

## Liverpool Lifts Its Voice

***Kate Joynes-Burgess finds a city not only loaded with musical history but pulsating with melodic innovation.***

Even Liverpool's modern Metropolitan Cathedral is rock and roll. It rises up at the end of Hope Street, a historically significant stretch of the port city's music scene containing the Philharmonic Hall. From its lofty seat, the Roman Catholic Cathedral surveys its gothic-revival Anglican counterpart with all the defiance of a rock musician giving his audience a nonchalant glance. Stepping inside I see architect Sir Frederick Gibberd has swapped standard serenity for theatrical wonder. Contemporary stained glass gives the electrifying effect of stage lighting even on a cloudy day. Glitzy appliquéd tapestries adorn the inner walls of the circular place of worship. One of them depicts Jesus bedecked in a sequined white robe fit for a latter day Elvis. There is no escaping Liverpool showmanship.

But it is another global rock phenomenon that remains a permanent, almost ghostly, presence in the riverside city. Four decades after they recorded their last album, everything in Liverpool still comes back to The Beatles. Take the Catholic Cathedral again. It was consecrated in 1967. I am reminded that, for many Liverpudlians (or "Scousers" in British slang), the year resonates as the release date for The Beatles' unforgettable double A-side, *Penny Lane* and *Strawberry Fields Forever*, which immortalised more pedestrian landmarks in their hometown. Beatles tourism is one of Liverpool's main attractions, bringing in an estimated £200 million pounds (4,100 million MXP) to the local economy each year. This unique musical legacy is both a breadwinner and a burden for wannabe musicians. The city's unbreakable association with music makes for many gigging opportunities but the omnipresence of the world's most famous band can be an overbearing influence. As Dr Sara Cohen, director of Liverpool University's Institute of Popular Music put it: "You can't ignore The Beatles. Every Liverpool band has to engage with them".

Shortly after arriving in *Beatlelandia* I started to wonder if my search for musical innovation would end in disappointment. I had attended a celebratory music event during the Transition Night festivities on 10 January when Liverpool handed the lucrative European Capital of Culture mantle onto 2009's dual victors, Linz (Austria) and Vilnius (Lithuania). As the 2008 titleholders Liverpool saw the injection of some £800 million pounds (16,750 million MXP) into its economy with the Arts – including popular music – benefiting significantly. Between being wowed by spectacular fireworks bursting over the river Mersey, I caught a line-up of local bands at the Tate Gallery. Their derivative performances were an insult to the avant-garde setting. Beatles mimicry clashed with echoes of Liverpool's more recent musical sensation – The Coral – themselves inspired by sea shanties that belong to the port's maritime past.

Thankfully, after five days trawling Liverpool's nightspots, cafes and arts centres, I discovered that nostalgic musical retrospectives are not the norm. I experienced the big buzz about Liverpool's emerging music scene first hand. Guitar-based bands predominate but there is innovation across most genres, particularly on the festival circuit. The multidisciplinary Cornerstone Festival (November-December) includes fresh interpretations on the classical genre while the Mathew Street Festival (August) and Liverpool Music Week (November) offer a bit of

everything including stages exclusively for new acts. The Ropewalks neighbourhood, formerly the manufacturing centre for the shipping trade, is a hub for new talent. Breakthrough bands play at its flagship bars Korova, Barfly, and Zanzibar. The latter pair holds some 'dry bar' (alcohol-free) events, which are worth investigating if you are travelling with under-18s. Liverpool acts starting to register on the national radar include Hot Club de Paris ([www.myspace.com/hotclubdeparis](http://www.myspace.com/hotclubdeparis)), Married to the Sea ([www.myspace.com/marriedtothesealion](http://www.myspace.com/marriedtothesealion)), 28 Costumes ([www.myspace.com/28costumes](http://www.myspace.com/28costumes)) and Voo ([www.myspace.com/voorock](http://www.myspace.com/voorock)). Established groups strut their stuff at the Academy and the most mainstream headline Liverpool's new Echo Arena.

The Hardman Street-Hope Street axis contains a cluster of intriguing venues despite the re-gentrification of the zone with its renovated Georgian townhouses. Don't miss Magnet, which presents a mix of guitar-based bands plus jazz, funk, hip hop and other music of black origin that is otherwise underrepresented in Liverpool. The area is still mourning the loss of The Picket, a veteran venue famed for supporting budding musicians. Founder Phil Hayes was forced out of his legendary Hardman Street music spot by developers in 2004. Since then he has been nurturing a new creative area of Liverpool in an industrial wasteland, rebranded as the Independent Quarter, where The Picket is now located. It is also home to the post-industrially chic Leaf Tea Shop, which takes its music as seriously as its tea and cake by hosting gigs and a trendy upstairs rehearsal and recording studio. Liverpool's cultural heartland has grown exponentially in recent years but these outlying edges will struggle as recession hits. The Independent Quarter's sprawling Contemporary Urban Centre, which includes performance and gallery spaces, is already facing financial difficulty a year after opening.

Yet overall Liverpool remains upbeat as gigs draws big crowds to its collective of bars and trendy cafes. Clubbers flock to eclectic nights run by credible Liverpool outfit Chibuku at Barfly and catch renowned DJs at the Academy. Cream super-club is no more but it lives on in the Creamfields Festival, held every August in the nearby Cheshire countryside. For those of us who have outgrown the club scene, acoustic nights are springing up all over town. Irish influence is evident in Liverpool's singer-songwriter movement thanks to historic links with the emerald isle. I went back to these roots at Seel Street's surprisingly authentic Pogue Mahone pub - complete with a coal fire, home-cooked food and excellent Guinness - which holds live sessions every Monday. Visit during the Liverpool Irish Festival (October-November) to really immerse yourself in traditional music.

Seeking something more contemporary, I checked out the Chameleon lounge-bar. It launched on New Year's Eve 2009 and features live acoustic sets every night. Clever design - a hypnotic monochrome art wall, red velvet armchairs and creative cocktail list - encourages listeners to stick around. Go overboard for their Best of British cocktails like Sailor's Treacle, a blend British Virgin Islands Pusser's Rum, treacle, bitters and apple juice. I felt like an A&R mogul as I discovered Molly Boyle's reflective, melancholy and whimsical strains at her Chameleon debut ([www.myspace.com/mollyboyle3](http://www.myspace.com/mollyboyle3)). She had just left the picturesque Yorkshire Dales to launch her music career in Liverpool. Aged 19, the wide-eyed singer-songwriter is the daughter of respected Anglo-Irish folk musicians Steve Tilston and Maggie Boyle and sister to acoustic songbird Martha Tilston. Molly invited me to see her perform after we got chatting at Tabac café (another acoustic venue) where she works as a waitress. She is part of Liverpool's story. Not

only is the city an affordable and creative base for aspiring musicians, it is a place where English people actually talk to strangers. I waited for her performance with some trepidation in case she was off key or just plain dull. But of course she wasn't and Molly Boyle became my Liverpool discovery. Every visitor sampling the city's varied musical menu should make at least one.

### **How to get there**

Direct flights from Mexico City to London Gatwick are available with Mexicana ([www.mexicana.com](http://www.mexicana.com)); Trains for Liverpool Lime Street leave daily from London Euston ([www.virgintrains.co.uk](http://www.virgintrains.co.uk)).

### **Where to stay**

#### **Malmaison**

This hotel meets the Malmaison decadent style standards. *William Jessop Way, Princes Dock; 0151 229 5000; [liverpool@malmaison.com](mailto:liverpool@malmaison.com); [www.malmaison-liverpool.com](http://www.malmaison-liverpool.com); Habitación doble desde 95 libras.*

#### **Hard Day's Night Hotel**

Surprisingly hip Beatles-inspired hotel opened in 2008. *Central Buildings, North John Street; 0151 236 1964; Habitación doble desde 165libras.*

### **Where to go**

#### **Barfly**

*90 Seel St; 0844 8472424; [www.barflyclub.com/liverpool/whatson/WhatsOn.aspx](http://www.barflyclub.com/liverpool/whatson/WhatsOn.aspx)  
Entrada desde 5 libras.*

#### **Bluecoat Chambers**

This 18<sup>th</sup> century former school house is now an art centre hosting critically acclaimed art and music events; *School Lane; 0151 702 5324; [www.thebluecoat.org.uk](http://www.thebluecoat.org.uk); Entrada desde 7 libras.*

#### **Contemporary Urban Centre – North West**

*41-51 Greenland Street; 0151 708 3510; [www.novasscarman.org](http://www.novasscarman.org)*

#### **Chameleon Bar**

*7-9 Back Colquitt St; 0151 707 0283; [www.chameleonbar.co.uk](http://www.chameleonbar.co.uk); Entrada gratis.*

#### **Liverpool Echo Arena**

*Monarchs Quay; 0151 475 8888; [www.accliverpool.com](http://www.accliverpool.com); Entrada desde 26 libras.*

#### **Heebie Jeebies**

A laid-back bar good for pre- and post-gig gatherings plus acoustic nights on Wednesdays. *80-82 Seel St; 0151 709 2666. Entrada gratis.*

**Korova**

39-41 Fleet St; [www.korova-liverpool.com](http://www.korova-liverpool.com); Entrada desde 4 libras.

**Magnet**

45 Hardman Street; 0151 709 6969; [www.magnetliverpool.co.uk](http://www.magnetliverpool.co.uk); Entrada desde 5 libras.

**O2 Academy**

11-13 Hotham Street; 0151 707 3200; 08444 77 2000; [www.o2academyliverpool.co.uk](http://www.o2academyliverpool.co.uk); Entrada desde 10 libras.

**The Picket**

61 Jordan Street; 0151 708 6789; [www.savethepicket.com](http://www.savethepicket.com); Entrada desde 4 libras

**Pogue Mahone**

77 Seel St; 0151 708 8301. Entrada gratis.

**The Zanzibar**

43 Seel St; 0151 707 0633; [www.thezanzibarclub.com](http://www.thezanzibarclub.com); Entrada desde 5 libras.

**What to eat****Tabac**

Stylish café and acoustic venue serving hearty European food using fresh, local ingredients; 126 Bold St; 0151 707 9795; Gran desayuno ingles para dos 15 libras.

**Leaf Tea Shop and Bar**

Detox on their specialist teas or indulge in tasty home-cooked fare while watching out for The Zutons, Ladytron, Echo and the Bunnymen and other iconic recording artists taking breaks between recording sessions at the upstairs Elevator Studio. 27 Parliament St; 0151 7077747; [www.thisisleaf.co.uk](http://www.thisisleaf.co.uk); Comida para dos 12 libras.

**Donde Comprar****Bullet**

Vintage clothing and accessories help you look the part on the music circuit. 41 Hardman St; 0151 7085808

**Probe Records**

Take home some tunes from this iconic record store; 9 Slater Street; 0151 7088815; [www.probe-records.com](http://www.probe-records.com)

**Flagship Festivals**

Agosto 29-30: Creamfields: [www.creamfields.com](http://www.creamfields.com)

Agosto: Mathew Street Festival; [www.mathewstreetfestival.com](http://www.mathewstreetfestival.com)

Noviembre: Liverpool Music Week; [www.liverpoolmusicweek.com](http://www.liverpoolmusicweek.com)

Octubre-Noviembre: Liverpool Irish Festival; [www.liverpoolirishfestival.com](http://www.liverpoolirishfestival.com)

Noviembre-Diciembre: Cornerstone; [www.hope.ac.uk/cornerstone/festival](http://www.hope.ac.uk/cornerstone/festival)

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