists that played The Greyhound over the first five years was astonishing.

In its first couple of months as a venue, and as the Sixties was coming to an end, Rod Stewart and the Faces played The Greyhound on 29 November 1969, followed by Yes just over a week later, then Stray (who became venue stalwarts), Mott The Hoople, and the final gig of the year was Deep Purple on 28 December.

A complete list of the artists and bands who played The Greyhound is impossible to compile for this article, there are just so many! But here are just some that stand out as being ‘a bit special’: Queen (10/03/74), David Bowie’s Ziggy Stardust tour (25/6/72), Elton John (31/1/71), Lou Reed (30/7/72), Thin Lizzy (eight times between 1971 and 1976), Genesis (in ’72 and ’73 for their Nursery Cryme and Foxtrot tours), Black Sabbath, Hawkwind, AC/DC, Camel, Free, Steeleye Span, Fairport Convention and Parliament Funkadelic. And that’s just a taster!

The Greyhound was also a favourite hangout for Croydon-born Captain Sensible (Ray Burns), who was there as The Greyhound became home to the punk and new wave scene of the mid-seventies.

The high-octane energy of punk was already simmering in Croydon. Growing up with the backdrop of the new brutalist, concrete town centre skyline and the mundanity of suburban life, a counter-culture youth movement was getting ready to explode. And, for many, the fuse was lit in the north of the Borough.

Sex Pistols manager Malcolm McLaren and artist Jamie Reid shared a flat in Thornton Heath whilst they were at Croydon Art College and the Captain’s family home was on Edith Road in Selhurst - this was to become a regular rehearsal spot for proto punk band Johnny Moped.

Captain was already playing lead guitar with Johnny Moped when he met drummer Rat Scabies (Chris Millar) in 1974, whilst they were both working as cleaners at the Fairfield Halls, and they forged a lasting friendship (seemingly based on music and a perhaps just little mischief).

After a couple of ‘career changes and some swapping in and out of bands, Scabies encouraged Captain to join The Damned in 1976 as bassist and they played their first gig supporting the Sex Pistols at the 100 Club in London on 6 July 1976.

Signed to Stiff Records, The Damned's debut single, *New Rose*, was released on 22 October 1976 (five weeks before the Sex Pistols released *Anarchy* in the UK), making them the first UK punk band to release a single. They followed this up with the release of their debut LP *Damned, Damned, Damned* (the first UK punk album), on 18 February 1977.

The Damned played The Greyhound on 15 January 1978. By then the list of punk and new wave artists that had played the venue was already reading like a 'who's who' of the genre: The Buzzcocks, Generation X, The Ramones and Talking Heads on the same bill, XTC, X-Ray Spex, and Siouxsie and the Banshees (again, the list goes on!).

By the end of the 70s, the golden age of live music at The Greyhound was coming to an end. The live music industry was changing, venues were getting bigger (Brixton Academy opened as a venue 4,000 plus capacity in 1981) and bands were having to perform less often. We were also witnessing a change to how we consumed music; MTV launched in 1981 and compact discs were introduced in November 1981, sparking a decline in the sales of singles. The Greyhound was forced to close its doors with the building reopening in 1986 as The Blue Orchid nightclub.

For over a decade The Greyhound programmed the very finest in British music, with some surprising American headliners in the mix as well. For anyone lucky enough to have been there, this was a venue that made memories, sparking a myriad of stories that begin "Yeah, I used to go to The Greyhound, have I told you about that time I saw..."

The Blue Orchid was a two-discotheque club hosting many late nights for people across London. Ownership of The Blue Orchid is tied to another location along our trail, The Orchid Ballroom. The owners moved their pursuits from Purley to the centre.

The owners focused on creating an experience, and with doors open until 3am, it was a hub for partygoers and students--notoriously, even those with fake IDs.

This plaque also pays homage to a Croydon legend, Captain Sensible and The Damned. Captain Sensible was already playing lead guitar with Johnny Moped when he met drummer Rat Scabies (Chris Millar) in 1974, whilst they were both working as cleaners at the Fairfield Halls, and they forged a lasting friendship.

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The Damned just launched their new album in 2023 and are currently on their US tour for Darkadelic.

## THE UNDERGROUND



The Underground moniker wasn't just a clue to this venue's sub-terranean location, it also described the music scene that filled this cult basement venue. For four short, intense years The Underground was home to Croydon's counterculture and alternative scene, hosting an astonishing list of artists and bands.

There's something about basement venues that create a sense of anticipation as you arrive. Heading down the stairs you start to sense what you're going to be walking into before you enter the room. You can hear the thump of the bass line, the crowd cheering, or as was often the case at The Underground jeering the band (trying to provoke a reaction from some hyped up psychobillies on stage!). But you still can't see what you're walking into. The expectancy of the night to come building with each step you take deeper underground.

Located at the High Street end of the wonderful Sixties brutalist concrete structure of St George's Walk, the entrance to The Underground faced the Victorian grandeur of the Grants department store, sandwiching arrivals between two key historical periods of Croydon's architectural development. Coincidentally, Grants closed its doors for the final time the same year The Underground opened, although no conspiracy theories exist to link the two events!

Once you had descended the stairs and entered the venue, you were met with black walls and highlights of red (it was the Eighties!). Red painted scaffold polls formed the framework for the benches down one side. The carpet and floor were invariably sticky, but no one cared. This was a place you came to party, to sink into a rabbit hole of intense musical performances, to be close to the musicians on stage. The Underground was where you went to immerse yourself in the music you loved.

When The Underground launched on 15 February 1985, it was still the age of handwritten gig flyers, DIY promotion and venues that were a 'scene' themselves, rather than some kind of homogenous high street corporate chain. The Underground's reputation stood alongside

the likes of the legendary George Robey, north of the river in Finsbury Park. Both venues played host to a staggering list of established artists but were also a crucial starting point for any emerging band that could muster a Ford Transit van and get on the road to tour.

The Fall were regulars, as were King Kurt (the hyped-up flour flinging psychobillies) and Sique Sique Sputnik.

Doctor and The Medics were once supported by The Stone Roses.

The list goes on: The Las, Fields of Nephilim, Xmal Deutchland, Johnny Thunders, Jah Wobble, Zodiac Mindwarp, John Ottway, The Sweet....

Primal Scream were bottom of the bill to Meat Whiplash and Weather Prophets.

[The Bangles](#) played here on their first UK tour just as *Manic Monday* was about to blow up on the UK charts.

Resident DJ Pete Fox became a venue institution, mixing up soul, funk, rock, glam, Motown and reggae for the energetic dancefloor. Staying on the dancefloor for The Clash's *Should I Stay Or Should I Go Now* became a decision not to be taken lightly. Step aside and watch from relative safety or 'get involved' as the crowd erupted and go home drenched in sweat, drink and possibly nursing the odd bruised rib.

For four years The Underground was the hedonistic bedrock of alternative Croydon. For many it became a weekend ritual – pre drinks in The Ship and then down to The Underground to see a band and party hard.

The venue's reputation and camaraderie live on, there's an active Facebook group of regular attendees and bootleg cassettes of recordings are traded on Discogs.

The Underground.... Croydon salutes you! Mixing up genres, breaking new bands, carrying the torch for the alternative scene and bringing the good times to so many people... you might have been Underground, but you shone brightly!



Whilst most of Croydon's nighttime venues served up a mainstream offering, the Black Sheep Bar was home to the town's counterculture community and the spiritual birthplace of dubstep.

Once the site of the budget CD and video retailer That's Entertainment, Black Sheep Bar was originally opened as a restaurant in 1997 by Paul Bossick and his father Howard (who had previously managed The Greyhound music venue in Croydon). They soon decided that the location wasn't right for a restaurant, and remodelled as bar in February 1998, becoming the after-dark focal point for a generation of music fans, dancers and party goers until its closure fifteen years later on 16 November 2013.

With the Croydon town centre nighttime economy dominated by corporate chains, the independent venue quickly evolved into a musical melting pot and cultural institution, serving up a mix of live music and DJs spanning multiple genres.

From DJs playing everything from metal, drum and bass, funk, dub, hip hop and anything else you could think of in between, to lino being rolled out on the floor for hip hop dance battles, live bands, indie nights, fetish nights and OTT Halloween parties, Black Sheep Bar served up the sounds of the alternative scenes. The beauty of the Black Sheep Bar was that those scenes were able to overlap, creating nights that criss-crossed and built a community.

At a time when other clubs and bars were enforcing a 'no trainer policy' Black Sheep was opening its doors to the people of Croydon that wanted to experience this musical hedonism, as Paul Bossick explained in an interview in 2003:

"Unlike other bars we don't have a dress code on the door. I don't think that a pair of shoes shows you won't be any trouble. All it means is you get a pub full of people who look the same. Our door policy is based on attitude. So, what we get is a group of like-minded people coming together."

And those like-minded people were in for some serious musical treats. With a capacity of just 250, the venue managed to pull some big names including Newton Faulkner, Raging



Speedhorn, Ozric Tentacles, Pendulum, Grooverider and Enter Shikari (just a couple of weeks before they hit the main stage at Download Festival).

But the enduring legacy of the Black Sheep Bar is being the spiritual home of CroyDub, and a welcoming venue for some of dubstep's biggest names.

Dubstep is a Croydon sound and genre. It is a Croydon journey, and the starting point for that journey could arguably be Big Apple Records located a few hundred metres from the Black Sheep Bar down Surrey Street Market, a record store and label specialising in bass heavy house and techno.

Big Apple was founded in 1992 by three partners, Gary Hughes, Steve Robertson and John Kennedy. In 1996 Kennedy became the sole partner remaining in the business, and invited Arthur Smith, aka Artwork, to take a recording studio space above the shop. Around the same time, he also employed a young DJ Hacha in the store, and as the UK experienced a garage music explosion, the Big Apple store became the place to pick up the best vinyl going, with Hacha bringing in many pirate radio and local DJs into the store.

Big Apple were stocking some of the best bass heavy sounds around, and the store became a natural place for young Croydon music producers to hang. A scene was growing, and the founding names were all from Croydon – Benga, Skream, Loefah, Mala, Plastician, Digital Mystikz, the mighty production collaboration that was Magnetic Man (featuring Benga, Skream and Artwork) and Sgt Pokes.

By now the shop had launched a new label, Big Apple Music, and this was the first label to release the music of Benga and Skream and Digital Mystikz, in 2003 and 2004 respectively.

Fast forward four years to a Sunday night in August 2008 and Sgt Pokes, who was at that point working at the Black Sheep Bar, had a second shot at launching a regular night at the venue (Paul Bossick had previously pulled the plug on 2004's Dub Sessions). Pokes remembers (in an interview for UKF Music in 2018):

“Paul took me for a beer and said he called it wrong with the first night, Dub Session. He wanted to give it another try. I wasn't going to do it for a while. But then thought if I didn't do it then someone else would and I think it should be me. So that was August 2008. The line-up was Surge, Deapoh, Oneman, Cluekid and Chef.”

With the mix of influences that the dubstep pioneers brought to their sets, the music seemed to find a way of uniting all the elements of counterculture that mixed at the Sheep, from the metal and grime fans to the dance crowd. Croydub nights took off and with a license now until 4am, they were road-block events with crowds queuing down the street.

Big Apple Records closed their doors for the last time on 20 November 2004, twelve years to the day after they opened.

The Black Sheep Bar called time on 16 November 2013 after planning permission was granted to convert the offices above the venue into flats.

Is there a 'sound of Croydon'? If you believe the answer is 'yes' then you probably would agree that that is the sound of dubstep, a homegrown sound that took inspiration from many quarters, but owes a 'big thank you' Big Apple Records for being right there in the mix.

The Black Sheep Bar will always be remembered for one of Croydon's most hedonistic venues, a bar that bucked the trend and gave itself to the alternative scene... whichever scene that might be on the night you walked in!

And Croydub? Croydub was championed by Mary Anne-Hobbs, has had its own show on BBC Radio One, and the producers and DJs that drove it have gone on to shake the sub woofers of venues and festivals across the world for the last fifteen years.

## SCREAM STUDIOS



Scream Studios was born and bred in Croydon tucked into the alley of flats at 20c South End, Croydon. With 17 rehearsal and recording rooms and well-maintained equipment for hire, Scream Studios facilitated the practice, performance, and shared creativity of various bands throughout the 1990s and early 2000s.

In addition to the practice spaces and impromptu performances, Scream Studios had reliable staff and partners who specialised in sound technician work, installation engineers, lighting engineers, and more. This low-key studio was the set of many parties, including one hosted for the turn of the millennium, Y2K.

Some of the bands and artists who spent time developing their craft at Scream Studios includes: The Shane Richie Band, Lavondyss, Illuminatus, Harry Harris, Brittle Head Girl, and Big Tooth. Known for its wacky and weird persona, this welcoming venue hosted and set the stage for many great acts from across the UK. Sadly, the studio closed due to planning for apartments in the block, but many hope that Scream Studios makes its Croydon comeback in the coming years. Many performances, sound checks, and more can be found on YouTube.

## RUSKIN HOUSE FOLK & BLUES CLUB



Ruskin House has a storied history dating over 300 years. This Grade II listed building is where the grassroots community decided to form the Ruskin House Folk and Blues Club with the aim of raising funds to help preserve the historic building. Forty years later, local performers and bands have played every Sunday at Ruskin House, and another Blues club performs every Monday.

This community group has helped maintain Croydon's music and heritage and continues to host The Ruskin House Annual Festival. This music venue is open to people with all abilities whether a born musician or music enthusiast. This welcoming approach has been there since day one. One of the founding members, Garry Davis, can be heard here playing the harmonica.

The history of the building is another reason to venture to Ruskin House. Did you know, in the nineteenth century approximately £10,000 was spent in Croydon's taverns every week and the Croydon United Temperance Council decided to make its base at the first Ruskin House. In fact, the old County Temperance Hotel in Station Road, West Croydon, was bought and the building was re-named Ruskin House. The organisation strived to promote prohibition through education on the negative effects of alcohol, especially in the context of still prevalent Victorian morals and promotion of the unit family.

Breathing life back to music and festivity, the Folk and Blues Club Annual Festival does indeed include real ale.

Visit The Museum of Croydon to learn more about local history.

## RALPH MCTELL



Folk singer Ralph McTell is well aware that he is best remembered for a solitary song, Streets of London. What is less known by the general public is that chunks of it were written about Croydon: the opening line "Have you seen the old man in a closed-down market, kicking up the paper with his worn-out shoes" was written by McTell with Surrey Street market in mind. It was written in 1967 when the market was thriving, so presumably "closed down" just means it was this was a scene set at the end of the day. And quite possibly "yesterday's paper telling yesterday's news" is a reference to the Croydon Advertiser. There's a thought.

He was born Ralph May in 1944, taking his stage name from blues legend Blind Willie McTell. He grew up in Croydon. His father walked out on his family and money was tight, but his childhood in the 1950s was happy – "my father walked out on us" – but he remembers his childhood with affection in songs like Barges.

When Ralph was ten, he got a second-hand ukulele and a copy of The George Formby Method. "The book said put your fingers here and here – I did, and a chord came out. I was thunderstruck – it was like magic!" He joined a skiffle band and hasn't stopped since. The early sixties brought beatnik culture to Croydon – he discovered folk, jazz, blues and R&B. He bought a guitar, learnt to play ragtime and blues and decided to hit the road. "We'd go down to Brighton and sit on the beach looking windswept and interesting. I first met Rod Stewart that way, hitching on the Purley Way."

Though he has never been an overtly political folk singer, one cause meant a lot to him was the Derek Bentley case. In November 1952, Bentley and his friend Christopher Craig had planned to burgle the warehouse of the Barlow & Parker confectionery company on Tamworth Road - PC Sidney Miles caught them in the act and was shot dead by Craig. McTell's mother knew the Bentley family, and the execution of Craig's friend Bentley, a teenager with learning difficulties, horrified the 9-year-old Ralph. "It happened just round the corner, my mum knew the Bentleys. I was about eight but even then I could see the

horror and injustice of executing a teenager for a murder he didn't commit." His song Bentley and Craig led to a meeting with Derek's mother Iris Bentley and his involvement in her campaign for justice.

Yet Streets of London remains the song he is best known for. It was a hit in 1974 and would have been number one if it hadn't been for Mud's Lonely This Christmas. Its success was a shock to Ralph - "I had been playing the bloody thing for seven years!" It changed the public's perception of folkie Ralph, and he was sharp enough to know what might happen next. "You have to understand that a lot of people regard somebody that is underground like that as their own personal discovery and therefore their own property, and when you get out to the mass public with a hit record, they switch allegiances to something else."

Ralph survived his flirtation with fame and is now "one of Britain's best singer/songwriters, a national treasure," according to Billy Connolly. He has gone on to worked with Phil Collins, Rick Wakeman, the Everly Brothers, Bert Jansch, Tom Paxton, and Fairport Convention among many others. He continues to tour as he approaches his eightieth birthday. "I'm always nervous before I go on. But that's OK. You walk out, they can see you're on your own, they clap, and the confidence comes. I tell myself, 'You're one lucky bastard; all these people have come to hear you play'."

## BEANOS & BIG APPLE RECORDS



Beano's was a place where you could learn almost everything about music, from the rare records on the wall to the bargains in the racks. Originally it opened in 1974 and was called Bell Hill Cassettes, a sneaky way for owner David Lashmar to get a licence from the council as they wouldn't give him one for a record shop (apparently Croydon already had too many record shops). He changed the name in 1977 as, primarily, he was selling second-hand records, and he simply named it after his favourite comic. The first Beano's was in a former billiard hall at the top of Bell Hill, parallel to Crown Hill, with a red lion sitting on the top. The billiard hall had been built by an adjacent, long-disappeared pub called the Black Lion, so the lion has obviously been repainted over the years. The building's still there. They had a blackboard on the wall with their best-selling re-issues - Fleetwood Mac's Albatross always seemed to be in the Top 20, and some wag spelt it 'Albert Ross'.

Having outgrown Bell Hill, Beano's moved to a three-storey building on Surrey Street in 1979, with the top floor being the stock room. Singles were upstairs, racked alphabetically, and they tried to stock a copy of every record that had ever charted - this is what made Beano's different to any other second-hand shop in the country. If you heard something on the radio, the chances were they'd have it. Not only that, but they tended to get new albums in almost as soon they came out, presumably from journalists living in the area. Simple Minds' Sons And Fascination, Billy Fury's Wondrous Place, a Sparks album, or some ratty compilation on K-Tel, Beano's merged music from the past and the present in a way that is an everyday occurrence in the digital age, but was virtually unique in the seventies, eighties and nineties.

In re-utilised Schweppes tonic water crates behind the counter were rarer singles - Atlantic soul 45s, highly desirable rock'n'roll singles on the London American label, Beatles and Stones rarities. The gatekeeper of the singles floor was Ray. He was impossible to age but had long grey hair and a short grey beard which earned him the nickname Catweazle (it's

possible Ray didn't know about his nickname). Eventually, Beano's moved to multiple units on Middle Street, around the back of what was then Grants department store. David Lashmar bought the old, small shops one at a time, like a game of Croydon Monopoly, and eventually he had the largest second-hand record shop in Europe, employing twenty-four people, with a café upstairs and bands playing live on Saturdays – this has become commonplace in the last ten years but was unheard of in the eighties. Eventually, Beano's felt the cold wind of the digital age and announced its closure in 2008. It's impossible to say how many musicians and DJs were influenced and inspired by the shop Lashmar had first opened in 1974. It had been one of the main reasons that tourists came to Croydon and is much missed.

Moving to Big Apple Records, dubstep is a Croydon sound and genre. It is a Croydon journey, and the starting point for that journey could arguably be Big Apple Records located a few hundred metres from the Black Sheep Bar down Surrey Street Market, a record store and label specialising in bass heavy house and techno.

Big Apple was founded in 1992 by three partners, Gary Hughes, Steve Robertson and John Kennedy. In 1996 Kennedy became the sole partner remaining in the business, and invited Arthur Smith, aka Artwork, to take a recording studio space above the shop. Around the same time, he also employed a young DJ Hacha in the store, and as the UK experienced a garage music explosion, the Big Apple store became the place to pick up the best vinyl going, with Hacha bringing in many pirate radio and local DJs into the store.

Big Apple were stocking some of the best bass heavy sounds around, and the store became a natural place for young Croydon music producers to hang. A scene was growing, and the founding names were all from Croydon – Benga, Skream, Loefah, Mala, Plastician, Digital Mystikz, the mighty production collaboration that was Magnetic Man (featuring Benga, Skream and Artwork) and Sgt Pokes.

By now the shop had launched a new label, Big Apple Music, and this was the first label to release the music of Benga and Skream and Digital Mystikz, in 2003 and 2004 respectively.

Fast forward four years to a Sunday night in August 2008 and Sgt Pokes, who was at that point working at the Black Sheep Bar, had a second shot at launching a regular night at the venue (Paul Bossick had previously pulled the plug on 2004's Dub Sessions).

The British Record Shop Archive explains the birthplace of dubstep at Big Apple Records on Surrey Street [here](#).



## CROYDON MINSTER



Affectionately known as Croydon Minster, The Minster Church of St John Baptist is a local landmark with a long history.

Established as early as the 960 CE in Saxon times, the church has had close historical links with the Archbishops of Canterbury with six Archbishops buried in the Minster. Visited by King Henry VII, King Henry VIII, and Queen Elizabeth I, this distinguished church has continued to develop its legacy in Croydon as a major diocesan and civic service provider as well as a community hub with a rich music tradition. Classical music has been a staple at the church since 1794 when the Avery Organ was installed.

Exactly 191 years to the day of the launch of this trail, 17th June 2023, Felix Mendelssohn performed on the organ here.

Traditional choral music has also been performed here and continues strong today with the Minster Boys' Choir and Minster Girls' Choir which have performed alongside the London Mozart Players and the English Cornett & Sackbut Ensemble.

## SAMUEL COLERIDGE-TAYLOR



At the turn of the century, Croydon was home to the pre-eminent Samuel Coleridge-Taylor. Born in 1875, Samuel was raised by his English mother as his father was unable to progress as a physician in London due to racial prejudice, and shortly returned to Sierra Leone.

Already at the age of 5, Samuel was showing signs of a prodigy playing violin and participating in a local choir where he was trained and mentored by H.A. Walters who in 1890 played a role in admitting Samuel into The Royal College of Music. At 15 he was the first black person ever to enrol at the prestigious institution.

While studying he switched to composition, working as a composer alongside contemporaries Gustav Holst, Gustav Mahler, and Edward Elgar.

Solidifying his name as the hyphenated, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, he worked as a conductor in Croydon and debuted his Ballade in A Minor at the Gloucester Festival in 1898 which prompted his wide-spread recognition.

He was inspired by Americana which developed into his musical interpretation of Hiawatha's Wedding Feast after Longfellow's poetic trilogy. Learn more about how he incorporated traditional American folk songs into Classical composition.

Sadly, at the young age of 37, Coleridge-Taylor collapsed at West Croydon station while waiting for a train and later died from pneumonia at his home in Croydon.

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor was the first black man to receive a blue plaque. He pioneered in music and advocated against racism through letters to the Croydon Advertiser.



In the 1980s and 1990s, London Road was home to Croydon's rock community. 178-183 was the one and only, The Cartoon. Started by Steward Wilder in 1976, this venue rose to showcase rock and blues performances seven nights a week. The Cartoon was a popular meetup for bikers requiring club goers to move past the Harley-Davidsons outside before trudging through the crowd along beer-soaked carpets to reach the bar according to one regular. From Etta Stone, a progressive rock group to pop-rock Skittle Alley and Slap Face, this club was open to local artists who became regulars before it morphed into The Club.

Jim, a regular at The Cartoon mentioned how he saw bands like Chicken Shack, once the band Christine Perfect, and he recounted when the lead guitarist from Stan Web's Band was so "in your face, strutting up and down the pavement outside...the wild looks from people on the bus and around London Road, that alone was worth the admission."

This local space was always adding more cartoons to the wall, engaging local bands, offering good pints, and was one of the more laid-back venues offering a good night out in Croydon.

Listen to this live recording from 1984 or the closing act from Bad Influence prior to the final curtain call in 2006.



There was a lot going on in the world in 1865. The American Civil War ended, Abraham Lincoln was assassinated, and The Star Hotel was built on the site of an old beer shop in Broad Green. We're not suggesting that all three events are of equal global importance, but over time this large red brick Victorian building, that dominated the local high street, would have a seismic impact on Croydon music folklore.

The first eighty years of the building's history seem fairly unremarkable, a large hotel and bar situated on the outskirts of a fast-developing Croydon. But all that was about to change with the British Blues Explosion of the early 1960s.

Until then, music hadn't played a huge part in The Star's history, with the exception of the dimly lit small backroom being used to host the Croydon Jazz Club on a Friday night with the likes of Ken Colyer, Alan Elsdon and Humphrey Lyttleton playing mostly to an enthusiastic student audience.

But as the music scene of the 60s began to change, The Star was quick to spot the potential of the new beat groups and the venue began to rock to a whole sound.

Most notable was the impact of music entrepreneur Giorgio Gomelsky, who brought his Crawdaddy Club nights to The Star. The influence of the Black American blues sound was already inspiring the likes of The Rolling Stones and Eric Clapton and transforming the sound of British music forever. Gomelsky had opened the Crawdaddy Club in Ealing in February 1963 – by April the Stones were playing there twice a week.

In October '63, after the second American Folk and Blues Festival at the Fairfield Halls a bunch of other musicians on the bill, many carrying their instruments, walked into The Star after their show to see the Yardbirds featuring one Eric Clapton on guitar. To the delight of

the crowd Matt 'Guitar' Murphy, Sonny Boy Williams and Muddy Waters gave impromptu performances and word quickly spread with the small venue quickly becoming packed out.

Gromelsky, ever the music businessman (he was also the Yardbird's manager at the time), was unsurprisingly front and centre as the crowd burst into applause, telling the reporter from the Croydon Times:

*"Hear that? That is how much the young people of Croydon enjoy rhythm and blues. We have come to fill a gap in the musical life of a town of 253,000. We do not want to attract 'geezers, herberts and charlies', we are here to suit the true aficionados."*

That November Gomelsky bought the Crawdaddy nights to Croydon, with the Yardbirds, as a resident band. The touch paper for a Croydon beat explosion had been lit and The Star would see performances from Cyril Davis, Long Jon Baldry, Steve Marriot, John Mayal and the Bluesbreakers, and three appearances by Peter Green's Fleetwood Mac following the release of their eponymous album in February 1968.

However, The Star didn't just rest on its reputation for blues and as the sound of the Sixties evolved.

Clapton had quit the Yardbirds in March 1965, and was replaced by Wallington born Jeff Beck. However, Clapton was to return to The Star on 26 September 1966, this time with arguably the world's first supergroup, Cream.

Featuring Clapton on guitar, Ginger Baker on drums and Jack Bruce on bass, the band had made their unofficial live debut on 29 July. By the time they played at the Star just 50 days later, Cream had performed a staggering 31 live shows, building a level of hype and anticipation as they continued their tour.

The Star was once again packed to capacity that night for Clapton's return with his new project. Audience members recall tables being stacked on top of tables and people clambering up to get a view of the stage and witness the early performance of a legendary line-up that would only last three years.

But The Star had one more big hitting guitarist that would appear in the now legendary back room of a Croydon boozier – Jimi Hendrix.

Hendrix had moved to London in late 1966 shortly after Chas Chandler of The Animals had become his manager. With Noel Redding on bass and Mitch Mitchell on drums, the line-up for the Jimi Hendrix Experience was set. Their first single, Hey Joe, was released on 16 December, and after performances on Ready Steady Go and Top of the Pops, it reached number 6 in the UK charts. Hendrix had arrived!

The gig at The Star on 6 February 1967 wasn't a secret event or a sudden surprise gig. It was programmed, announced and promoted. The ticket price of ten shillings was a premium rate, but no one seemed to care about the cost and the venue was packed on the night. In fact, it was so busy that Hendrix couldn't walk through the venue to get on stage in the back room and had to be helped in through a French window to the right of the stage.

Whilst there are no definitive set lists of the show, this seems the most likely running order for the gig: Stone Free, Hey Joe, Red House, Johnny B. Good, Are You Experienced?, Third Stone from The Sun.

Purple Haze was released roughly five weeks later, and the rest is rock history!

And the Star continued to be entangled in an amazing history of British rock.

1970 saw three gigs at the Star for Status Quo, plus David Bowie's Hype on 30 March, Black Sabbath on 2 April (just a couple of months after the release of their debut album, which reached number eight in the UK charts) and a 10 July outing for relative newcomers, Hawkwind.

Through the seventies the Star continued to program live music and became a regular hang out for the punk scene, with The Damned playing there some years later in 1981.

Open once again (and now known as the Broad Green Tavern) the story of The Star still shines bright. From jazz, blues and on to the biggest names in rock history, all from 'a tiny room out the back of a pub', this one of the most inspirational small venue stories you could ever imagine, and one that harnessed a scene in Croydon.

## THE BRIT SCHOOL



There's a school in Los Angeles called Fairfax High which, being within touching distance of Hollywood, has pretty impressive alumni: Carole Lombard, Demi Moore, Mila Kunis. And musically there's Slash from Guns N' Roses, Flea from the Red Hot Chilli Peppers, Herb Alpert and Jerry Leiber. Until the 1990s there wasn't really anywhere in Britain with a comparable list, but then along came the Brit School

Tucked away in a quiet, largely residential corner of Croydon, close to Selhurst station, the independent school was opened on 22 October 1991, funded by the British Government with support from the British Record Industry Trust. It quickly became leading Performing and Creative Arts school in the country.

One of the first graduates was Tatiana Mais, better known as Q-Tee, a rapper from Kidbrooke with a distinctive husky voice inspired by eighties star Roxanne Shant . She would go on to work with Saint Etienne on their So Tough album, have a Top 40 hit with Gimme That Body, and write the Eurovision entry Love City Groove which became a top ten hit in 1995.

The list of alumni really does read like a who's who of 21<sup>st</sup> century British pop. There's pin-up R&B singer Dane Bowers, formerly of Another Level and the duet partner on Victoria Beckham's hit Out Of Your Mind. Leona Lewis won the third series of X Factor in 2006 and recorded the transatlantic number one Bleeding Love a year later. Then there's Kate Nash (who had a number one album with Made of Bricks in 2007 and has since gone on to star in Netflix series GLOW), the soft-voiced Katy Melua, early grime star Katy B, and Brockley-born Kae Tempest who has been twice nominated for the Mercury Music Prize as well as winning the Ted Hughes Award for their poetry.

On an indie tip are Brit Schooled members of Athlete, the Feeling, the Kooks and the Noisettes, as well as every member of noise shockers Black Midi. On the straight-up pop side there's Ella Eyre, who had a number one in 2013 with Rudimental, the breakneck Waiting All Night, while the more traditionally art school FKA Twigs – or Tahliah Barnett as she was known at school – was Mercury-nominated in 2014. Maybe the famous 'old girl' was the late great Amy Winehouse who, like FKA Twigs, came to the school with a love of jazz singers like Ella Fitzgerald and Dinah Washington before developing her own unique style. Winehouse would become a huge influence on the next wave of British female singers like Duffy, Eliza Doolittle, Paloma Faith and, biggest of all, Adelle... who was another Brit School alumnus.

Principal Stuart Worden describes the Brit School as a “fun, passionate school packed with dedicated individuals who love the creative and performing arts. Before I arrived, people were saying: ‘Don't go there, it's a Kids from Fame school in Croydon.’ Two things: why shouldn't kids from Croydon be successful? And what was wrong with Fame anyway? It really inspired me... We believe in developing well rounded, articulate, kind and dynamic young people.” It's quite the thought that you can guarantee, in its Selhurst classrooms today, are the pop stars of the next few years.



## AVRIL COLERIDGE-TAYLOR

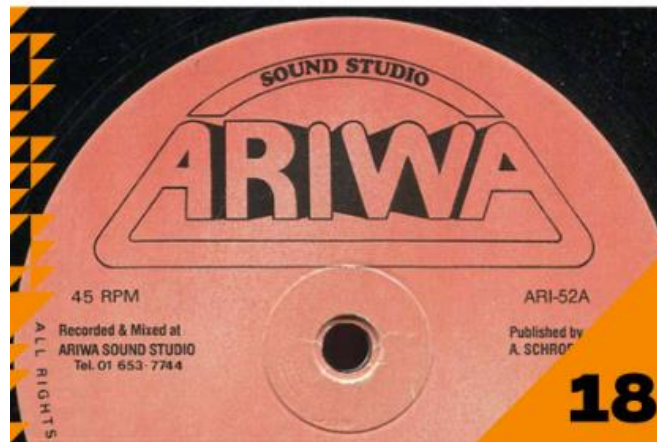


Born to famed composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Gwendolyn Avril came on the scene in 1903. She grew up in the family home at 30A Dagnall Park Road where she developed her love for music. At the age of 12, she earned a scholarship to study composition and piano in Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance where she honed her skills. In 1933, she conducted her first orchestra at Royal Albert Hall before making history being invited to conduct the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Throughout her professional career, Avril conducted the London Symphony Orchestra and was notably the first female conductor for the HMS Royal Marines Band.

Avril was not without controversy as she had maintained a neutral view of South Africa's apartheid and upon learning of her mixed heritage, she was no longer invited to perform. Following this experience, Avril worked to embrace her heritage and she gave back later in life by celebrating her West African heritage by composing Ceremonial March in honour of Ghana's independence in 1957.

She was a composer, conductor, pianist, author, and advocate and trailblazer for the Classical Music field. Listen to the third movement from her famous [Sussex Landscape, Op. 27](#) [III](#) composition. Later in life she moved to Seaford in Sussex where she passed in 1998.

## DESMOND DEKKER & MAD PROFESSOR



In celebration of Desmond Dekker's life and career as well as the continuing artistic presence of Mad Professor, we have decided to highlight both artists together to celebrate the trailblazing past and future of reggae. Learn more about Mad Professor's friendship with Desmond Dekker [here](#). Shared love for the music brought them together, and this passion continues with the work of Ariwa studios today.

From humble roots, Neil Fraser moved from his hometown of Georgetown Guyana to Britain at the age of 13 settling first in Tooting. Fraser first opened [Ariwa Sounds](#) in the late 1979 in Thornton Heath on Bruce Road before moving to its current location on Whitehorse Lane.

Fraser first appeared as 'Mad Professor' his alter ego, in his backing band called The Sane Inmates. Starting with a Teac 3440 tape machine, the early days of the studio were unpretentious yet innovative.

Ariwa developed from years of interests and self-studies into electronics, base, and radio production. Artistic to his core, [Mad Professor's music](#) included rich dub mixing, reggae sounds, and the intricate and creative approach towards technical aspects of music production helped elevate his career.

40 years on, Mad Professor has managed the longest black-owned studio in all of the UK, and he continues to produce albums from reggae, lovers rock, remixed dub sounds, and more. From Dub Me Crazy and collaborations with names including Horace Andy, Michael Prophet, and mixing tracks for the Beastie Boys in the 1980s, he hit a new high point in the 1990s working with Boston neo-ska band Bim Skala Bim and has [mixed-dub across five continents](#).

Today, Mad Professor along with his wife and two children are continuing the tradition of evolution of the studio, but the legacy is solidified as Mad Professor integrated Lover's Rock and Reggae globally across genres and countries.

In July 1967, Desmond Dekker's 007 (Shanty Town) entered the UK Top 20. It was only the second Jamaican-made record to do so – Prince Buster's Al Capone had pipped it by a few months – but it would be the beginning of a fruitful chart career for Desmond, who would move to Addiscombe in the 1970s and stay in Croydon until his sudden death in 2006. Until Bob Marley's rise in the mid-seventies, he was undoubtedly the most famous reggae singer in the world, and an ambassador for the music. In real life, he was modest and shy. You wouldn't have heard him brag that he had worked as a welder with Marley in the early sixties and helped to get the icon his first record deal. It's flattering to Croydon that Dekker chose to make Addiscombe, and later Thornton Heath, his home.

007 was groundbreaking in several ways. It was a protest song, a modern folk song set in Trenchtown, Jamaica, chronicling the civil disobedience that occurred when the police and military moved in to break up the shanty towns along the Marcus Garvey coastal road in downtown Kingston. The shanty town residents retaliated. "Everyone shooting, everyone get shot." Remembered Dekker. "Shots were everywhere. I never experienced anything like that. So I had to write the song which was a very big hit, even though at the time in England a lot of people didn't know what I was meaning with the lyrics. Like: *Them a-loot, them a-shoot, them a-wail, them a-burn down shanty town*'. As time goes on, they get to understand more the way we Jamaicans pronounce."

The song he is best remembered for is 1969's The Israelites, which outdid 007 by going to number one in 1969. It dislodged Marvin Gaye's, I Heard It Through the Grapevine and was only knocked off the top by the Beatles. Dekker Mania took hold. At one appearance, fans grabbed him by his scarf and nearly strangled him - he was unconscious for fifteen minutes. "Oh man, it is an experience I do not want to repeat. I was real scared I can tell you."

The hits continued with It Mek, a top ten hit in 1969 which was the first to use patois in its title, and Jimmy Cliff's, You Can Get It If You Really Want the following year. This was recorded in London, and would have given Dekker a second number one, only held off the top spot by Freda Payne's classic Band of Gold. At this point, Desmond decided he was working so much in the UK he may as well stay, initially in hotels, then in Forest Hill, and then Addiscombe. When record sales slowed, he was still in demand as a live performer. "People who have seen me on TV are surprised when they see me live" he told Melody Maker in 1975. "I personally cannot just stand there with a mike in my hand and sing my song. I have to be bounding around like a kangaroo. I go on dry and come out soaking wet, you can wring out my shirt... and me too, everything! That's what I really enjoy."

Did you know - Trojan Records launched in London in 1968, with songs like Desmond Dekker's 'Israelites' and The Specials' 'Rudy, A Message To You' resonating with young people from all communities. Here is a [clip](#) from the world-renowned Notting Hill Carnival in the 1970s, where crowds would enjoy these songs along with Soca and Calypso tracks.

At the Notting Hill Carnival, music reigns supreme, but so do the flavours. Check out this [recipe](#) of tasty Malasadas or Guyanese Pancakes to make at home!

## NADIA ROSE



Born in 1993 and raised in Thornton Heath, Nadia Rose grew up listening to her idols including the Spice Girls, Missy Elliot, Eminem, and Rihanna. Recognised for her performance & raps over hip hop, dancehall, grime and drill beats she was awarded MOBO Visual Artist of the year in 2016 after taking to the streets of Croydon with her highly acclaimed "Skwod" music video. Her debut EP, 'Highly Flammable' was followed up by 'First Class' from her own label, Qwerky Entertainment.

Nadia has developed her craft as an artist since the young age of 5, attending Stage Coach & BRIT School to now performing at multiple sold-out shows, song writing for both Rihanna and Spice Girl Mel C, solidifying her title as a leading woman of Hip-Hop and as an advocate for her home town.

An incredibly proud Croydonian and 'foodie' she decided to have her plaque located in front of a hometown favourite, Tasty Jerk just down the street from Crystal Palace Football Club where her dad took her to watch her first match. As she said in her BBC interview, "I've got big plans," and the people of Croydon agree.

## SAINT ETIENNE AT RMS STUDIOS



Bob Stanley and Pete Wiggs formed Saint Etienne as a synth duo in 1990. They had thought up the name years earlier when they were at Whitgift school, but it took the advent of samplers to allow them into a recording studio as neither was musically trained. They recorded a cover of Neil Young's Only Love Can Break Your Heart in January 1990 at Ian Catt's Catmusic studio in Pollards Hill, having been put in touch with Ian by Mitcham indie duo the Field Mice. Moira Lambert of Croydon folk rockers Faith Over Reason provided the vocal, and the single quickly became a Balearic classic. By the time they released their Mercury Music Prize-nominated Foxbase Alpha in 1991, Stanley and Wiggs had met Windsor-born singer Sarah Cracknell – they instantly clicked and 'Crackers' became a permanent third member of the group.

Saint Etienne's sound was initially built around samples from Stanley and Wiggs' eclectic record collections, largely acquired from Bonaparte's and Beanos. Both of them had Saturday jobs selling bacon, eggs and cheese from a stall on Surrey Street market, just two doors down from Beanos. The most well-known song on Foxbase Alpha was probably Nothing Can Stop Us – later used on a Marc Jacobs advert – which sampled Dusty Springfield's I Can't Wait Until I See My Baby's Face.

They move out of Catmusic to record their second album So Tough at RMS studios, adjacent to Crystal Palace's Selhurst Park and spitting distance from the Mad Professor's Ariwa Sound studio in 1993. Other groups who had recorded there included the Damned ("We virtually lived in RMS Studio" Captain Sensible told Uncut magazine. "It became our musical laboratory."), a formative version of future Britpop heroes Pulp and the Captain Sensible-touted Dolly Mixture, whose singer Debsey Wykes would become a regular member of Saint Etienne's live line-up. So Tough would be their biggest seller reaching no.7 on the album chart and earning a silver disc in 1993.

Over time, Saint Etienne's sound became more expansive; their biggest hit singles would be You're In a Bad Way (recorded at RMS Studios in 1993), He's On The Phone (with French star Etienne Daho in 1995) and Sylvie (recorded in Malmo, Sweden, in 1998). In 2002 they recorded the Finisterre album and, with director Paul Kelly, made an accompanying film about 24 hours in the life of London, which began and ended at South Croydon station. In 2006, Kelly, Stanley and Wiggs Saint Etienne became Artists in Residence at London's Southbank Centre in 2006 where they put on monthly film/music events and produced a documentary on the Festival Hall called This Is Tomorrow. Pete Wiggs has since been awarded a fine arts Masters degree in professional composition and orchestration, while Bob Stanley has written a number of music history books including Yeah Yeah Yeah: The Story of Modern Pop (2013) and the Penderyn Prize-nominated Let's Do It: The Birth of Pop (2022). Their film work has been shown at festivals around the world, from New York to Buenos Aires, and in 2023 they finally achieved their dream of headlining the Fairfield Halls – like their heroes the Monkees, Caravan, Glen Campbell and Kraftwerk before them.

## STANLEY ARTS



Stanley Arts, formerly Stanley Halls, is a Grade II listed Historic Asset celebrated by a [blue plaque](#) on the building façade. Constructed from 1901-1909. Its architectural legacy is championed by its cultural contributions to the arts including music, theatre, dance, material arts, and education.

Today, Stanley Arts continues the tradition of being a grassroots arts centre in South Norwood with a Gallery, Social Café, co-working space, bar, and event space for private and public events from festivals and concerts to themed dance evenings. This registered charity focuses on providing wellness, fitness, music, and fun to everyone and [Stanley Arts](#) continues to build upon its coveted reputation as the cultural hub for South Norwood. Learn more about [Stanley Arts](#) today.

## STORMZY



Stormzy, born Michael Ebenezer Kwadjo Omari Owuo Jr. on the 26th of July 1993, grew up on Whitehorse Lane in Croydon. Raised in South Norwood, he began rapping with friends at his local youth club at age 11.

His grime performances gained more attention on platforms like YouTube which led to him being named 2014's Best Grime Act and the MOBO artist to look out for in 2015. The release of "Shut Up" which started as a freestyle video took Britain by storm and reached number 8 on the UK Singles Chart. His first formal album was released in 2017 and went on to reach number one on the UK Albums Chart, winning British Album of the Year in 2018. Today he headlines at Coachella, Glastonbury, and is a global phenomenon for his performances as well as his charitable pursuits.

The Merky Foundation is a brand that supports philanthropic projects facing the black community.

Listen to Stormzy explain the power of reading during a [#MerkyBooks talk](#)

Pledging £10 million over 10 years, the Merky Foundation has partnered with Penguin Books to promote access to reading and education, 30 new scholarships at the University of Cambridge funding 12 students' tuition per year and has supported the Black Heart Foundation's 'Each Day. Every Day' campaign. Aiming to elevate black voices and committing to black empowerment in the UK. The location of Stormzy's plaque at the Thornton Heath Library pays homage to his childhood competing in the summer reading challenge, but it also highlights the affect he has as a performer and philanthropist giving back to the people of Croydon through the #merky books partnership.



## ARCHBISHOP LANFRANC ACADEMY



Since 1931, the Archbishop Lanfranc Academy has hosted students from three London boroughs through nursery to secondary school. The school's current Principal Simon Trehearn shared the school's vision "to be an outstanding learning community where together we learn to live and work together." This has been the case for the music community in Croydon as well.

With an emphasis on the 1970s and 1980s, many Asians who had settled in Croydon were in need of a cultural outlet and place to connect for cultural activities, celebrations, festivals and to build upon the Asian community already established in South London. With many venues charging a fortune to hire large spaces, community members turned to schools.

The Archbishop Lanfranc Academy opened its doors with reasonable rates and offered flexible days and hours for groups to perform, set up for cultural events, and festivals. It became a popular spot that was booked all throughout the year by diverse Asian groups including: Tamil, Goan, Malayali, Gujarati, and Punjabi traditions of performing dance, music, cultural language classes, and hosting regular festival events like Diwali, Onam, and Pongal. This is a community space that helped build a community for the grassroots Asian music scene in Croydon.



Today held in Wandle Park, Croydon's Lloyd Park became the cultural hub for the Asian community by hosting the first Mela festival in Croydon in 1997. Learn about performances from 1997 to 2012 [here](#).

What is a Mela? The word Mela comes from the Sanskrit “to meet”. These gatherings are steeped in South Asian history and are now enjoyed in many towns globally including, since 1997, in Croydon. Venues are often at major trade and transport junctions and themes vary from the commercial to the spiritual. Melting pots of activity often span arts and crafts, music, dance, eating and drinking and storytelling, with the encouragement of exuberant all-family participation. South Asian communities share their culture with others in melas around the world. A rare example of true social connectivity.

Sharing the same weekend as the Croydon Mela, the World Party kicked off the festival vibe in Lloyds Park on the Saturday, with the Mela on the Sunday. The World Party was just that – a multicultural celebration of music, featuring headliners on a main stage, showcasing emerging artists, DJs, acoustic tent, a green fair, a global food offering and a mix of activities for kids.

Over the years headliners included De La Soul, Jimmy Cliff, Courtney Pine, Soul II Soul Sound System, The Damned, The Proclaimers, Candi Staton, Dreadzone, Roy Ayres, The Beat, Ska Cubano, Courtney Pine, James Taylor Quartet and Motown legend Martha Reeves.

Whilst the event regularly pulled crowds of 40,000-50,000, it maintained a community, almost village-like feel. It was a big festival, well-staged and managed, but there was something about the crowd and the atmosphere that kept the whole event feeling so relaxed.

The over-riding memory when you talk to people about the World Party was that it was an annual gathering, Croydon truly coming together. You didn't need to make plans to meet anyone, you just knew everyone would be there. As you walked through the park you were surrounded by spontaneous meetings and reunions – it was a Croydon event and it felt like home.

## THE ORCHID BALLROOM & TIFFANY'S



The Orchid Ballroom was where Marc Bolan first met South Norwood percussionist Mickey Finn and T Rex were born. That would be enough of a claim to fame if it wasn't for the extraordinarily list of major names who also played at the venue – the Who, Otis Redding, the Clash, Slade. The Jimi Hendrix Experience played there in 1967, one of the shows at which Hendrix played the guitar with teeth; an eyewitness recalls it sounding “bloody awful”!

Sat midway between Purley and Coulsdon on the Brighton Road, the Orchid had originally been built in 1934 as the Imperial Ice Rink, with the Regal cinema virtually next door. It became the Orchid Ballroom in May 1950 – the skating area had been huge, and the Orchid was listed in the Guinness Book of Records as having the largest dancefloor in the country, appealing to acts as big as Ted Heath and his Orchestra. The Orchid had a rather rowdy reputation (which would unfortunately follow it through the decades) and so when the Mecca group bought it in 1962, they did a major refurbishment with a car park (two shillings to park), new cloakrooms, and a black-tie dress code. By the mid-sixties it had become the regional venue for BBC TV's *Come Dancing*, the forerunner of *Strictly*, with compere Keith Fordyce and bands led by Johnny Howard, Andy Ross and Ray McVay. In 1972 one episode filmed at the Orchid was hosted by Miss United Kingdom, Marilyn Ward.

This must have all seemed very uncool to the Croydon mods who had made the place their own in 1963 and '64. They would assemble every Monday night, with DJ-ing legends Jeff Dexter and Ian 'Sammy' Samwell spinning the records. Cathy Magowan, the hip TV host, did scouting missions to the Orchid to try and find dancers for her show *Ready Steady Go!* Teenagers flocked to see acts like the Small Faces the Jimi Hendrix Experience (March 1967), the Who (in 1967 and 1970), Edwin Starr (January 1968), Booker T & the MG's (March 1970), Status Quo (1971) and Deep Purple (1972). 1972 also saw the likes of Lou Christie, the Drifters, the Equals and Ben E King, suggesting a more soul-savvy audience. But as rock bands began to switch from old dancehalls to the university circuit, the crowds diminished.

A company called Triumph were based next door with a workshop underneath the ballroom. They made guitar amplifiers – one employee remembers singer Andy Fairweather-Low “coming down in his Jensen Interceptor with the rest of his new group after the split with Amen Corner to try out equipment that we had humped into the Orchid Ballroom. They stayed for about an hour during which time they made one hell of a noise. Not sure whether they ever bought anything as a result.”

The venue changed its name and its style in 1973 – as Tiffany’s, it now became primarily a night club with DJs and occasional star acts on a Saturday night like Slade, Mud and Suzi Quatro. The first Purley soul all-dayer was at Tiffany’s in 1978, with music played through a serious sound system designed by soul DJ Froggy. 1978 turned out to be a banner year for Tiffany’s with shows from Brit soul act Hi Tension, the Clash playing on December 18<sup>th</sup> on their ‘Sort It Out’ tour, and Siouxsie and the Banshees crossing the border from Bromley. The following December Queen played there on their ‘Crazy Little Tour of London’.

By the eighties the venue was operating as Cinderella’s Rockefellas, a peculiar name which sounded instantly dated, harking back to a novelty hit from ten years previously. It remained popular with the soul crowd but when tastes changed to house and techno at the end of the decade it once again lost a large part of its audience, finally closing in 1990. The building, at least, survives.

*\*Written content provided and edited by consultant writer Bob Stanley, consultant writer Graeme Miall, & Croydon Music Heritage Trail Project Officer Abby Pendlebury.*

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