

MUSIC LEGENDS OF LONDON

PEOPLE
AND
PLACES
WHO
ROCKED
THE
CAPITAL

BY DAN SYNGE & ERNESTO ROGATA



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Opposite: Guitars for sale at the former Regent Sound Studios in Denmark Street, once London's answer to New York's Tin Pan Alley

A London is the place for me

Any tourist who finds themselves traipsing around Piccadilly Circus in the rain will come with preconceived images of the London music scene: sneering leather-jacketed Kings Road punks, tattooed torch singers and cheeky Britpoppers in Camden Lock pubs or perhaps that most enduring of clichés – a parade of rock aristocrats including The Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin, Elton John, Queen, Rod Stewart and their coteries – stepping regally from stretch limos into bacchanalian basements drowned in patchouli and incense.

Those who cling onto such myths might be tempted to hop on the top deck of a Routemaster bus and bag a souvenir T-shirt from The Beatles Store in Baker Street, then afterwards perhaps take selfies in Abbey Road or Heddon Street, where David Bowie's seminal Ziggy Stardust cover was photographed. Then it would be time to grab a burger at the world-famous Hard Rock Cafe or Bill Wyman's Sticky Fingers fast food joint surrounded by gold discs, vintage guitars and customised Harley Davidsons. A fun day out no doubt, but one which reveals little about our capital's real musical trajectory.

So to begin a proper examination into the musical lives and legends of London, we must to grab our best walking shoes (not forgetting an umbrella too!) and take a psycho-geographic wander through the very neighbourhoods where ideas were first born, collaborations clicked and genuine artistic and creative endeavours were successfully realised on vinyl, CD or digital download.

Where better to begin than in Soho, that crisscross of streets which nestle between Leicester Square and Oxford Street? On its popular main drag Old

Compton Street, you will encounter just a whiff of roasted coffee bean – an aroma that accompanied London's skiffle and rock 'n' roll craze of the post-war period. Kids just wanted to emulate their hero Elvis Presley but, stuck in austerity Britain, had no money for amps and electric guitars, making music instead with washboards, broomsticks and tea chests. This primitive precursor of the 1960's beat boom and the later singer-songwriter era epitomised by Bob Dylan, Joan Baez and Simon and Garfunkel found willing young audiences in the cramped surroundings of the 2i's Coffee Bar, Heaven & Hell, Le Macabre and other briefly starred Soho business ventures.

Of course frothy coffee and jukeboxes are now ancient history, as are Cliff Richard, Lonnie Donegan and Tommy Steele – London's very own answer to Elvis – yet this home-grown, devil-may-care attitude mixed with a certain southern European flair lives on in Soho today, particularly late night outside Frith Street's Bar Italia (established 1949) or on stage at Ronnie Scott's, the long-standing jazz club directly opposite.

Just a stone's throw away from here, on the east side of the Charing Cross Road, aspiring musicians still drool at the beauty of solid bodied electric guitars. This is Denmark Street, once London's answer to New York's Tin Pan Alley. It not only housed the entire music publishing business during its 1940's heyday but was the birthplace of Melody Maker and New Musical Express, the influential music weekly whose legendary rock writers included Julie Burchill, Nick Kent and Charles Shaar Murray.

When the former Regent Sound Studios was in business at number

4 Denmark Street, this humble cut through to St Giles Church and Covent Garden teemed with beat bands on the make including The Kinks, The Stones, The Who, The Yardbirds and other winkle-pickered guitar slingers. Meanwhile, in the smoky, wood-panelled Giaconda café next door, precocious wannabe's like David Bowie and Marc Bolan hustled deals with hard-nosed publishers and agents who would have been around when Vera Lynn and The Andrews Sisters topped the charts.

Walk along Oxford Street and descend to the basement of the garishly painted 100 Club and you are at the place where English punk rock found its watershed moment in 1976. Or, should you prefer an alternative punk landmark, the site of the old Roxy in nearby Covent Garden, which in 1977 hosted the likes of Generation X, The Damned, X-Ray Spex and The Adverts.

Of course the original punks hailed mostly from London's sprawling suburbs such as Bromley, Croydon or Ealing but frequented what are now prime property hot spots; Covent Garden, Soho and the infamous Kings Road, where Malcolm McLaren opened his bondage wear emporium Sex and auditioned a young Johnny Rotten by the shop's AMI juke box.

Sadly, many of these legendary characters and landmarks are no longer around – time and the relentless Crossrail development of Tottenham Court Road tube have seen to that – but don't let that stop the enjoyment of discovering similarly culturally-loaded locales; Mayfair, Chelsea, Camden, Brixton and Richmond to name just a few.

London, you see, never really stands still and part of its appeal



Right: Simone Marie Butler rocks a Fender bass on stage with Primal Scream; DJ and video director Don Letts hits the decks at the annual Notting Hill Carnival



to the social historian is that it has always attracted outsiders who help propel the culture further. Exiled 17th century Huguenot weavers, 19th century Jewish refugees as well as Afro-Caribbeans, Asians and Africans from the last 100 years, have all offered up their own unique view on the city. And a remarkable amount of it ends up in popular song.

Take for instance, the comedic Trinidadian calypsos of Lord Kitchener, who was keen to point out the highs and lows of the immigrant experience in the 1950's: 'Never me again will go by London Underground train' he lamented in The Underground Train (1950) or 'My landlady is too rude, in my affairs

she likes to intrude' from My Landlady, a commentary on the hardships of finding accommodation for the Empire Windrush generation.



uch social and cultural transactions were echoed 30 years later by the late Smiley Culture, whose Cockney Translation and Police Officer chimed with the polarisation and racism directed, during the 1980's, at London's black community. A black Londoner himself, Smiley Culture was something of an outlier to the reggae hierarchy, but his vocal style predated the now generic London accent of today – a stew of Jamaican patois mixed with the original local vernacular.

Although neither artist incorporated a Cockney singalong into their repertoire, both Brazilian political exile Caetano Veloso and future global reggae superstar Bob Marley spent formative years here

in the downtrodden 1970's. For the troubadour of Tropicalia, London proved to be predictably lonely experience and a long, long way from his native Bahia, resulting in the track London from the 1971 LP Caetano Veloso:

*I'm wandering round and round
nowhere to go
I'm lonely in London,
London is lovely so
I cross the streets without fear
Everybody keeps the way clear*

For Marley, the pain wasn't all in vain as it eventually led to a record deal with Chris Blackwell's Island Records, who at the time owned recording studios in Chiswick by the river Thames. His breakthrough hit LP Exodus was recorded here in W4 and it is said that Marley's favourite thing about London was playing football with his handmates in Battersea Park.

Of course, a quintessentially foggy London town famously had Ella Fitzgerald 'low' and 'down'. The capital, with its sprawling landscape of terraced housing, bus lanes, underground networks, mile high offices and limited opportunities for spontaneous social intercourse, is frequently depicted as a tough expensive and often unforgiving place to put down roots. This applies whether you're a wet-behind-the-ears Paul Weller from Woking:

*I first felt a fist, and then a kick
I could now smell their breath
They smelt of pubs,
and Wormwood Scrubs
And too many right wing meetings
Down In The Tube Station At
Midnight, The Jam*

or Linton Kwesi Johnson, a young immigrant from Jamaica:

*w'en em gi'you di lickle wage packit
fus dem rab it wid dem big tax rakit
y'u haffi struggle fi meek en's meet
an' w'en y'u goh a y'u bed y'u jus'
can't sleep
Inglan Is A Bitch, Linton Kwesi
Johnson*

Even Sheffield-raised St Martin's School of Art student Jarvis Cocker railed against the social injustices on offer to new arrivals such as himself. The song Mile End from the 1996 Train-spotting soundtrack, was inspired by Cocker's experience of moving to a high rise in the then ungentrified East End:

*The pearly king of the Isle of Dogs
Feels up children in the bogs
And down by the playing fields
Someone sets a car on fire
I guess you have to go right down
Before you understand just how
How low, how low a human being
can go
Mile End, Pulp*

It's all a far cry from Terry meeting Julie down at Waterloo Bridge.

Even real Londoners, such as Brixton boy David Bowie, can testify to its darker side. One of his earliest recordings, The London Boys, tells the sobering story of a young suburban teenager who, in his attempt to impress the fickle West End mod cognoscenti, falls victim to too many pills and too little sleep.

*You're gonna be sick,
but you mustn't lose faith
To let yourself down
would be a big disgrace
With the London boys
The London Boys, David Bowie*



Perhaps this sorry character would have been better adopting Lily Allen's more free-wheeling faux-Cockney approach to the city, choosing instead to roam Notting Hill and Ladbroke Grove on her bicycle in the heat of summer because 'the sights that I'm seeing are priceless' – among them,

incidentally, an old lady being mugged in a park and 'a fella looking dapper... sittin' with a slapper'. How London is that?

Like it or not, the reality is that the most talented and ambitious musicians from other corners of the country have always been willing to move to the capital in order to raise their profile. In the wake of digital, the music business has diversified beyond recognition taking power away from the traditional London-based centre, yet this is still the headquarters of the music and entertainment industry.

It's a trend that has been repeating itself ever since The Beatles, under the guidance of the urbane Brian Epstein left Liverpool and took up residence in various West End properties, later decamping to individual luxury villas in the Surrey hinterland. Such a model was adopted later by The Rolling Stones and Jimi Hendrix, who briefly occupied a Mayfair flat next to the former home of composer George Frideric Handel, now a heritage museum where 18th century harpsichords vie with feather boas and a mounted Fender Stratocaster.

But what about the fans, the hangers-on, the liggers, the groupies and glory seekers who cannot play a single note between them? For them London is a veritable Pleasure Island with a seemingly endless choice

of live music venues ranging from 20,000 or more capacity stadiums and crumbling Art Deco picture palaces to once-smoky dives, folk cellars, and humble pub back rooms with sticky carpets to match. Surely such buildings, crumbling or otherwise, can lay claim to being 'Music Legends of London'?

The proliferation of such establishments in the capital owes much to existence of once solid working-class neighbourhoods – Camden Town, the Old Kent Road, Hackney, Hammersmith and the like. In Edwardian times, the drudgery of the working week was given ample release in the local music halls and gin palaces, which gave way to cinemas and bingo halls later in the 20th century. However, the advent of American rock 'n' roll in the 1950's and television in the 1960's saw a decline in the popularity of the Odeons, Empires and Regals, who were soon accommodating hairy rock bands to stay afloat.

For instance, the 3,000-seater Finsbury Park Astoria, which was originally blessed with a tiled Moorish-style fountain and a stunning auditorium that evoked an Andalusian nightscape, became The Rainbow in 1971. Having begun with a deafening show by The Who, the venue has a near religious status among 1970's rock fans and is remembered via several 'Live at The Rainbow' LP's from artists ranging from Queen and Genesis to Bob Marley, Van Morrison, Pink Floyd and Iron Maiden.

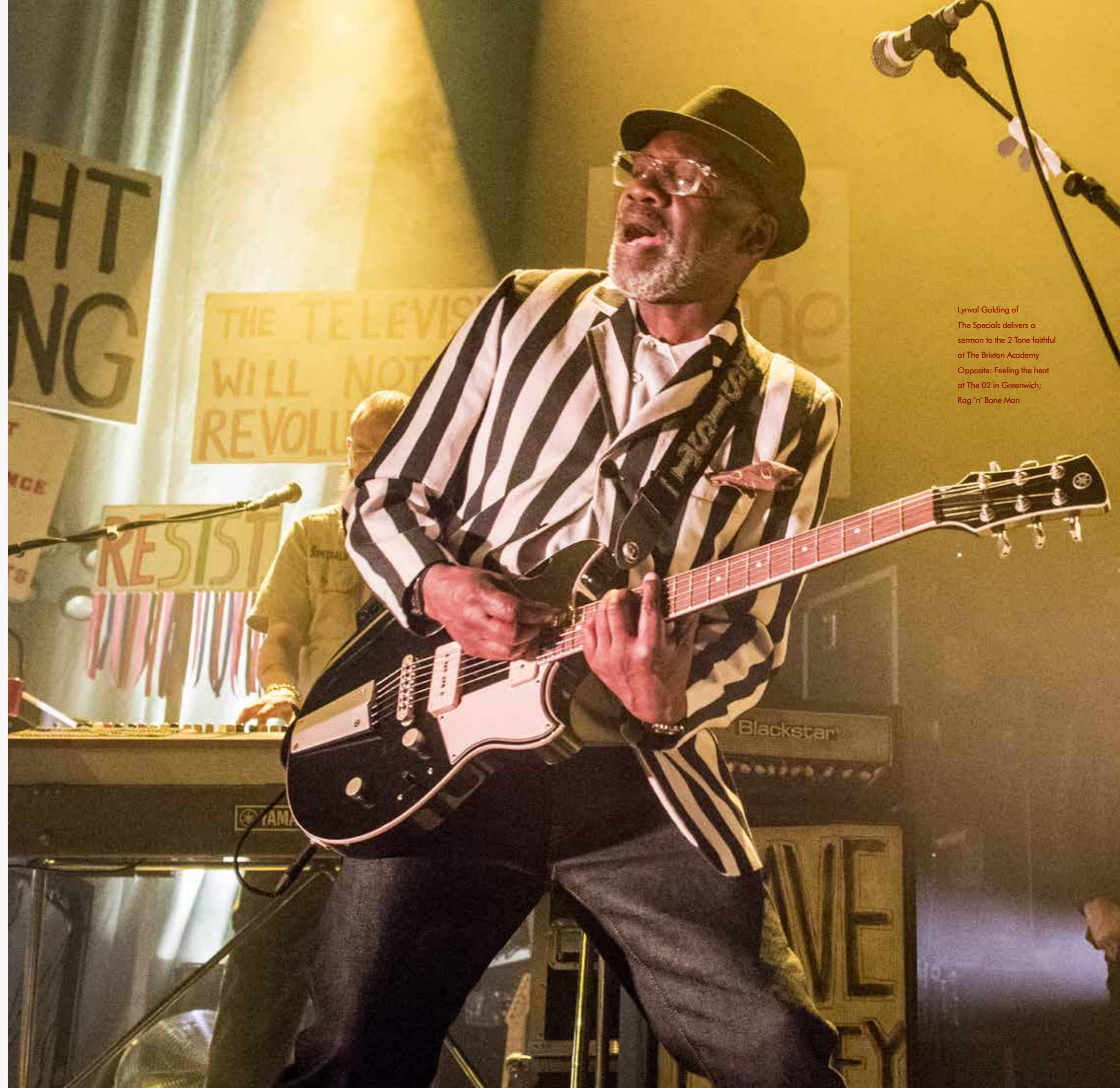
Another Art Deco gem from the same stable was The Brixton Astoria, which had room for up to 4,750 movie goers and opened in 1929 with the Al Jolson musical *The Singing*

Fool. The setting was arguably even more lavish with a vast marble hallway and an Italianate auditorium lined with colonnades, Cypress trees and statuettes.

The old Astoria's fortunes had faded by the 1980's and the venue later served as both a cinema and a night club. It didn't properly establish itself as a live music venue until the 1980's after promoter Simon Parkes hedged his bets – the area had been scarred by rioting in 1981 – and bought the building for just a £1. As the Brixton Academy, it went on to host concerts by The Clash, Madonna, The Rolling Stones and Dr Dre. The venue was taken over by the Academy Music Group in 2004.

Today, the world-renowned Royal Albert Hall, Wembley Stadium and the O2 are synonymous with quality live entertainment, but closer examination tells us that over 35% of our live music venues have closed their doors since 2007. A combination of stricter licensing laws, rising commercial property prices and devastation of the parts of the West End to the Crossrail development, has already seen off iconic names such as The Marquee, The Astoria, Madame Jo Jo's and The 12 Bar Club in Denmark Street, where back in the 1990's a teenage Adele played her first live set. Can we, or the Adele's of the future, afford to lose more like these?

Ernesto's photos capture the London music and entertainment scene at an important crossroads. London pop culture has been dominant force globally since the 1960's, pioneering movements such as psychedelia, glam, punk, acid house and grime. But you never know what's around the corner. Here's to the next generation of London legends!



Lynval Golding of The Specials delivers a sermon to the 2-Tone faithful at The Brixton Academy
Opposite: Feeling the heat at The O2 in Greenwich; Rag 'n' Bone Man

Chapter one : central

RONNIE SCOTT'S

Over the years, London's jazz scene has fallen into two distinct camps: the trad and the modern. Trad has its roots in downtown 19th century New Orleans and a revival of the genre became wildly popular in England in the era before rock music swept all before it. Modern, on the other hand, is more to do with individualism, improvisation and the cool phrasing of players like Charlie Parker, Miles Davis and Sonny Rollins.

And if the latter ever had a spiritual home in London it would be Ronnie Scott's, the 60-year-old institution located at 47 Frith Street, right opposite a building where a youthful once Mozart stayed during a tour of the country.

It all started when young East End-born saxophonist, Ronnie Scott opened his tiny basement jazz club with partner Pete King in nearby Gerrard Street, now the central thoroughfare of Soho's Chinatown.

Hugely in awe of the Bebop musicians he had seen on an exploratory tour of the nascent New York modern jazz scene, Scott began to showcase some home-grown exponents of the art form such as Tubby Hayes, Don Rendell and John Dankworth then somehow managed to lure to the club the cream of the US artists – Sarah Vaughn, Miles Davis, Count Basie, Nina Simone and other proper legends.

Not that you need to be a jazz great to play here. This friendly and intimate venue has witnessed shows by artists as diverse as Tom Waits, Elkie Brooks, Eric Burdon and Ruby Turner, the UK soul singer who performs a series of sell out shows at Ronnie's every year.

The 220-capacity venue has been



its current Frith Street location since 1965. "A sure-fire recipe for financial disaster and mental breakdown," Scott once said about running his venture. Despite several makeovers and refurbishments and the sad passing of its founder, it remains the highly respected supper club-style venue it always has been.

Opposite: This iconic sign says you're at the spiritual home of jazz in London
Above: The 220-capacity supper club venue has been at Frith Street since 1965, hosting artists such as Miles Davis and Nina Simone

SPOTLIGHT : RUBY TURNER

Which legends you have worked with during your career?

In the world of reggae, UB40 from my home-town Birmingham were fantastic and I had some crazy days on tour with them. With Culture Club in the 1980's, I sang two nights at Madison Square Gardens in New York. I think Boy George really is a great singer and he's able to put a song across in his own way. That's what it's all about! I've also been fortunate enough to work with the likes of Jools Holland, Bryan Ferry and Mick Jagger.

What's it like to play the famous Ronnie Scott's?

I've been playing here since the 1980's and so it feels a bit like home to me. It's still very much the same interior with a supper club feel and table lamps. It has a very similar vibe to the Blue Note in New York.

Which other London venues do you know?

I've played Dingwalls, The Jazz Café, The Mean Fiddler, The London Palladium and The Dominion Theatre. And there was a certain concert outside Buckingham Palace to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee – it was amazing performing alongside Grace and Tom Jones with Her Majesty introducing herself backstage. All I have now is memories!

Are there any venues you would avoid?

Listen, I'm a working musician and a gig is a gig! I can work with anything, just roll with it. Any artist must understand what the gig is then work around those perimeters. Tonight, for instance, I'm playing two 45-minute sets with a break in between. It's true that some of the venues I've performed in have been 'toilets' with horrible sticky carpets, but back then I was paying my dues and honing my craft. I've earned this!

Do you feel you have to play jazz music here?

No, I play Ruby!



Soul singer Ruby has performed at the Ronnie's regularly for over forty years. 'It feels like home to me!'



ST MORITZ CLUB

This below stairs Soho legend has the distinction of being both a restaurant and a nightclub. The latter was opened at the dawn of the 1960's by Swiss pastry chef Armin Loetscher aka Sweety and initially catered for London-based Swiss and French emigres who must have felt immediately at home in this cosy basement with its part German bierkeller, part Euro ski lodge décor.

Sixty years later, appearances are remarkably unchanged; Alpine lamps hang from low, wood-beamed ceilings, thick white emulsion covers decades of cracks and dings, and a back bar straight out of a Patrick Hamilton novel.

The enterprising Sweety – now in his eighties but still on the scene – then hit on the idea of hosting live bands while serving up fondues and rostis upstairs. The Kinks, Lee 'Scratch' Perry, The Sweet and Joe Strummer's first band The 101ers are among the biggest names to grace its decidedly

unstarry stage, and the late The Clash singer even penned a tribute to the club: Sweety of the St Moritz.

Over the decades, this quintessential Soho dive has been an after-hours refuge for rockers, rude boys, punks, goths and new romantics. During the 1980's it was impossible not to rub shoulders with Motorhead's Lemmy who would monopolise the club's fruit machine.

Since 1995, it has hosted Gaz's Rockin' Blues, undeniably the 'longest running club night in London'. Launched by DJ Gaz Mayall (son of the famous British blues guitarist John) back in 1980 at the long-defunct Gossip's nightclub, it has stuck to its guns with a weekly diet of timeless ska, blues, rock 'n' roll, jazz, funk and world music. During her first stay in London a then single Meghan Markle said the St Moritz was her favourite club in the capital calling it a "sweaty, grungy" haunt full of "red-lipped tough birds".

Clockwise from far left: Wardour Street, Soho, is home to several legendary music venues including The Marquee and The St Moritz Club, founded in 1960 and still going; a Café Django gypsy jazz session in full swing; dancers take to the floor for their weekly dose of ska, blues, rock 'n' roll, jazz and world music; rock memorabilia dating back to the 1970's lines walls covered in thick white emulsion

Night owl Gaz has hosted his weekly club in Soho since the 1980's. 'We play everything from the first African beat to the very latest thing'



SPOTLIGHT : GAZ MAYALL

What was the first club you ever visited?

The Flamingo Club around 1964. I was only a kid, but my father had his single Crocodile Walk coming out. I was at the soundcheck and there was a crocodile on my dad's Hammond organ! It was mainly black musicians who played there, and Georgie Fame and the Blue Flames were the resident band. All the mods kick started their scene downstairs in this Soho basement.

How did Gaz's Rockin Blues start?

I've been doing a regular night in Soho for 40 years and the first night was at Gossip's in Dean Street. I remember catching a taxi over to the West End with my records and I had butterflies all the way down Oxford Street worrying whether enough people would turn up. In the end, over 700 people came to the first night. The owner Vince Howard, who looked like a cross between Muhammed Ali and James Brown, said: "Gary, this club will last for three years!"

What do you like about St Moritz Club?

A few years ago, an old black guy came up to me and said: "I haven't been here since before the war. Did you know this place used to be a jazz club?" A lot of stuff has gone on during the 300-year life of this building. It was a live music club in the 1960's and The Kinks played here every week before they had hit records. The owner Sweetie struggled with the restaurant business at first, until the TV celebrity cook Fanny Cradock put fondues on the telly and, all of a sudden, Swiss food became the latest fad. Of course, here was the only place you could get it!

What's your musical ideology?

We play everything from the first African beat through to the very latest thing. I was playing drum and bass here in the 1990's when it was brand new – I've still got an enormous stack of the original Metalheadz records. Although we centre around black dance music through the ages, we always go back to the blues. Early 1950's rhythm and blues is the crucible of it all.

Why do so many young people attend your nights?

I think it's because the music we play was made for young people to dance to, whether that was in the 1920's, the 1990's or now. It was designed to make listeners excited, express their sexuality. No-one's locked into one particular genre. The bottom line is that I like people and they seem to like me. Luckily, they still want to go out and meet like-minded souls from different social circles and find their niche. Believe it or not, some young people are not wholly dependent on social media!

What's the perfect nightclub in your opinion?

A basement dive in Soho with a low ceiling and no windows. It would be somewhere with a history going back two or three hundred years. If its walls could talk, they would record all that fun and laughter, happiness and amusement, sex and satisfaction.