Oxford Road Corridor

JOURNEY BACK TO THE CRETACEOUS PERIOD AT **MANCHESTER MUSEUM**

TRANSFORMING LIVES WITH **OLYMPIAS MUSIC FOUNDATION**

CONTACT THEATRE: A MOVEMENT, NOT JUST A STAGE

Autumn Edition

ISSUE 10 OCT 2025

Wavelength

Four in the morning, and four years since the last night like this:
walking Manchester in my men's suit under my patchwork coat.
The first big work do in this job: posh hotel to Yes to the Village,
an underground bar with unabashed joy and "Dancing Queen",
finally feeling on the same wavelength as my new colleagues,
bobbing up and down, laughing, seen.

I have peeled off: Portland Street, Piccadilly, Northern Quarter,
Shudehill, that new glass tower, wanting to transport myself
into bed through sheer will and exhaustion.

But now – the dawn chorus begins. It sounds like many birds,
peeping and whistling such different melodies. I run the app,
and it says robin, then, a while later, blackbird. The dot hops
back and forth between the names, showing their conversation.
Just two birds, or two families of birds, they are a symphony,
curls and taps and cascades of sound.

Robins and blackbirds – I see them most days, around the place.
I didn't know I could feel this connected, glowing, in my suit
at four in the morning, hearing every heartbeat.

Elizabeth Gibson

Elizabeth Gibson is a Manchester poet, performer, zine-maker, and workshop facilitator whose debut poetry collection is *A love the weight of an animal* (Confingo, July 2025). They have worked with Manchester Poetry Library, Manchester City of Literature, University of Manchester, Manchester Literature Festival, the Portico Library, and Islington Mill and are currently completing an MA in Creative Writing at the Manchester Writing School at Manchester Metropolitan University.

Welcome

As the nights draw in, the Corridor is brimming with stories that connect past, present and future.

At Manchester Museum, *Triceratops: Eat, Roam, Repeat.* offers a chance to step back 68 million years and rediscover the awe of first encounters with dinosaurs. Olympias Music Foundation marks ten years of transforming lives through free music education, reminding us how creativity can break barriers and spark belonging.

This season also invites reflection. *Remember Nature 2025*, led by Castlefield Gallery and artist Yu-Chen Wang, calls us to stand up for the natural world. Manchester's dual UNESCO status finds expression in a cross-cultural collaboration with Nanjing.

Meanwhile, Contact continues to prove why it matters now more than ever, putting youth leadership and radical imagination centre stage. A new walking tour traces the sounds that shaped Manchester, from Hallé to Haçienda, while the story of Ras T. Makonnen reminds us how Oxford Road has fuelled global movements for liberation.

From dinosaurs to dance, activism to archives, this autumn is a celebration of discovery, resistance and imagination.

Follow us @OxRdMcr

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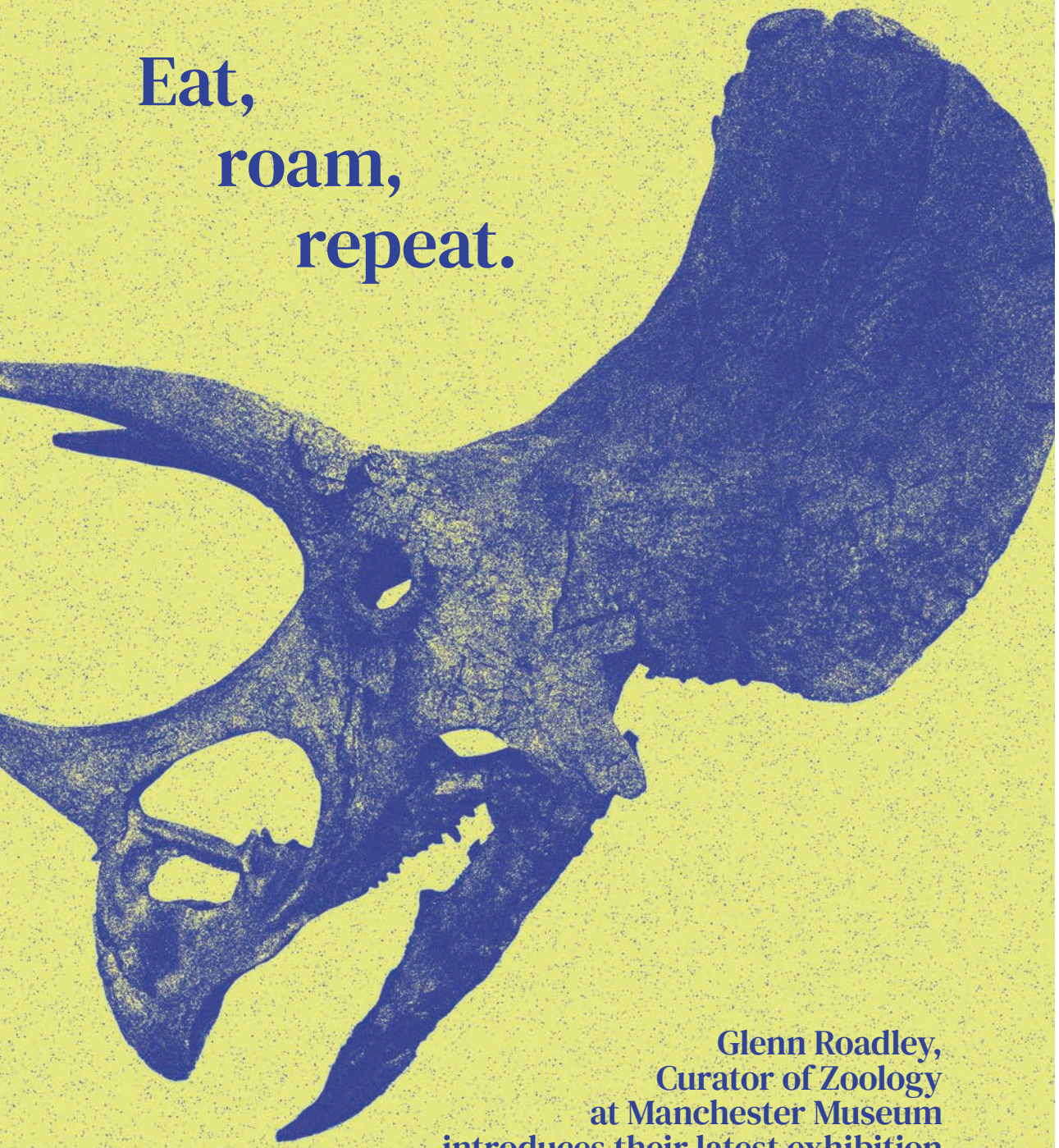
Designed & edited by Ben Williams. With thanks to our partners Manchester Metropolitan University, University of Manchester, Manchester City Council, Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust, Bruntwood and Royal Northern College of Music

Triceratops

Eat, roam, repeat.



Glenn Roadley, Curator of Zoology at Manchester Museum introduces their latest exhibition

This autumn, Manchester Museum invites visitors to step into the world of Triceratops through our new exhibition, *Triceratops: Eat, Roam, Repeat.* Rather than simply presenting a fossil, the exhibition offers an immersive experience, transporting guests 68 million years back to a tropical swampy landscape teeming with life. The goal is to spark curiosity, encourage exploration and reconnect people with the sense of wonder many of us had as children when encountering dinosaurs for the first time.

The exhibition examines the form and function of Triceratops' horns, beak and teeth, revealing how these features were adapted for feeding, defending against predators and competing for resources in their environment. Visitors gain insight into the animal's interactions, including imagined encounters with predators like T. rex, highlighting both the drama and the survival strategies of the Cretaceous period.

To bring these ancient creatures closer to the present, the exhibition draws parallels with modern animals. Observing bighorn sheep, deer, peacocks and parrots allows visitors to understand how horns, antlers, frills and beaks can serve similar functions across species. These comparisons provide a lens for imagining how Triceratops might have behaved, displayed dominance or foraged for food, demonstrating patterns that persist across millions of years of evolution.

The exhibition journey begins with an atmospheric introduction to the Cretaceous world that Triceratops inhabited, evoking the landscapes and creatures of the time. This scene-setting leads visitors towards the centrepiece of the exhibition: the Triceratops skull itself. The emphasis is on giving a sense of the scale and diversity of life during the Late Cretaceous, while highlighting the fossil not as a static object but as a vivid connection to a once-living ecosystem.

A core aim of the exhibition is to reignite curiosity in visitors of all ages. Many adults recall a childhood fascination with dinosaurs, and the exhibition taps into that nostalgia while presenting the latest scientific discoveries. Fossil research continues to advance rapidly, meaning there is always more to explore both within the Museum and in the wider world. Signposting throughout the gallery guides visitors to additional highlights including Stan the T. rex in the Fossils Gallery and the dramatic rock layer marking the meteorite impact that ended the age of dinosaurs. The visible change in the rock, ash and sediment marking the moment of mass extinction, provides a tangible way to appreciate both the fragility and resilience of life on Earth.

Perspective is a key theme. Understanding the vast timescales and sizes involved, from the millions of years Triceratops roamed the planet to the scale of its own anatomy, can be overwhelming, yet the exhibition emphasises accessibility. Fossils are not simply objects for scientists. They are touchstones for learning, exploration and imagination. Visitors are encouraged to seek out fossils locally, investigate ancient rock formations or even pursue forms of palaeontology as a hobby, reinforcing the idea that discovery is ongoing and open to everyone.

By making comparisons between the ancient and modern world tangible, the exhibition invites visitors to think beyond the fossil itself and imagine the wider ecological web that Triceratops was part of. This perspective opens up questions about how environments change, how species adapt and what lessons the distant past might hold for understanding our own relationship with the natural world today.

Museums provide a space where discovery is tangible and curiosity can flourish. Through this exhibition, visitors encounter the excitement of exploration, the thrill of new knowledge and the inspiration to continue learning long after leaving the galleries. *Triceratops: Eat, Roam, Repeat.* demonstrates that the natural world, past and present, is open for everyone to explore and enjoy. And that is precisely what I hope visitors leave with. A sense of curiosity rekindled, a deeper appreciation of deep time and an understanding that the natural world, past and present, is there to explore.

Finally, the exhibition celebrates not only Triceratops as a species but also the broader human story of engaging with the natural world. Palaeontology is an exercise in observation, interpretation and imagination. By combining immersive experiences, scientific insight and participatory learning, the exhibition brings the ancient past to life in a way that resonates with contemporary audiences. Visitors leave not only with knowledge. They leave with inspiration, perspective and the motivation to explore, question and understand the world around them.

Ultimately, *Triceratops: Eat, Roam, Repeat.* is about reconnection, reconnecting with deep time, with curiosity and with the thrill of discovery that spans generations. The massive, awe-inspiring Triceratops serves not only as a window into Earth's distant past but as a lens through which we can explore the richness, complexity and enduring beauty of life on our planet.

From 25 Oct–22 Feb
museum.manchester.ac.uk/triceratops

Ras T. Makonnen — businessman, activist, and one of the architects of Pan-Africanism in Manchester — used his Oxford Road enterprises to support the historic Fifth Pan-African Congress of 1945. Eighty years on, Washington Alcott explores how his vision, networks, and enterprises helped shape the end of empire.

A ROAD TO PAN-AFRICANISM

SCAN QR CODE TO EXPLORE THE LEGACY OF THE 1945 FIFTH PAN-AFRICAN CONGRESS IN MANCHESTER, MARKING 80 YEARS OF SOLIDARITY. LIBERATION AND ACTIVISM.

Ras T. Makonnen is little known in Manchester today, yet this businessman and philanthropist used his Oxford Road enterprises to help finance one of the most important gatherings of African leaders and activists: the Fifth Pan-African Congress. Taking place 80 years ago, from 15 to 21 October 1945, at the then Chorlton-on-Medlock Town Hall (now part of Manchester Metropolitan University's estate), the Congress was a watershed moment in the struggle to end British colonial rule. Much of its success is credited to Makonnen's financial and organisational contributions. This article explores the story of his businesses and the remarkable figures he helped bring together in Manchester — figures whose ideas and decisions would shape the course of a continent.

Born as George Thomas Nathaniel Griffiths in British Guiana (Guyana), he emigrated to the UK in 1936 following his United States education. His early exposure to Jamaican Marcus Garvey's work in Guyana was to have a lasting impression on him and saw him develop a consciousness of injustice and an understanding of the work of colonial powers. Makonnen in his own words stated that he was influenced by George Padmore and CLR James who were integral figures in writing about the colonial exploits in West Indian networks across Britain in the 1930 and 1940s. In an interview in the 1970s he cited Padmore's book *How Britain Rules Africa* published in 1936, "it guided many of us for years after, here was the Magna Carta leading to those it spoke to from darkness. I still feel the impact of that book upon us. It was a part of our spiritual campaign." Hence, it was no accident when he changed his name in solidarity with Ethiopia which had been invaded by Italy, 1936.

Oxford Road (including numbers:10b, 58, 64 and 66) and properties on several adjacent and nearby streets was the hub of Makonnen's economic empire of restaurants, houses, night clubs, a bookshop and a publishing house. Through these establishments, he embodied his beliefs and created spaces that reflected an African presence and way of life in Manchester.

In 1939 he opened The Ethiopian Teashop which became a place of exchange and encounter between West Indian and Africans from Manchester and beyond. Including several well known writers in Britain who came before the mass migration era and had fostered a flourishing West Indian network. Their discussions examine the hostility and the loneliness of living in Britain at that time. Anti-colonialist voices and social and literary figures such as CLR James, George Padmore, Roger Mais and George Lamming were frequently discussed and debated in this venue.

"I did not regard these restaurant as mine nor their takings for that matter - this was what the Pan-African thing was all about" said Makonnen.

The Cosmopolitan was one of his early ventures into the restaurant trade. It took Makonnen some £3,000 to renovate and establish the business. It was called the Cosmopolitan as its target market was for more affluent diners as well as to make a political statement about Africans.

According to Makonnen "It's not a question of money, but racial prestige. We have to make these white folks know that we are enlightened. I want you to go to town on this."

The venue was distinguished by its striking murals depicting a common humanity and the contribution of all races. By this time, he had built strong connections with other communities, particularly through an Austrian Jewish friend. These murals also left a lasting impression on Black American soldiers who were pouring into England during this period.

The Orient was a restaurant established at Manchester University, selling only curries, and operated primarily to support students. Nearby was The Forum Club, the first of several clubs - it had good cuisine and music, with performances by the great calypsonians like Lord Kitchener. A number of his African and West Indian colleagues helped with the organisation of these businesses; for instance Jomo Kenyatta, the future President of Kenya, at one time was in charge of the Cosmopolitan. George Padmore was instrumental in the operation and success of The Belle Étoile, a smaller club, which also sold food.

Makonnen used the takings from the restaurants to establish The Pan-African Publishing Co. Ltd, which had its registered office on Oxford Road its directors included, Padmore, Kenyatta, and Makonnen. Up until now he'd relied on good relations with local printers who would dine at his restaurants. He knew the director of the printing firm that published Sylvia Pankhurst's *New Times and Ethiopia News*. His contacts with Pankhurst and several of her associates in her office were also crucial and sympathetic to Makonnen's political campaign. They printed campaign material for him before the publishing company was established.

Makonnen became a bona fide member of The Publishers Association and went on to publish a range of works that demanded wider attention. These included a pamphlet by Jomo Kenyatta, a Socratic-style dialogue between Nancy Cunard and George Padmore on the "black man's burden," and a manuscript by Eric Williams, the historian who later became the first Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. He was also asked to review a manuscript by the South African trade unionist Clements Kadalie. In addition to these, he published the monthly periodical *The Pan-Africa*. Reflecting on this work, Makonnen remarked: "One's own press allowed me to keep up with my Ethiopian interest, and I was able to aid Sylvia and her son Richard Pankhurst with the publication of their book on Italian war crimes in Ethiopia."

Makonnen also opened a bookshop on Oxford Road called The Economist. Stocking titles from his publishing company and drawing on his close ties with Manchester University students, the shop supplied some of their required texts. It also provided part-time employment for several students, particularly those connected to West Indian communities.

As Makonnen expanded his business empire he recalled how Padmore would "rib me about it - 'You damn businessman; you'll become an octopus, and we'll have to restrain you'". Alongside his business exploits, Makonnen was a vibrant campaigner in several battles against racism in many corners of England. The number of Pan-African organisations he helped to establish was remarkable, sowing the seeds that would lead,after the Second World War, to the crushing of British colonial rule in Africa and the West Indies.

Washington Alcott is a historical researcher and teacher who moved from Jamaica to Manchester.

For over ten years, Olympias Music Foundation has been transforming access to music education for children and young people from low income backgrounds in Manchester.

Petra van den Houten reflects on how an initiative led by Royal Northern College of Music students offering free music lessons in local schools has grown into an award-winning charity employing five staff and 20 freelance musicians.

© Charlotte Wellings

Olympias' work actively breaks down cultural and social barriers and we are determined to fundamentally change the systemic structures which prevent young people from accessing life-changing cultural opportunities, and to help young people realise their potential.

How do we do this? By offering free 1:1 music lessons and free instruments to children and young people aged 6-18 for as long as they want, delivered in the heart of the community at Longsight Library, every week during term time. Our child-centred approach is about friendship, belonging, nurturing, and succeeding when the odds are against you. We strongly believe every child should experience the power music has to change their life. Through music-making we empower young people to build their confidence and self-belief so that in return they feel excited about their future.

It is no secret that music education within the school curriculum is in crisis, and, as reported by Arts Council England, without sustained financial support for music lessons, a child experiencing low-income has 'virtually no chance of becoming a professional musician'.

Through the transformative vision of our founder, Dr. Jo Yee Cheung, we have delivered a staggering 41,000 free music lessons to 600 children since 2015. We have engaged even more children and their families and carers through the joy of choirs, weekly *Musical Horizons* workshops at two SEND schools, and the yearly *Music and Mountains* trip to Wales. It is here in the hills of Snowdonia where children receive daily music lessons in the morning and explore outdoor activities such as hiking and climbing each afternoon, often experienced for the first time.

We are incredibly lucky to have our base on the Oxford Road Corridor as one of Manchester Museum's *Top Floor* partners. Our partnership with the Museum has given us a chance to collaborate with other organisations in the space and above all the Museum itself. Over the last couple of years, we have delivered several workshops, our children's and parents' orchestras, and incredibly heartwarming concerts at Christmas time, a joy for all.

Most recently, in June 2025, Olympias Music Foundation delivered a two-day session of musical exploration, environmental awareness, and song writing with Manchester Museum as key partner. The session focused on items from the Museum's collection and was created in response to the plight of the pangolin and in preparation for the arrival of *THE HERDS*, a monumental migration of puppet animals on a 20,000km journey from the Congo basin to the Arctic Circle as part of Manchester International Festival.

Young people met with staff from the museum to learn all about the pangolin. They came face to face with the Giant Ground Pangolin and the smaller, White-Bellied Pangolin. We learnt that they eat 70 million ants a year (between them, not each...) and that the pangolin is shockingly the most trafficked animal, hence their importance to the narrative of *THE HERDS* and the climate emergency in general. Subsequently, with the help of our woodwind and cello teachers, Jamie Stockbridge and Polly Virr, seven of our young people devised and filmed a performance of a piece of improvised music based on their experience. Cultural experiences like these, delivered with support from our partners are invaluable to the children and young people in our community.

This was not the only project we delivered at Manchester Museum this year. As our number of pupils has increased from 125 to 180 over the past year, the need for instruments has grown. To support this need, we launched a sustainability project, *The Recycled Orchestra*.

Every year, thousands of musical instruments go to landfill as the cost of repair is so expensive. Unwanted musical instruments present a recycling challenge as they are typically made of high value materials such as rare woods and metals. However, with regular maintenance and repair, these instruments can last for decades and so with funding from the Oglesby Charitable Foundation we launched *The Recycled Orchestra*.

This project involves repairing 100 instruments donated by the public to ensure that they are being used and enjoyed for years to come by children who would otherwise not have access or be able to afford them, rather than contributing to growing landfill sites and wasting finite natural resources. Several wonderful luthiers and woodwind specialists came together over a weekend in spring when they repaired instruments for all to see. This weekend also saw a workshop for some of our instrumental teachers who are now equipped with a 'First Aid' kit for string instruments. It also resulted in a fabulous online resource for all string players and music teachers around the country and beyond.

Another key partnership along the Oxford Road Corridor is our longstanding collaboration with the Royal Northern College of Music where our young people have attended *Composer's Club*, learnt piano through our student pedagogy scheme, and together with their families have enjoyed many concerts for free. Being able to attend cultural venues, a range of diverse events and even peek behind the scenes is incredibly valuable for our community, providing enjoyable and aspirational opportunities and experiences. Our partnership will be strengthened next academic year through the introduction of a joint PhD in Global Music Teacher Training with the College, overseen by senior lecturer Dr Robert Gardiner. The Global Music Teacher Training programme is an innovative way to broaden and diversify Western models of music education. It will provide skilled inspirational and much needed relatable musical role models for young people to learn new instruments.

Many of the young people we teach are from global majority backgrounds, and to support our mission to diversify music education in the UK we have already introduced lessons in three non-Western instruments: Iranian santoor, West African drumming, and North Indian harmonium. Going forward, we have committed to introducing an additional non-Western instrument into our teaching scheme each year. We have already started training and developing three of our exceptional global majority musicians with the teaching skills they need to share their musical heritage with our young musicians as professional teachers.

Our tenth anniversary year has seen some incredible successes beyond these projects and the growth of the children and young people that we teach. Our flagship programme Learn to Play resulted in 17 students taking ABRSM exams this year. These exams inspire and challenge developing musicians and recognise and celebrate their progress. And whilst taking exams is not the goal of learning to play music at Olympias Music Foundation, for those who wish to take them, they are an incredible accolade.

Olympias could not deliver its work without the help of wonderful supporters and partners. We would like to welcome you to be part of our community and if you feel you could give a child a better future and support with music lessons, we would love to hear from you.

Petra van den Houten, CEO (Interim)
olympiasmusic.com

A River of Exchange between Manchester and Nanjing

JO FLYNN EXPLORES MANCHESTER'S CHANGING LANDSCAPES IN THE REFLECTION OF ITS PRESTIGIOUS DUAL UNESCO DESIGNATIONS.

2025 is a monumental year for cultural milestones in Manchester. We're celebrating 20 years of Manchester Literature Festival, 10 years at HOME, 25 years of The Lowry, not to mention the incredible year music has had here - but Manchester has never been a city stuck in the past. Just take a look at that changing skyline, and as it turns out, the changing underground landscape too.

Manchester's legacy of literary heritage coupled with the buzz of a thriving contemporary scene was formally recognised when the city was designated as a Creative City of Literature in 2017, thanks to a whole host of organisations coming together as one and working through the rigorous bidding process. Now there is an independent charity that advocates on behalf of literature in the city and that designation. In 2024 Manchester was also designated as a City of Lifelong Learning, through a similar approach and commitment to the cause.

This means we're connected to cities all over the world who are committed, in black and white, to centring culture and sustainable development in their city regions. It shows there is backing for artists and writers in Manchester to pursue their creative vision. Manchester is clearly serious about this attitude to learning being inclusive and the city is now, more than ever, fertile ground for cultural mobility.

The city is now one of just a handful of cities that share the UNESCO designation as a Creative City of Literature and a City of Lifelong Learning alongside Bucheon, South Korea; Dublin, Ireland; Durban, South Africa; Ljubljana, Slovenia; Lviv, Ukraine; Nanjing, China; and Okayama, Japan.

In testament to this collaborative creative spirit, one of the first ways the UNESCO designations have come together has been through a year-long piece of work titled 'Real Contentment', a cross-cultural exchange with Nanjing in China named after a poem by Nanjing-born Han Dong who was part of the project.

Working in both cities, artists including a Forward Prize shortlisted poet, two award-winning TV and script writers, one of China's most revered poets, a founding member of the Nanjing Calligraphy Academy and a Programme Leader at Manchester Metropolitan University collaborated around environmental themes.

Thanks to funding from the British Council's International Collaboration Grants, the artists have worked together to create a huge wealth of work. An anthology of some of the written work is available up and down the Corridor at Manchester Poetry Library and Manchester Central Library.

Playwrights Amy Lever and Zhou Meisen developed a playscript each, drawing on the history of the forced deportation of Chinese sailors from Liverpool during World War II, developing what the producer described as "a trans-creation of the [each] other; naturally contextualised to their playwrights with different cultural, generational life backgrounds."

Poets Han Dong and Charlotte Shevchenko Knight both developed sequences of poetry based on the very different rivers in their respective cities, the Yangtze and the Medlock.

Visual artists Yao Yuan and Eleanor Mulhearn also developed work about rivers, with Yuan creating stunning paintings based on observations around the Yangtze in Nanjing, whilst Mulhearn (and Shevchenko Knight) developed relationships with an aqua-biologist expert in the history of the much less visible Medlock in Manchester, you can see some of it at the top of Oxford Road across from The Palace Theatre.

Mulhearn's sequence of "river writings", Truths and Tales of the River Medlock, depicts an urban river altered by people and industry from its origins, creating both visual and imaginative images that invoke reflection on how the environment is always man-made, especially in a place as entwined with the industrial revolution as Manchester.

Eleanor Mulhearn

Mulhearn notes in her piece that "The Medlock has been culverted over many years and will increasingly flood the city centre without extensive new measures", a clear reference to climate change. Those culverts and the omitted parts of the Medlock become the very shape of Charlotte Shevchenko Knight's poem "SPEECH ACT: a river in eight culverts". The poem's form and lineation echoes the specific shapes of eight parts of the Medlock, sometimes in curving lines.

The river is reimagined as it is reshaped, set in a context of long, historical, change: "how could this shape not be grief?" The threat to the environment is implicit:

"levees appearing to guide

the medlock somewhere

she does not want to go –

a strange palm

on the small of her back –"

Launched during June 2025's Festival of Libraries, a delegation including the artists from Nanjing were hosted on the Corridor at a spectacular celebration event in Grosvenor East Theatre, which included readings, films, live translations, an exhibition of artwork by schoolchildren in both cities, and even a visit from the UK Ambassador for UNESCO Anna Nsubuga.

Deepening inter-cultural understanding is part of the work of the Creative Cities. Real Contentment is just one shining example of the partnership ethos of the UNESCO network. Not only is it beneficial to be working closely with other cities who see the value of culture in their city from a best practice point of view; but all Creative Cities are also working with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals in mind - meaning climate action, reduced inequalities, good health and wellbeing, no poverty and above all: peace are intrinsic to all of the work that we do.

Finding ways to work together interculturally means new confluences can organically form, the artistic benefit for the city of Manchester is no meander - clearly seen from the swell of quality work that the Real Contentment project alone has surfaced.

Real Contentment was a partnership of: Nanjing Literature Centre and Nanjing University of the Arts, Creative Manchester and University of Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan University, Confucius Institute Manchester and Manchester UNESCO City of Lifelong Learning.

Jo Flynn, Director of External Affairs, Manchester City of Literature
manchestercityofliterature.com

Why Contact Matters

(Now More Than Ever)

Jack Dale-Dowd

JACK DALE-DOWD, CEO OF CONTACT, SHARES HOW THE OXFORD ROAD THEATRE CONTINUES TO BE A HOME FOR YOUTH LEADERSHIP, RADICAL CREATIVITY AND COMMUNITY, WITH A NEW SEASON THAT BUILDS PLATFORMS FOR JOY, RESISTANCE AND IMAGINATION.

Perfect Show for Rachel

When I became CEO of Contact earlier this year, the space was buzzing with a possibility I was excited to develop. Because Contact isn't just a theatre. For over 50 years now it has been a movement, a meeting point and a home. Based on Oxford Road, right at the centre of Manchester's most creatively charged corridor, we're a centre for young people's creativity, imagination and leadership. Not only within the arts and culture but in how the world could be.

This autumn, we're not just putting on shows. We're building platforms. For joy. For resistance. For identity. For celebration. For truth-telling. For laughter. For real talk. For futures that haven't been written yet.

And that's what I want to speak to in this piece, why the work we do at Contact matters right now, and what it looks like this season as we carry that mission forward.

Contact has always done things differently. We're proud to be at the forefront of championing and demonstrating youth leadership nationally. With young people shaping decisions at every level of the organisation. That's not symbolic. Our board includes young trustees. Our programming is influenced directly by young creatives. Our building, radical in its design and values, is intentionally open, collaborative and made for a new generation of artists and audiences.

But our difference isn't just in structure. It's in belief. We believe that creativity is a tool for change. That the arts should be by and for everyone, not just the privileged few. That young people are not "emerging" or "developing", but already fully capable of making bold, brilliant, world-class work, especially when given space, support and trust.

In a time when arts funding is shrinking, cultural spaces are closing and youth services are under pressure, places like Contact are more essential than ever. We're holding space, quite literally, for ideas, identities and energy that might otherwise go unheard or unseen.

This season, our programme reflects exactly what makes Contact special: it's sharp, political, accessible, joyous and totally alive.

In *Perfect Show for Rachel* we have partnered with S!ck Festival to bring audiences a truly one-of-a-kind experience, with every show being decided on the night by the titular Rachel. A theatre-loving, enigmatic, learning-disabled 35-year-old who commands the action at the touch of a button. *Perfect Show for Rachel* was developed with Rachel, to create a show on her own terms. It explores who defines artistic taste, and questions who that currently excludes.

In *See My World* we are partnering with Big People Music, working with some of our Contact alumni to present a festival of Pan African events which will see choreographers Joe Price and Kieron Simm bring together three generations of Manchester dancers to weave stories born of African and Caribbean roots. Music, celebration and a party atmosphere will fill our building, and we hope you join us for what promises to be an amazing set of events.

During *Salaam Festival* we will be exploring the future of Islamic art and culture alongside local, national and international artists of diverse backgrounds and art forms. This festival offers a unique platform to celebrate the rich tapestry of Islamic heritage while embracing bold new expressions.

Across the season, we'll also be running workshops, artist development labs and open events in our café and studio spaces. Our building is always alive, not just during showtime.

One of the most striking things about Contact is the community that surrounds it. We are proudly rooted in Manchester, but our reach is global. Artists from across the world want to work here because they know it's a place that takes risks, listens deeply and embraces experimentation. But importantly, our audiences know that too.

Whether it's a young person stepping into a theatre for the first time, a local artist testing a new idea in our studio, or a long-time supporter returning to see something unexpected, people come to Contact because they feel like it belongs to them. That's what we mean by access. Not just physical or economic access (though we work hard to make sure those barriers are broken down too), but emotional and cultural access. Feeling seen. Feeling welcomed. Feeling that the work speaks to something in your life. That can seem all too rare within the arts sector and the wider world. And it's something we protect fiercely.

Being on Oxford Road means we're in constant conversation with some of the UK's leading institutions, universities, galleries, music venues, libraries, and labs. But what makes the Corridor so special isn't just infrastructure. It's intention.

Oxford Road has long been a place of radical thought and cultural production. And Contact, sitting right in the middle of it, brings the fire of youth and imagination to that tradition. We are proud disruptors. Proud collaborators. Proud facilitators of futures that are more equitable, more creative and more innovative than what came before.

As we look to the rest of the year, my focus as CEO is clear: deepen our impact, expand our reach and continue to make Contact a place where young artists and audiences feel they can take up space, unapologetically.

This isn't just about programming. It's about purpose.

The arts will always matter. But how we make them and who we make them with and for, is what determines their power.

And at Contact, that power starts with young people. Always has. Always will.

Jack Dale-Dowd, Contact CEO
contactmcr.com

So It Goes: A Walk Through Manchester's Music DNA

There's a rich musical history running through the Oxford Road Corridor — one that has shaped, shaken, and soundtracked generations.

Over the last year we've been digging into this heritage to create a self-guided walking tour. That's meant working with tour guides, scouring the Internet, and diving into the brilliant Manchester Digital Music Archive.

The knowledge quarter has always been a natural home for live music, from basement dives to grand concert halls and everything in between. That's why festivals like Manchester Psych Fest and Punk Fest thrive alongside a stacked calendar of gigs, concerts and club nights. Looking back, the roll call is staggering. Manchester Academy alone has hosted everyone from David Bowie and Stevie Wonder to Nirvana, Queen and Lady Gaga. Just over ten years ago, punters queued in the bucketing rain for a surprise £10-a-ticket gig by none other than Prince.

The tour doesn't just look at today's venues and legendary names who have come through the city. It's an exploration of a changing landscape and how spaces shift from generation to generation. This is starkly drawn when you cross the Epping Walk Bridge into Hulme, forever known as the Joy Division bridge thanks to Kevin Cummins' photography. The Manchester you see from here today would be unrecognisable to the boys in those iconic images. As would Hulme itself, where The Beatles made their BBC radio debut at NIAMOS in 1962. The same venue was reopened in the '90s by Nina Simone. Just around the corner stood Arch Bar, where 20-year-old Amy Winehouse played her first solo gig outside London. Today, it's a block of flats.

Long before The Bridgewater Hall or Royal Northern College of Music, there was the Manchester Gentleman's Concert Hall. In 1848, Chopin himself performed there — "He is very spare in frame, and there is an almost painful air of feebleness in his appearance and gait," wrote the *Manchester Guardian* at the time. It's a recital still commemorated each year with the RNCM's Chopin Prize; there's a statue there too. The Gentleman's Concert Hall was demolished over a hundred years ago to make way for the Midland Hotel.

It's a pattern weaved throughout the history of this ever-changing city. Places mean different things to each generation. Take the Tesco Metro on Oxford Street. To some, it's just a convenient, if slightly chaotic, spot to pick up a meal deal. To others, it's a no-go, having sworn never to enter the place which was once Jilly's Rockworld and the site of their goth awakening. It was also Music Box and before that Rafters, where Tony Wilson first saw Joy Division. Before that it was Fagins. Across the road is Temple, once a public toilet and famously celebrated by Elbow as the "hole in the neighbourhood."

So it goes.

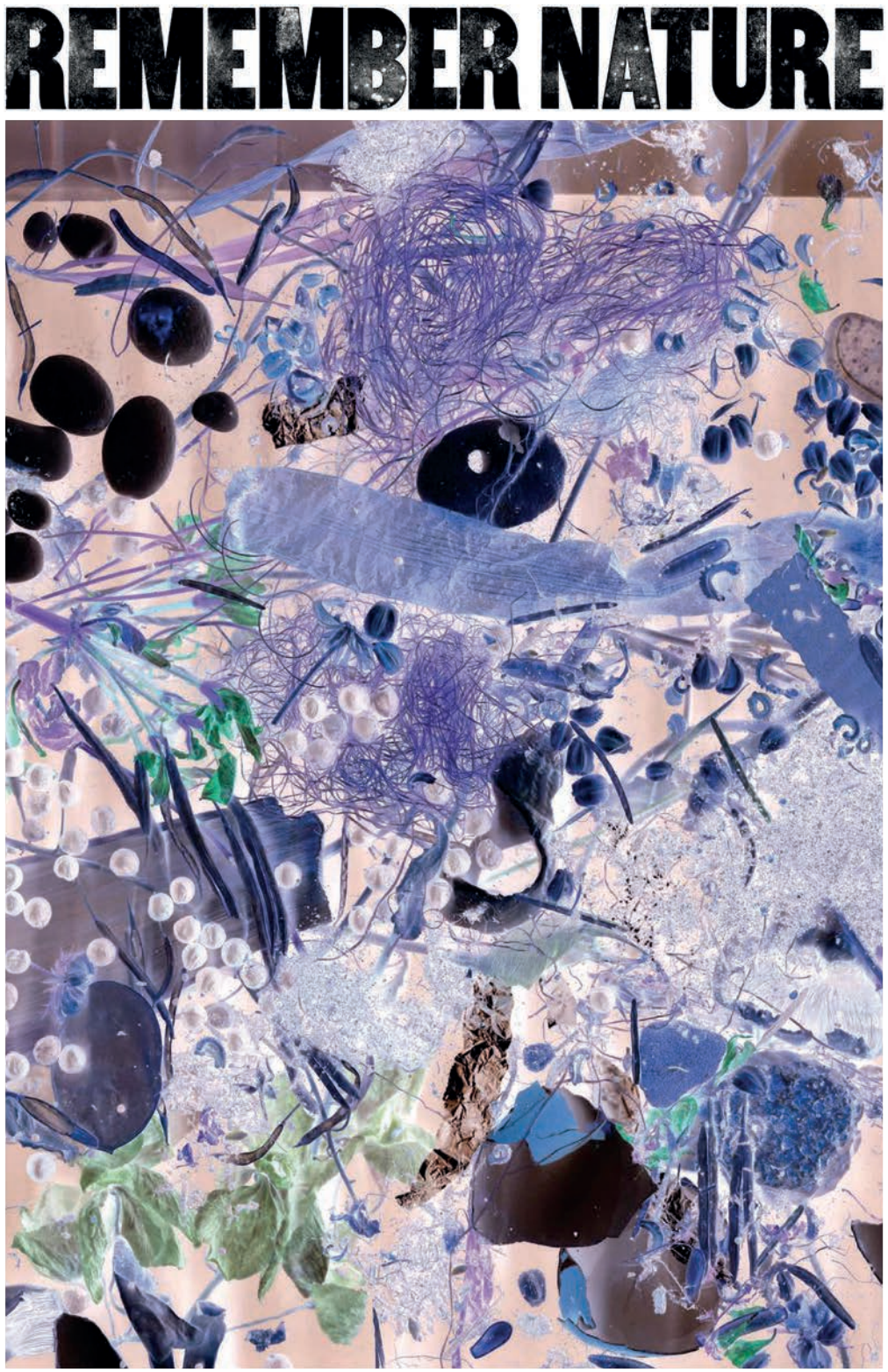
Then there's Madchester. Tony Wilson, Factory Records and The Haçienda. The club that bankrupted the socialist record label became the epicentre of a cultural movement the city has never really escaped. This part of Manchester was (mostly) at the centre of it all.

But the story didn't end there. Manchester has always been a brilliant place for musicians and music lovers, and it still is. The next generation of talent is being nurtured at the RNCM and BIMM, while future nostalgia is written every night in venues like The Deaf Institute, Gorilla, YES and Ambers. These spaces may not carry the mythology of the Haçienda, not yet at least, but for those who saw the likes of Little Simz, King Gizzard and Charli XCX here, those memories will be told and retold in years to come.

We have done our best to pull together the detail as accurately as we can. The trick is knowing what to believe. So much of Manchester's music history has been passed down word-of-mouth, impossible to trace back to a single source. As Tony Wilson probably didn't say: when you have to choose between the truth and the legend… print the legend.

From Sir Charles Hallé's orchestra to punk awakenings, acid house nights and Britpop anthems, the Oxford Road Corridor is where Manchester's musical DNA comes alive. Walk it in 90 minutes, stretch it over an afternoon with a pint or two, or simply read at your own pace.

Tour is available by scanning QR code in the picture or at oxfordroadcorridor.com/music-tour



Castlefield Gallery and artist Yu-Chen Wang's call to REMEMBER NATURE

A Nationwide Day of Artist-led Action to Stand Up for Nature

In 2015 artist Gustav Metzger put out a call, especially to art schools and students of all disciplines, to "Remember Nature" and "make a stand against the ongoing erasure of species". Tuesday 4th November 2025, marks a decade since that call, and partners across England are coming together, bringing ethics into aesthetics, for Remember Nature 2025.

With artist Yu-Chen Wang, Castlefield Gallery will extend the 2025 call to action across Manchester. Centred on artist-led and self-led walking routes (including a SPARK Network organised route initiated by artists Phil Barton and led by Jane Andrews), we will explore the natural environment in an inner-city context. The aim is to encourage our communities to really 'see' nature, connect with, and actively listen to and learn from the natural world we are a part of and call our home.

The day will be filmed and conclude with a gathering and series of activations at Hulme Community Garden Centre. Yu-Chen Wang's poignant protest poster, part of a national series of artist-designed posters, will call for action across the city and beyond. We are excited to be working with Yu-Chen and to bring Remember Nature 2025 to the region.

Helen Wewiora
Castlefield Gallery Director & Artistic Director

Creative Producer Jane Lawson talks to Yu-Chen Wang about plans for the day.

What are your plans for the Day of Action?

The main walking route will start at Manchester Art Gallery, traverse Castlefield past Castlefield Gallery, and end at Hulme Community Garden Centre. There will be walks and action taking place across the city, nationally, and online, including a live stream. The day should provide opportunity for anyone to get involved.

I hope people will join these walks and explore Manchester's landscape, one that visibly fuses layers of histories, legacies of industry, contemporary development, and the natural environment. We'll seek to discover interconnections, share reflections, and spark new ideas.

At Hulme Community Garden Centre, the invitation is to gather and see day into night over warm refreshments, exploring the question: "what can we do to support nature?" Artists and wider community groups, including Venture Arts, young representatives from Unity Radio (92.8fm), environmental scientists, activists, and many others, will gather. Digital content and platforms will extend access. Those who don't believe our climate is changing and our natural world is declining are equally invited to get involved.

What interests you most about the Remember Nature project?

It's profound for me to feel spiritually connected to the late Gustav Metzger, and after I was lucky enough to meet him some years ago. His political activism, the concept of Auto-destructive art, and Art Strike from the '70s, remain incredibly relevant.

Conceptually, Remember Nature is tremendous. Convergences happening simultaneously across the country will highlight the importance of localised initiatives in addressing global challenges, ones that require us to act creatively and collectively in a time of ecological destruction. This deeply resonates with my practice, which investigates industrialisation and Western-centric narratives of progress, with a focus on their ecological and social impacts. The climate crisis is intrinsically tied to inequality and the enduring legacy of imperialism, and the entanglements are embedded in our landscapes. As our environments become increasingly anthropogenic, I want people to remember, to remember nature.

What do you hope your event on the 4th November will achieve?

To activate an inclusive space that can unlock the power of local communities, and with whom we can develop tools to support people to navigate the challenges of our time. I hope more people will feel inspired to support nature and start to explore and adopt strategies for adaptation.
There is already so much knowledge within communities, and this event is about creating space for people to share that knowledge and feel empowered to do so.

Remember Nature 2025
Tuesday 4 November
castlefieldgallery.co.uk
rememberнature.art

Autumn ‘25

There are thousands of gigs and concerts across the Corridor each year, including free lunchtime performances at The Martin Harris Centre and RNCM, countless cinema screenings at HOME, and loads of literary happenings in this designated UNESCO City of Literature.

Follow us on socials and visit oxfordroadcorridor.com for more inspiration.

Please double-check listings before making a journey. All events are subject to change.

Exhibitions

TURNER: IN LIGHT AND SHADE

The Whitworth
Until 2 Nov
Celebrating the 250th anniversary of his birth, this exhibition explores the work of the legendary English landscape artist J.M.W. Turner.

SILENT SKIES

Manchester Museum
Until 2 Nov
Curated by Ardwick Climate Action, Silent Skies reveals air pollution’s impact through community stories, sparking reflection and action for a cleaner city.

I’VE NEVER READ ELIZABETH GASKELL

Elizabeth Gaskell’s House
Until 9 Nov
Celebrate 10 years of Elizabeth Gaskell’s House with a new exhibition from three emerging writers-in-residence exploring her legacy.

ACTING UP!

Central Library
Until 31 Dec
The story of 40 years of HIV activism in the region through archives, testimonies and films

SANTIAGO YAHUARCANI: THE BEGINNING OF KNOWLEDGE

The Whitworth
Until 4 Jan ‘26
The first international solo exhibition of works by Santiago Yahuarcani.

ROOTS IN THE SKY

HOME
Until 25 Jan ‘26
Curated by Tunji Adeniyi-Jones, this exhibition brings together works by ten contemporary artists whose practices span the United States, Europe, and West Africa.

IT REQUIRES GETTING LOST

Castlefield Gallery
1 Nov–22 Feb ‘26
A new group exhibition exploring what can be discovered when we let go of certainty and embrace unfamiliar paths.

TRICERATOPS

Manchester Museum
25 Oct–22 Feb ‘26
Journey into the heart of the Cretaceous to meet a true prehistoric icon. *See Page 04.*

YUKI KIHARA: DARWIN IN PARADISE CAMP

The Whitworth
Until 1 Mar ‘26
A visually stunning exhibition centring Indigenous, queer worlds by Japanese-Sāmoan artist Yuki Kihara.

PERFORMING TREES

The Whitworth
Until 4 Apr ‘27
A new exhibition exploring the changing role of trees in art, showcasing more than 50 works from the Whitworth’s collection.

Listings

Stage

1884

HOME
9–10 Oct
Immersive game-theatre inspired by the legacy of the 1884 Berlin Conference, an often-overlooked historical turning point for the African continent and the world.

SUNNY AFTERNOON

Palace Theatre
11–18 Oct
After two years in the West End, the Olivier-winning musical about The Kinks’ highs and lows returns.

MANCHESTER LITERATURE FESTIVAL

Various
11–26 Oct
Manchester Literature Festival celebrates its 20th year, bringing world-class writers and thinkers to inspire and connect audiences.

SEE MY WORLD HOMAGE

Contact
16 Oct
A tribute to Manchester’s dance legacy by acclaimed dance artists and choreographers Joe Price and Kieron Simms.

BREAKING THE CODE

HOME
28 Oct–1 Nov
From triumph to tragedy, get to know Alan Turing in this new production of Hugh Whitemore’s Breaking the Code.

SONGS OF THE SUFI

Contact
1 Nov
Discover the untold story of Qawwali in Songs of the Sufi. A journey through 800 years of music, history, culture and devotion. Part of Salaam Festival.

BARRIER(S)

HOME
6–8 Nov
Love transcends language in Barrier(s) – a powerful deaf-hearing love story about connection, survival, and breaking through silence.

THE SLEEPING BEAUTY

Palace Theatre
19–22 Nov
Experience all that is grand, gleaming and gorgeous with English National Ballet in this stunning version of one of the world’s favourite stories.

PERFECT SHOW FOR RACHEL

Contact
19–22 Nov
Rachel, a theatre-loving 35-year-old with a flair for fun, directs the action at the touch of a button. From barroom brawls to bourbon biscuit cabaret – this is Rachel’s Perfect Show.

CENSUS

HOME
20–22 Nov
Award-winning duo Malandra Jacks introduce you to what happens when a working-class community tells its own story.

TINA – THE TINA TURNER MUSICAL

Palace Theatre
25 Nov–3 Jan
From Nutbush, Tennessee to global stardom, Tina Turner broke all the rules. This hit musical, created with her input, tells the untold story of her life.

ORDINARY DECENT CRIMINAL

HOME
26–29 Nov
Set in the years following the Strangeways prison riot, meet recovering addict Frankie, played by renowned political comedian Mark Thomas as he enters the brave new world of a liberal prison experiment.

FREAKY FRIDAY

HOME
27 Nov–10 Jan ‘26
The new musical based on the beloved 1972 novel by Mary Rogers and the hit Disney films comes to HOME with its UK stage premiere.

GALLIFREY CABARET PRESENTS IT’S BEHIND WHO!

HOME
2–6 Dec
The Doctor has crash-landed further than they’ve ever been before… Panto Land. Oh yes they have.

RUMPELSTILTSKIN

Contact
11–31 Dec
The Big Tiny return to Contact this Christmas with a unique panto. Can Cupid outwit Rumpelstiltskin and help Prince Dierdrick find love?

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

HOME
18–20 Dec
Marley was dead... to begin with. Join Ebenezer Scrooge on a supernatural journey into the past, present and yet-to-come.

Classical

MANCHESTER COLLECTIVE: SHAKER LOOPS
RNCM
5 Oct

MANCHESTER UNIVERSITY MUSIC SOCIETY: SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA CONCERT
Martin Harris Centre
18 Oct

SETH PARKER WOODS – THUS SPOKE THEIR VERSE
RNCM
23 Oct

HALLÉ: ADAMS CONDUCTS HARMONIUM
Bridgewater Hall
30 Oct

HALLÉ: JOHN ADAMS CHAMBER SYMPHONY
RNCM
31 Oct

HALLÉ: ADAMS CONDUCTS THE CHAIRMAN DANCES
Bridgewater Hall
1 Nov

HALLÉ: ELDER CONDUCTS DVOŘÁK
Bridgewater Hall
6–9 Nov

BBC PHILHARMONIC MAHLER'S 'TITAN'
Bridgewater Hall
8 Nov

KANTOS CHAMBER CHOIR: THE WITCH TRIALS
RNCM
14 Nov

BBC PHILHARMONIC – STORGÅRDS CONDUCTS SHOSTAKOVICH
Bridgewater Hall
15 Nov

HALLÉ: TCHAIKOVSKY'S VIOLIN CONCERTO
Bridgewater Hall
27–30 Nov

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER CHORUS AND SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Martin Harris Centre
29 Nov

BBC PHILHARMONIC – STEVE REICH: THE FOUR SECTIONS
Bridgewater Hall
29 Nov

HALLÉ RUSH HOUR: NUTCRACKER SELECTION
Bridgewater Hall
4 Dec

BBC PHILHARMONIC SERENADE FOR STRINGS
RNCM
5 Dec

PROKOFIEV: L'AMOUR DES TROIS ORANGES
RNCM
7-13 Dec

THE HALLÉ – CAROL CONCERTS
Bridgewater Hall
13–14 Dec

BBC PHILHARMONIC CHRISTMAS
Bridgewater Hall
19 Dec

ALICE SARA OTT
RNCM
19 Jan

LIZA BEC: THE END TIMES
RNCM
27 Jan

Gigs

THE PHARCYDE & SOULS OF MISCHIEF
O2 Ritz Manchester
18 Oct

NEWDAD
Manchester Academy
18 Oct

MCKINLEY DIXON
YES
18 Oct

JESSICA WINTER
YES
23 Oct

YOUTH SECTOR
Deaf Institute
24 Oct

SEE MY WORLD FESTIVAL
Contact
24 Oct

THE DIVINE COMEDY
Bridgewater Hall
24 Oct

ROYA
Gorilla
29 Oct

THE LOVELY EGGS
Manchester Academy
30 Oct

NATIVE JAMES
Deaf Institute
4 Nov

CELESTE
Manchester Academy
4 Nov

BOB VYLAN
Manchester Academy
5 Nov

MOMMA
Gorilla
7 Nov

CHARTREUSE
Deaf Institute
7 Nov

DAIISTAR
YES
7 Nov

CURTIS HARDING
Gorilla
11 Nov

BILLIE MARTEN
Manchester Academy
13 Nov

ALEX G
Manchester Academy
15 Nov

THE ORCHESTRA (FOR NOW)
YES
16 Nov

LEVELLERS
Manchester Academy
16 Nov

FRANKIE COSMOS
YES
17 Nov

RADIO FREE ALICE
Gorilla
17 Nov

CABARET VOLTAIRE
Gorilla
18 Nov

DJ PREMIER & THE ALCHEMIST
O2 Ritz Manchester
20 Nov

OBONGJAYAR
Gorilla
24 Nov

FCUKERS
Gorilla
25 Nov

AMIE BLU
YES
27 Nov

KNEECAP
Manchester Academy
28-29 Nov

THE BELAIR LIP BOMBS
YES
29 Nov

LAMBRINI GIRLS
O2 Ritz Manchester
29 Nov

SUDAN ARCHIVES
Manchester Academy
4 Dec

NIGHT TAPES
YES
5 Dec

RÍOGHNACH CONNOLLY AND HONEYFEET
Manchester Academy
5 Dec

YEAR'S END FESTIVAL 2025
Various
6 Dec

EKKSTACY
Gorilla
9 Dec

QENDRESA
YES
9 Dec

DIVORCE
Manchester Academy
10 Dec

SUNFLOWER BEAN
YES
11 Dec

THE CHARLATANS
Manchester Academy
11 Dec

STEREOLAB
O2 Ritz Manchester
11 Dec

DUCKWRTH
Manchester Academy
14 Dec

BLACK GRAPE
Manchester Academy
20 Dec

PUBLIC IMAGE LIMITED
O2 Ritz Manchester
28 Dec

BYRNE'S NIGHT
YES
22 Jan '26

ANNA VON HAUSSWOLFF
YES
27 Jan '26

WESTSIDE COWBOY
Gorilla
29 Jan '26

HALF MAN HALF BISCUIT
O2 Ritz Manchester
30 Jan '26

MACHINE GIRL
O2 Ritz Manchester
31 Jan '26

Oxford Road Corridor

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Mozart
Così fan tutte
English National Opera

Friday 27—28
February 2026
The Bridgewater Hall