

Musical Routes: Audio Guide Transcript

INTRO

Hi, I'm Jo Whiley and throughout my career as a broadcaster and DJ, I've travelled the length and breadth of Britain by train exploring all the incredible musical genres, bands and artists that it has to offer. Along the way I've discovered so much great music from pop hits to dance floor bangers and hidden indie gems and I'd like to invite you to join me as we visit some of the country's most magical musical hotspots. So, whether you're sitting on a train ready to be whisked away or just planning your next adventure, sit back and relax as we uncover the stories behind the places that have helped shape Britain's rich and exciting musical history.

Birmingham

It's getting heavy in Birmingham

The next stop on our magical musical tour is Birmingham. But first, let's make a little stop off for a pop quiz. Who knows which musical genre this city can lay claim to? What do you reckon?

The answer is heavy metal. Birmingham is the home of heavy metal. If we go back to the early 1960s, when Birmingham's music scene was one of the largest and most vibrant in the country, there were over 500 bands performing in venues right across the city.

The scene was buzzing. But at the same time, Birmingham was an industrial heartland and, of course, the spirit of the city started to seep its way into the music. The heavy, pulsating sounds of machinery began to help form the sounds of the city's newest musical genre. And so, heavy metal was born.

In a city with such a lively music scene, there are plenty of places that can lay claim to being a part of heavy metal history. But perhaps no other venue has quite the same claim to fame as Birmingham's The Crown Pub. Just a stone's throw from Birmingham New Street Station.

It was here that local band Earth played their first ever gig back in 1968. The story goes that the club's promoter, Jim Simpson, saw them play and offered to manage them on the spot. Not long after, they changed their name to Black Sabbath, and one of the biggest bands in metal was born. And if you want to join the band, there's a Black Sabbath bench on Broad Street, just 15 minutes from the station, where you can sit side by side with some of the city's most famous musical sons.

But if heavy metal's not your thing, do not fear. Birmingham's musical history is as diverse as the city itself. By the 1970s, another influential venue, The Rum Runner, was making its mark on the city's music scene. Just a 15-minute walk from New Street Station on Broad Street, The Rum Runner was the venue where, throughout 1979 and 1980, new romantics Duran Duran built their fan base and started to make their mark on music history. The club's owners took the fledgling stars under their wings, becoming their managers and letting them use the club for rehearsals, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Later on, other future big names in British pop, such as UB40 and Dexy's Midnight Runners, also began their careers at The Rum Runner, with the club even becoming the setting for a music video or two, notably Duran Duran's Planet Earth, as well as spawning its own record label.

The site has since been honoured with a blue plaque to celebrate its musical and cultural heritage. Birmingham might be Britain's second city, but it's got a musical history that is second to none.

It is also the place, coming from the Midlands myself, as I do - It's the very first place that I went to see my first concert. I was taken along by a group of music fans. I'd just gone out for the day with them, and they said, "hey, we're going to see this band called The Clash" that I'd never heard of before in my life. And we headed for Birmingham, Bingley Hall, and that was my initiation into a world of music. So, Birmingham, I thank you.

So, whether you're looking to go heavy metal detecting or searching for something a bit more new wave, Birmingham is the place to be.

Cardiff

Have a nice day... in Cardiff

Cardiff is the proud capital of Wales, a country known for having some of the world's most incredible choirs and singers. Its musical reputation is so great that the country is often called the land of song. When I do my 90's anthems, DJ gigs, it's the most incredible experience standing on stage and hearing the crowd singing back and they definitely have the best voices.

It's probably not much of a surprise then that as well as being the birthplace of some famous voices from Tom Jones to Charlotte Church to Cerys Matthews, it's also the birthplace of an entire musical movement, Cool Cymru.

Cool Cymru, Cymru being the Welsh language word for Wales, was a musical and cultural movement that was born in Cardiff in the 1990s. It was kind of a response to the optimistic Britpop-infused Cool Britannia movement that was overtaking the

airwaves in other parts of the UK at the time and a way of putting Wales and Cardiff firmly on the map. This was a time when bands like Stereophonics, Manic Street Preachers, Catatonia and Super Furry Animals were proudly making their own Welsh-shaped mark on the international musical landscape, singing about life in Wales in Welsh accents and even, in the case of Super furry Animals, writing an entire album in Welsh.

For many of these bands, their careers started on Womanby Street, just a 10-minute walk from Cardiff Central Station. Here you can find a number of amazing live music venues like The Moon, Fuel and The Welsh Club, a cultural centre where some of the stars of Cool Cymru cut their teeth and made their names.

At the other end of the scale, the city is also home to the 75,000-capacity venue, the Principality Stadium in the heart of the city. It's equally easy to reach from Central Station. In fact, in 2023, Coldplay singer Chris Martin surprised fans by rocking up to the concert on a train from Manchester. He reportedly mingled with other commuters, said hello to the station staff who clocked him when he arrived before taking to the stage with the rest of his bandmates.

There are plenty of musical adventures to be had in and around Cardiff. In the Morgan Arcade, which is less than a 10-minute walk from the station, you'll find the world's oldest record shop, Spillers Records, which has been in business since the early 90s. Like the very early 90s. Like the 1890s, in fact. And it's here that Manic Street Preachers spent much of their early career, either inside browsing, looking for records or busking in the street outside.

And I'll never forget my first encounter with the band. They made such an impression then. I went on to book them for a TV show that I was working on, and they rehearsed their song all day long, the single that they were going to be playing. And then when the show went live, they performed one of their very sweary-est songs. I managed to keep my job, and they were brilliant.

And still with the Manics, the lead singer James Dean Bradfield in 2006 put out a solo album. It was called The Great Western, and that was inspired by The Great Western Railway, which is also referenced in the album's artwork. Much of the album was written on James Dean Bradfield's train journeys between his home in Cardiff and London's Paddington station.

So, if you are looking for an old record or two, or you fancy exploring music in the Welsh language, Cardiff is the place to be.

Glasgow

Glasgow, home of Scottish music history

Glasgow is an incredible city, and if you planned on dropping by for a short visit, you might want to consider extending your stay. With close to 200 live venues, plenty of independent record shops, and the history of countless famous acts to explore, you need time to discover everything that Glasgow has to offer.

This is, after all, the place that became the UK's first UNESCO City of Music back in 2008. If you're looking for a destination with a wealth of musical history, you're in the right place. Glasgow has always been home to a rich and diverse music scene, from bands like Aztec Camera, Texas, Deacon Blue in the 80s, through to Bell and Sebastian, Franz Ferdinand and Primal Scream in the 90s and 90s, and CHVRCHES and Lewis Capaldi today.

Glasgow has an incredible roster of talent who still proudly call the city home. But it's not just the bands that make Glasgow a key destination on this tour of musical Britain. It's also home to a number of venues that are worth visiting in their own right. Take, for example, the Britannia Panopticon Music Hall. It's not only Britain's oldest music venue, it's the world's oldest surviving music hall. Incredibly, it closed its doors in the 1930s, only to be rediscovered again in 1997. In recent years, it's undergone a huge restoration project and is worth stopping by.

Perhaps the most famous venue in the city, however, is the Barrowland Ballroom on Gallows Gate, just a 20-minute walk from Glasgow's central station. Named as the best venue in the UK by Time Out in 2023, it's one of the most iconic venues in the city. In fact, it's so iconic that David Bowie himself reportedly stole one of the stars off the ceiling, taking it home as a souvenir to keep in the bathroom of his Paris flat.

If you're looking for something more intimate, Glasgow has countless smaller venues dotted around the city, where you can catch the best up-and-coming new acts. Head to Nice and Sleazy on Soccer Hall Street, the Hug and Pint on Great Western Road, the Glad Café in the Southside, or the converted Church of Òran Mór in the West End, to name but a few.

If you really want to visit a venue that is a piece of musical history, then the famous King Tut's Wah Wah Hut on St Vincent Street is just a 10-minute stroll from Glasgow's central station and is the place to go to. It was here in 1993 that a group of lads from Manchester, calling themselves Oasis, were added to the bill for a gig that night. Little did they know, the legendary record label boss Alan McGee was in the crowd, prompting him to sign them to his famous creation records. And the rest, as they say, is history.

And speaking of records, if you're in the market for a souvenir, then there are loads of record shop gems dotted around the city. Head to Missing Records, a two-level store teeming with second-hand vinyl and CDs. It's located practically underneath Glasgow Central Station, so it's perfect for a final stop before heading off on your next journey.

Durham

Durham keeps producing the goods

A small but mighty destination on this musical trip of Britain is Durham.

Just south of Newcastle, the city made its mark on the British music scene with the help of one man in particular, record producer and musician, Mr Trevor Horne.

Those of you who didn't grow up in the 80s might not necessarily know the name, but you would definitely recognise the music he has contributed to over the years. After all, this is a man who is said to have single-handedly invented the 80s, and that is quite a claim to fame. Trevor grew up here in Durham and worked in a local factory before turning his hand to music, playing in a band in Durham's Top Rank ballroom, and then later as a session musician for other artists. This gave him the exposure he needed to crack the music industry, as well as the financial support to open up his own studio.

But it was as a member of the Buggles that this Durham local first made it big, with the international number one hit, Video Killed The Radio Star in 1979. It was this track that opened the door for Horne to work with other artists, as he began to focus his energies on producing, which is where he found his greatest success. He was among the first to incorporate electronic instruments into his work, creating a soundscape that came to define the 80s. It undeniably influenced many of the artists he worked with, including ABC, The Art of Noise, Frankie Goes to Hollywood, and The Pet Shop Boys, to name but a few.

But Trevor Horne isn't Durham's only well-known musical son. The 1950s had Bruce Welch, who was a core member of Cliff Richard's band, The Shadows, while the 60s also gave us Alan Price, the keyboard player in The Animals.

For those looking to catch a live set in the city today, the atmospheric Durham Cathedral hosts live music events throughout the year. Just a 15-minute walk across the river from the train station, music lovers can enjoy a range of entertainment, from choral performances to musicals and artists such as M People's Heather Small.

Why not take a trip to Durham and seize the opportunity to enjoy beautiful music in a beautiful location?

Nottingham

Notf Rocks

If you're looking for a city filled with bands of merry men and women, then Nottingham is the place to be. The live music scene is enough to turn even the sheriff of Nottingham into a music fan.

After all, it has the aptly named Rock City music venue at its core. Just 15 minutes' walk from the train station. And while bigger names might head to the Motorpoint arena nearby, Rock City is the real beating musical heart of Nottingham. It's hosted everyone from Amy Winehouse to Rage Against Machine, not to mention a few gigs from Ozzy Osbourne and The Pogues, where the riot police, quite literally, had to be called in.

As much as fans love getting up close and personal with the artists, artists also love playing there. In fact, Bastille referred to their 2011 gig there as one of their favourites they've ever played.

Nottingham is both a royal city and a student town, and it was on the 9th of February 1972, that these two worlds collided. Rock royalty Paul McCartney turned up at Nottingham University, which is a 40-minute walk or a short journey by public transport from Nottingham Station and asked for a gig to showcase his new band, who were called Wings.

The event was so spontaneous that apparently it was left up to the band's roadie to convince the venue manager that former Beatle Paul McCartney was outside looking to come in and play. Fortunately, the venue was happy to host, and a plaque outside now commemorates the debut gig of a group that was destined to fly to incredible heights.

However, it's not just big names that make a noise in Nottingham. There are some great venues around the city that are perfect for catching bands in their ascendancy. The Bodega on Pelham Street, just 10 minutes from the station, is a great place to see up-and-coming acts before they become household names. It's played host in the past to the likes of Coldplay, Scissor Sisters, Florence and the Machine and countless others.

For an entirely different vibe, there's Peggy's Skylight, an independent jazz club in the heart of the city. Its founders, Rachel Foster and Paul Dietz, are jazz musicians, and have performed as 'Me and Mr Jones' around the world. While they recognise Nottingham was an amazing city full of musical talent, they thought it lacked a fantastic jazz venue, so they set up their own.

But before you leave Nottingham, make sure you check out some of the record stores dotted around the city. Rough Trade Records on Broad Street, which is less than a 15-minute walk from the station, has a great selection of vinyl, not to mention a line-up of gigs and events that is sure to keep you coming back for more.

Or if you're looking for something a bit more low-key, then go crate-digging in Big Apple Records in the West End arcade, which is just a 14-minute walk from the station.

You certainly won't leave Nottingham empty-handed, whether that's with a new appreciation for its musical history or armed with another vinyl to add to the collection.

Coventry

Have a Special time in Coventry

The phrase 'being sent to Coventry' refers to being ignored by everyone around you, but it's hard to ignore some of the incredible sounds that have come out of this small city, and none quite so iconic as local band The Specials.

Let's go back to 1977 and take a trip to the Old Heath Hotel, the site of the band's first-ever gig, when they were then called The Automatics. Their music borrowed heavily from the laid-back sounds of Jamaican music and the passion and intensity of British punk rock. They were always determined to do things their own way. So much so, they set up their own record label 2-tone, a name that reflected their multicultural and anti-racist standpoint, which was at the very heart of everything the group did.

While The Specials instigated the ska revival movement in the UK, their label 2-tone was also responsible for kick-starting the careers of a number of other bands - groups including The Selector, The Beat, and perhaps the biggest ska band of them all, Madness.

Sadly, many of the places central to the story of 2-tone and The Specials no longer exist. The Horizon studio was built by The Specials using the royalties from one of their earliest hits, and the musicians would gather before, after and even during recording sessions in the nearby Rocket Pub.

As you exit the station, you can see a plaque commemorating both locations and reminding visitors of the truly special history of music in this city.

For those looking to experience live music today, there are still plenty of places to visit. A quick walk into the city centre from Coventry Station will find you at HMV Empire Coventry on Hartford Street, a 2000 capacity venue which features a wide range of music events across different genres. There's also Draper's Hall, which hosts a music program in the newly restored Regency Building in the Cathedral Quarter.

Visitors can also pop into the Coventry Music Museum, which showcases the city's musical heritage from Roman occupation all the way through to today's impressive array of talents Coventry lays claim to. Just over half an hour's walk or a short bus ride

from the train station, there's lots to see and do at the museum, including its own studio where visitors can try making their own music.

Who knows, maybe you'll be discovered as the next big artist to step out of Coventry.

Widnes

Go wild in Widnes

For the next stop on our journey, you won't even need to leave the railway station to discover a piece of incredible musical history. Because in 1965, on the station platform at Widnes, none other than Paul Simon wrote the lyrics to the hauntingly beautiful *Homeward Bound* as he waited for the train to take him back to London to visit his girlfriend.

At the time, he was part of Simon and Garfunkel, who together recorded and released the track going on to become an international hit and cementing the group's position as certified stars of the international music scene.

But Widnes' other claim to fame takes us a long way from the gentle melodies of Paul Simon to Spike Island, about a 40-minute walk from Widnes station. It was here, in 1990, where The Stone Roses, at the peak of their career, decided to put on a gig that would become legendary in the years to come. At the time, The Stone Roses were one of the most talked about bands in Britain, having come out of a debut album that fused 60s psychedelic rock with Acid House, known for its repetitive beats and synthesised bass lines.

Having spent the earliest parts of their career playing at raves and in warehouses, the band was looking for a venue outside the norm to host the gig that would become the defining moment of a generation. And they certainly found what they were looking for, a reclaimed toxic waste dump in Widnes.

The gig was either incredible or abysmal, depending on who you ask. Some people complained that the PA wasn't working and that their vision was impaired by a dust cloud that had formed in the dry conditions. Others considered it to have been a life-changing moment. Either way, it was a seminal gig for those who were there and those who wanted to be.

If you want to experience Spike Island for yourself, minus the dust, the mayhem and the 29,000-strong crowd, you can still visit the island. Today, you'll find open green spaces, waterways and views of the River Mersey.

So why not pay Widnes a visit, take in the beautiful scenery and walk on the ground where music history was made.

Leeds

Going live in Leeds

Sometimes overlooked due to the influence of other Northern powerhouses, Leeds is home to a thriving musical history of its own that has shaped many of the genres still heard in Britain today.

Leeds is a rock and roll city, a reputation built on a history of iconic live performances. Since 1999, the city has co-hosted the Reading and Leeds Festival at Bramham Park every single summer. Just outside the city, festival goers can pick up a shuttle bus from Leeds station and catch some of the world's biggest acts every summer. And The Who's Live at Leeds, considered by many to be the greatest live album of all time, was recorded at the University of Leeds Refectory on Valentine's Day in 1970. The recording featured the band at its most visceral, with legendary Keith Moon excelling on the drums and cemented the band's reputation as the greatest live spectacle in the world of rock.

But Leeds has also spawned plenty of his own musical heroes, from the Spice Girls' very own Mel B to Synth Pop King's Soft Cell, to the forefathers of Indie Rock, The Wedding Present and 1990's anti-establishment rockers Chumbawamba.

More recently, students William Sainsbury, Joe Newman, Gus Unger Hamilton and Thomas Stewart, who met at Leeds University, which is just a 14-minute walk from the station, came together to form the band now known as Alt-J. Their sound is a distinctive ode to the rock and roll essence of Leeds and can be heard in some of their most famous songs like Breeze Blocks, Left Hand Free and Matilda.

The Kaiser Chiefs are another band originating from Leeds. The band members, so we have Ricky Wilson, Andrew Whitey-White, Simon Ricks, Peanut and Nick Hodgson, met at around 11 years old at St Mary's Catholic High School in the village of Menston, which is the 20-minute train journey from Leeds station. To date, they've released seven albums, including the Mercury nominated Employment.

Their breakthrough song from that album, I Predict a Riot, was heavily inspired by a night out on the streets of Leeds. The story goes, apparently drummer Nick was DJing at a nightclub that got so chaotic, the club boss uttered the immortal words, I predict a riot.

Leeds has been synonymous with many scenes and is often known as the home of Goth, spawning not only Sisters of Mercy, but also The Mission. Perhaps less well known is Leeds' pivotal role in the development of UK hip hop. During the 1960s, a new wave of immigrants from the Caribbean set up sound systems in cities across the UK, and

Leeds was no exception. In areas like Chapeltown, around a mile from Leeds City Centre, sound systems gave young people the chance to hear Jamaican reggae and dancehall, and later the opportunity to experiment with the technological capabilities of turntables.

These new songs inspired early breakdancers and beatboxers, as well as aspiring DJs like George Eveline, also known as Nightmares on Wax. By 1992, the city's thriving hip hop scene led to the creation of Low Life Records, Britain's biggest hip hop label.

While London may be home to most of the UK's modern rap artists, it was Leeds that spawned much a British hip hop culture. We've gone through Leeds' rich musical history and diversity, but now let's look at where to experience this music on a night out. Aside from buskers lining the streets, finding music venues is not hard in the city. A quick walk out of Leeds Railway Station and past Kirkgate Market, you'll find yourself at the Corn Exchange, home to Released Records and KMAH Radio, responsible for championing the city's local artists.

Or walk along the river to Community Venue, Wolf Chambers, where for a small membership fee you'll get to taste the top underground hub in Leeds. For live music, visit Brudenell Social Club, less than a 15-minute walk from Burley Park Station, or smaller venues like Seven Arts and Chapel Allerton nearby.

For bigger gigs, try the O2 Academy in Leeds or first direct arena, and for an outdoors venue in the summer sunshine, Roundhay Park has hosted mega stars like Robbie Williams or more recently, Ed Sheeran. And pay particular attention to one of the best new bands and one of the most exciting live acts you can see that have come from Leeds in recent times, and that is Yard Act.

All in all, music pulses through every corner of Leeds. Enjoy.

Bristol

Welcome to Bristol. Next stop... trip-hop

As soon as you get off the train at Bristol Temple Mead Station, things just seem to move at a laid-back pace. And maybe it's this chilled vibe that influenced the birth of Bristol's biggest musical export, Trip Hop.

Born out of a mix of electronic instruments, syncopated hip-hop beats, slow tempos and an atmospheric sound, Trip Hop was hailed as the first truly UK-centric hip-hop movement. 1991's Iconic Blue Lines, the debut album by Massive Attack, created the template for the Trip Hop sound, and contained the hit single Unfinished Sympathy, regularly voted one of the greatest tracks of all time.

This was followed by seminal mid-nineties releases from Portishead and Tricky, bringing international acclaim to a genre that, just a few years earlier, had been confined to Bristol's underground scene. But Trip Hop itself has gone on to inspire other genres, with Bristolian collectives like Roni Size and Reprazent, fusing Trip Hop elements with drum and bass to create a rich, textured, new sound, winning them the 1997 Mercury Music Prize, just three years after Portishead scooped the award in 1995.

But despite being so chilled on the face of things, Bristol has a hidden energy in its underbelly, and it's this sense of energy that more recently, post-punk bands like Idols have tapped into, with their insistent rhythms and charged vocals making them a fixture on the national and international live music scene.

If you're looking to capture some of this raw and energetic spirit live, while in Bristol you can get right to the heart of things at the exchange, less than a 20-minute walk from Bristol Temple Mead station, in fact the venue was for a time managed by one of the members of Idols, and regularly hosts up-and-coming bands as they carve out a name for themselves.

If you're looking for something more intimate, then The Louisiana is your place. Just 20 minutes from the station and situated beside the River Avon, another legendary smaller venue which has hosted the likes of Coldplay, Muse and the Stereophonics over the years.

Or if being a spectator just isn't enough for you, and you're hoping to actually make it in the music industry, then BIMM, the British and Irish modern music institute, is situated at half an hour's walk from the station, and has been a launchpad for the careers of artists like George Ezra, Idols and Tom O'Dell to name but a few.

Wherever you are in this musical city, you won't have to go far to find a good tune. Bristol streets are alive with the sounds of buskers turning concrete pavements into impromptu music halls. Just take a wander down Park Street or stroll through the harbourside area, and you're sure to find some street singing that will make a stroll around the city feel like a musical adventure.

London Euston

Why don't you come on over... to London Euston

Just a ten-minute walk from Euston Station up Eversholt Street, you'll find the beating heart of London's alternative and independent music scene, Camden Town.

Camden High Street is a must-see neighbourhood for visitors to the capital. Its vibrant atmosphere is unlike any other area of London, with sprawling markets, giant 3D shop signs, an abundance of pubs and bars, and for music lovers, it has so much to offer.

Camden and its largest venue, The Roundhouse, played host to gigs from the mid-60s onwards, including a 1966 Pink Floyd concert, renowned as London's first-ever all-night rave.

In the 70s, punk had started to infiltrate Camden. While it originated on the King's Road and The Hunter Club on Oxford Street, just half an hour walk from Euston Station, it also found its way to the North London Borough.

In July 1976, New York band The Ramones played two consecutive nights in Camden at The Roundhouse and Dingwalls. With the Stranglers supporting, that weekend saw members of the Sex Pistols, The Clash, The Damned and the Pretenders in the audience. Despite some reported fisticuffs between musicians and members of the press, within just a few months those bands formed the bedrock of a burgeoning, aggressive new sound coming from London.

1977 saw the release of both The Clash and The Sex Pistols debut albums. In May of that year, The Pistols' single God Save the Queen stirred up controversy as Britain prepared to celebrate the silver jubilee of Queen Elizabeth. Despite topping the NME singles chart, the song peaked at number two on the official UK singles chart, prompting accusations that it had been fixed, a debate that has never been settled to this day.

However, Camden is also synonymous with the band Madness. Formed here in the late 70s, the Ska and Pop Band were a big part of the 2-tone revival. They started out with a weekly residency at the Dublin Castle, where their fan base continued to grow. People began queuing around the block to see them and record companies started to take notice too.

The Dublin Castle, about a 25-minute walk from London Euston train station, is still open today. It's recognised as an important venue in the early stages of several bands' career, particularly the birth of Britpop.

Camden has remained a central part of the capital's musical landscape, becoming the epicentre of Britpop in the mid-1990s. For a sip of music history, why not step inside the Good Mixer, located on Inverness Road? It was here where Blur and Oasis first sparked their notorious rivalry. And while that was all very rock and roll, Blur in fact started their career in the much more sedate setting of the East Anglian Railway Museum, playing their first gig under the name Seymour in the museum's Good Shed in 1988.

Camden also became the home of one of the country's most celebrated musicians of recent times. At the age of 20 and following the release of her debut album, Frank, Amy Winehouse moved to the area. Amy briefly worked as a barmaid in the Hawley Arms on Castle Haven Road, where she met other aspiring musicians like Pete Doherty of the Libertines. She would often perform at the Jazz Café on Parkway and became a regular at the Dublin Castle pub.

2006's Back to Black album, produced by Amy's close friend, Mark Ronson, shot Amy to mega stardom, bringing her uniquely soulful vocals to millions of new fans. Her untimely death in 2011 prompted an outpouring of grief, and a life-size bronze statue can be found in Camden Stable's market.

She also has a stone on London's Music Walk of Fame on Camden High Street, but you'll find nods to Amy all over Camden. Images of her trademark beehive hair and winged eyeliner adorn walls and doorways in the streets in tribute.

Sheffield

Looking good on the dance floor, Sheffield

Sheffield is something of an unsung hero of the British music scene, which is ironic given how many incredible musical acts this Northern city has produced.

Take for example Rock and Roll Hall of Famers, the deafeningly loud Deaf Leppard, originally known as Atomic Mass, the band formed back in 1976, with their first gig taking place in a dining hall at a school in Sheffield. Combining the power of heavy metal with catchy pop hooks, the unique sound propelled them from the smaller clubs of their hometown towards Stardom on the international stage, with hits including Pour Some Sugar on Me and Love Bites.

Before they hit the big time, Def Leppard supported another Sheffield-born band, the Human League, at The Limit venue - a huge dark basement club on West Street. The Human League emerged from the city's underground scene with their number one hit single 'Don't You Want Me' in 1981, and legend has it that Sheffield's only cocktail bar, at the time, Sinatra's Style Bar, was the inspiration for their lyric, 'You Were Working as a Waitress in a Cocktail Bar When I Met You'.

And it's important to mention that the Human League were part of the incredibly influential electronic pop scene that flourished in Sheffield, along with Cabaret Voltaire, Heaven 17, Thompson Twins, all having their roots in Sheffield.

Pulp, of course, are another one of Sheffield's proudest musical exports, having formed all the way back in 1978 when Jarvis Cocker met his bandmate Peter Dalton at the City School. Rather incredibly, it took more than a decade before they became a household name, riding the wave of the Britpop music explosion in the 1990s, and finally having their first top ten hit with the anthemic Common People in 1995.

It's been said that no musician has a stronger connection to Sheffield than Richard Hawley, former member of Pulp and also, Longpigs, and a huge influence on our next band, the Arctic Monkeys.

While Stardom came at a measured pace for Pulp, for the Arctic Monkeys, success was almost overnight. If you want to start at the beginning of their rock journey, then you need to head to The Grapes Pub on Tribbett Lane, just a 15-minute walk from Sheffield Station.

We saw the 16-year-old band members perform together for the first time in 2003, and they were brilliant right from the very, very beginning. One of those gigs in 2003, I remember going to see them and standing in the balcony and Alex Turner looking up, spotting me in the crowd, and just going, "All right, Jo", and that was it.

They released their debut album three years later, which, thanks to an incredible following of online fans, quickly became the fastest-selling debut album in British history. And can I just apologise for my terrible impersonation of Alex Turner?

Over the years, they've drawn on their hometown for inspiration countless times. Fans can visit the suburb of Hunter's Bar, which is name-checked in Fake Tales of San Francisco. It's about a 20-minute bus ride from the train station.

Arctic Monkeys are huge contributors to Sheffield's already thriving music scene, which today includes up-and-coming band The Reytons, a band with a huge, passionate following.

Also, electric nightlife with the likes of The Frog and Parrot, Cuckoo and The Leadmill, just a few names still playing indie music on a regular basis. So many reasons to pay Sheffield a visit.

London Bridge

Rock'n'Rollin' into London Bridge

London Bridge is the gateway to much of South London, an area that spawned many of the artists that have gone on to define British music today.

One of the greatest stories of how a band formed starts with chance encounter at Dartford train station, less than half an hour from London Bridge. On the 17th of October 1961, two young students were passing through Platform 2 at the South London station. Keith Richards was heading to Sidcup Art College, while Mick Jagger was on his way to the London School of Economics. Richards was carrying records by Chuck Berry and Muddy Waters, and the pair who recognised each other from primary school quickly bonded over their love of blues music.

That moment sparked a close friendship between the pair, and the following year,

they went on to found one of the most successful rock and roll bands of all time, The Rolling Stones. The Stones released some of their most recognisable songs during the swinging 60s, but were perhaps slightly overshadowed by their British contemporaries, The Beatles, for much of the decade. In the 70s however, The Stones really found their swagger, recording albums that became instant classics, such as *Exile on Main Street* and *Sticky Fingers*, while also becoming the biggest touring band in the world.

To commemorate their momentous meeting at Dartford train station, a blue heritage plaque was put in place on Platform 2 in 2015. Locals are so proud of their Rolling Stones connections that the town has now named some of its streets after the band's songs. You can wander along Stones Avenue, Satisfaction Street, Angie Mews and Ruby Tuesday Drive. Dartford Council even commissioned two life-sized statues of Mick Jagger and Keith Richards, which now proudly stand at the town's one-bell corner. The bronze sculptures were created to show Mick and Keith in movement, and they're a very good inspiration for anybody fancying themselves as a bit of a stage performer.

Travelling between London Bridge and Dartford, you'll find Welling, hometown of the prodigious Kate Bush. Growing up, Kate Bush was influenced by her parents' love of music and taught herself piano at the age of 11. It wasn't long before she began composing her own songs, and with her family's assistance, recorded demos of over 50 original creations while still in her mid-teens.

One of those demo tapes ended up in the hands of Pink Floyd guitarist Dave Gilmore, who was so impressed that he helped the 16-year-old to record a more polished tape. That ended up on the desk of EMI Records' Terry Slater, who promptly gave Kate her first recording contract. Whilst still just a teenager, she wrote, recorded and released the theatrical and utterly unique *Wuthering Heights*. It was the first single of her debut album *The Kick Inside*, which shot to the top of the charts and led to Kate becoming the first female artist to achieve a UK number one single with the self-written song. It may not be quite the wild and windy moors of *Wuthering Heights*, but East Wickham Open Space is an easy 15-minute walk from Welling Station for those who wish to tread the same ground as our heroine.

Forty-four years after that debut, Kate Bush's *Running Up That Hill*, hit number three in the US singles chart, after featuring rather prominently in *Stranger Things*, earning the singer her first bona fide transatlantic hit single at the age of 63.

Skip a few boroughs west from Bexley Heath and you'll discover the roots of another British musical genius, David Bowie, born David Robert Jones in Brixton in 1947. Bowie's musical career spans six different decades, all the way from his 1969 hit single *Space Oddity* through to his final album *Blackstar* in 2016.

During the late 1970s, Bowie released his Berlin-era trilogy of albums, recorded with producers Brian Eno and Tony Visconti, which took rock music in bold new directions, incorporating elements of electronica and krautrock to create a distinct and unique

new sound. Touring for Bowie was often complicated by a fear of flying, but he was an avid fan of train travel. He once even took on the world's longest train journey, the six-day Trans-Siberian Railway from Moscow to Vladivostok.

David Bowie sadly died on the 10th of January 2016, two days after the release of the acclaimed *Blackstar*, ensuring a fitting finale to the career of one of British music's finest minds. In the days following his death, a street art mural of the Starman, just a hundred yards or so from Brixton Railway Station, became a shrine where fans laid flowers and laid tributes to the artist.

But South London's musical lineage runs right up to the present day, with some of Britain's biggest stars today hailing from the suburb of Croydon.

Croydon is home to the world-famous Brit School where stars like Adele, Amy Winehouse and FKA Twigs honed their craft. It's also the birthplace of Michael Omari, better known as Stormzy, who broke onto the scene in 2014 with his single *Shut Up*. This was followed up three years later by the debut album *Gang Signs and Prayer*, which became the first grime record to top the UK album charts.

For anyone making the 11-minute train journey from London Bridge to Croydon, it's worth exploring the Croydon Music Heritage Trail while you're there. Opened in January 2024, the city presents a walking tour of publicly nominated and voted artists and venues that will take you through the heart of central Croydon.

It starts at the Queen's Gardens where you will see Croydon Symphony, the mural showcasing artists who made Croydon their home and inspiration and will give you the chance to learn more about Stormzy's hometown too.

Stormzy's influence on British culture is felt well beyond just the world of music, with the artist's funding paid scholarships for black students to attend the University of Cambridge and launching his own *#Murky Books* imprint, helping showcase underrepresented authors and voices from diverse backgrounds.

So wherever in South London you're coming from or going to, there's no doubt you will feel the significance of its musical history on your travels.

Edinburgh

Edinburgh's music scene is no joke

If there's one thing Edinburgh is famous for and it has many claims to fame, it's the Edinburgh Festival. For most of August the city is taken over by artists of every kind, from comedy to theatre and everything in between. And while many will talk about the fringe, for music lovers the star of the show is the International Festival, a

celebration of dance, film and music of almost every genre you can imagine. Featuring orchestral and chamber music, opera, ballet, contemporary music and of course traditional Scottish folk and the sound of Scotland bagpipes.

What's more, the whole festival takes place in the shadow of the beautiful Edinburgh Castle, just 15 minutes' walk from Edinburgh Station in the heart of the city. But don't worry, if you can't make it there in August, Edinburgh has plenty going on to keep visitors busy all year round.

If you're looking to explore the more traditional side of the city, then Sandy Bells on Forest Road, which is about 12 minutes from the station, hosts nightly live folk sessions for visitors and locals to enjoy.

Of course, no trip to Scotland would be complete without mention of the tartan-clad icons who put Edinburgh on the global music map, the Bay City Rollers. Throughout the 70s these Scottish art-throbs captured the adoration of fans across the globe with big tunes like Bye Bye Baby and Saturday Night. Anybody else have their own Bay City Rollers fan club and their particular Bay City Roller, Mine Was Woody? To this day to be honest...

While the Bay City Rollers were busy taking over the world, a different type of star had moved to the city and was getting ready for a meteoric rise. In a small flat on Drummond Street, about 10 minutes from the station, David Bowie was living with Mime Artist extraordinaire Lindsay Kemp, who reportedly taught Bowie his moves and showed him how to apply the makeup that he would wear as Ziggy Stardust. Three years later in 1973 Bowie returned to the Stardust Theatre, now called the Edinburgh Festival Theatre and played a show as Ziggy, certifying his position as one of the most otherworldly musicians on the planet.

Meanwhile, back on earth and back in Edinburgh, one of the most exciting groups of the last decade, Young Fathers, met in the bongo club in Edinburgh Old Town in 2001. A few years later, and just a few doors down the road, the group played their first major gig in the city at Sneaky Pete's on Cowgate. Since then, of course, they've gone from strength to strength and won numerous awards, including the 2014 Mercury Music Prize for their debut album Dead.

For those after something a little more alive than 'dead', Edinburgh has some great live music venues where you can catch a show. Usher Hall is just a 20-minute walk from the station and has been hosting concerts for over a hundred years. Bands of every sort have played here, including Snow Patrol, who met at university in Scotland, as well as Scottish favourite, Lewis Capaldi. For more intimate vibes, Cabaret Voltaire on Blair Street, associated the likes of Idlewild, Ben Howard and Frightened Rabbit.

So, whether you're looking to get tickets to see an incredible live band or looking to listen to the sounds of traditional Scottish bagpipes, Edinburgh simply has it all.

Oxford

Oxford - a city of radio-heads

Oxford is, of course, famous for being home to one of the oldest and most prestigious universities on the planet, and it's only a 15-minute walk from Oxford Station.

But it's not just brilliant minds that Oxford has produced. The county has produced more than its fair share of brilliant music, too, none perhaps more brilliant than Radiohead.

Before they were the huge name they are today, they went by a slightly different name. Having met while at nearby Abingdon School in 1985, they were originally called On a Friday, named after the day of the week they rehearsed.

Under this name, they played their first ever gig in 1987 at the Jericho Tavern on Walton Street, just a 15-minute walk from the train station. After taking a four-year break from live performances to attend university, the band regrouped in Oxford in 1991 and rented a house on the corner of Magdalen and Richfield Roads. During this time, they recorded a demo, Manic Hedgehog, named after an Oxford record shop. They performed again at the Jericho Tavern to play their eighth ever gig, and not long after, signed a six-album recording contract with EMI Records. At EMI's request, the band changed their name to Radiohead and went on to sell over 30 million records and changed the face of alternative rock forever.

Since the early days of Radiohead, this venue has hosted a number of other big names, too. In 1993, another young Oxford group, Supergrass, played their first ever gig there and were also immediately signed. They later went on to win the Mercury Prize for best album with *I Should Coco* in 1995, which became their label, Parlophone's biggest selling debut album since The Beatles.

One band that didn't get signed after a gig in the Jericho Tavern but still managed to make a name for themselves is Fools. They formed in Oxford in 2005, and the band played many gigs around the city in their early days, including the O2 Academy and even the HMV on Corn Market Street, which is just 13 minutes from the train station.

If you'd like to take your own tour of live music venues in Oxford, there are plenty of places to stop off, each boasting different vibes and musical styles. Check out Sandy's Piano Bar on King Edward Street, about a 20-minute walk east from the station where you can enjoy live music every night of the week, before heading to indie hotspot, the Bullingdon on Cowley Road, another 10 minutes away.

Whether you're looking for a little bit of artist history or a lot of great live music, Oxford is the best city to advance your musical education.

Peterborough

Give A Little Respect to Peterborough

A short walk from Peterborough Station lies the city's most famous building, an impressive and historic cathedral known as St Peter's Cathedral. But this small city has more to it than just breathtaking Norman architecture. Its pop pedigree is just as spectacular.

Railways have actually played a role in Peterborough's rich music history. In 1989, British rock band Queen came to the nearby Nene Valley Railway to film the video for Breakthrough. In the video the band performed the track on a platform attached to a moving train that they named the Miracle Express, which then dramatically broke through a polystyrene brick wall.

While Peterborough has several famous spaces, who once called it home, perhaps the most successful of them all is Andy Bell, one half of Erasure, who dominated the charts in the 80s and 90s. To date they've had 17 top 10 hits including Love to Hate You, Always and A Little Respect. Andy Bell grew up in the Dogsthorpe area of Peterborough but moved to London to pursue a career in music.

He spotted an ad in the music paper Melody Maker. Established songwriter seeks versatile singer. The established songwriter was of course Vince Clarke, who had formerly been a member of Depeche Mode and Yuzu with Alison Moyet. But it was together with Andy that he made history as Erasure, selling over 28 million records worldwide.

Andy Bell isn't the only musical son to come from Peterborough. The city was also home to Keith Andrew Palmer, better known by a stage name of Maxim from The Prodigy. Maxim began his career emceeing at the young age of 14. His older brother Hitman introduced him to the Peterborough reggae sound system scene, which is a genre of music particularly popular in Jamaican culture that consisted of DJs and emcees playing music from the island. In 1990, Maxim teamed up with Liam Howlett and Keith Flint to form The Prodigy, releasing hits including Firestarter and Breathe.

If you want to go to a gig or two while you're in Peterborough, there are plenty of venues to choose from. The New Theatre, which has hosted the likes of Led Zeppelin's Robert Plant, is just a 15-minute walk from the station.

And then it's an easy train journey either home or onto the next stop of your musical adventure.

Windsor

Meet music royalty in Windsor

Windsor is known for being a town full of royalty, but it's the city's musical royalty that we'll be discovering today.

First, let's introduce you to The Ricky Tick, a club night that began in 1962 at the Syat and Garter Hotel on Peascod Street. This is a club that started off strong. No more than a week after it opened, it was visited by the kings of rock and roll, The Rolling Stones. Their first ever gig with bassist Bill Wyman was here in Windsor, and they enjoyed themselves so much that they came back and reported 40 times in 18 months.

Over the years, The Ricky Tick nights became a hotbed for nurturing talent that frequently made the leap to international stardom. Soon the club nights became so popular that the organisers took to running them in as many as 27 other towns across the country, including nearby Reading and Slough, which can both be reached by train from Windsor.

But one club night wasn't enough to satisfy the appetite of local gig goers, and so, the National Jazz and Blues Festival was brought to balloon meadows by Windsor Racecourse, which is just a 27-minute walk from Windsor and Eton Central train station.

In 1966, the festival's first year in Windsor, a supergroup called Cream, featuring the already famous Eric Clapton, Jack Bruce and Ginger Baker, made their official debut. Later, the band went on to sell 15 million records worldwide.

The following year, there was another notable debut as Fleetwood Mac performed for the first time ever. They would go on to sell an incredible 120 million records over the course of their long and tumultuous career.

The National Jazz and Blues Festival continued to grow in popularity, and eventually, in 1971, it moved venues for a final time, becoming the huge annual music extravaganza, now known as Reading Festival. Enjoyed by around 90,000 revellers each year, it's seen headline acts from incredible talents, such as Nirvana, Eminem, Sam Fender and Billie Eilish.

But even musical royalty has to start somewhere, and one venue that has played host to a number of bands on their way up is The Old Trout. Although, sadly, no longer open, the venue was a small room at the back of a pub, just by the river and just a short walk from Windsor and Eton Central.

Over the years, it saw the likes of Blur, Elastica, Supergrass and The Verve grace its stage before they hit the big time. Another band that played The Old Trout before they became certified superstars was Oasis, playing there just three months before the release of their debut album Definitely Maybe in August 1994. Nearly 30 years later,

the contract for the gig was sold at auction for £4,000. In a world of musical diva demands, the band's rider was actually quite modest and included a request for sober-speaking staff to help the roadies, 24 cans of quality lager, bottled water and a good quality two-course hot meal.

Which just goes to show that even in Royal Windsor, the high kings of rock and roll had to start somewhere.

Stevenage

Who Wants to Live Forever in Stevenage

With lots of great connections to the capital, including, might I say, some wonderful train connections, Stevenage's place in musical history is assured, thanks to hosting some of the biggest open-air gigs in British history.

Just a short ride out of town from Stevenage Station, you'll find Knebworth House, a Tudor stately home surrounded by lavish picturesque gardens. But at regular intervals over the past half-century, these sedate surroundings have been transformed to welcome hundreds of thousands of people to watch some of the biggest musical acts on the planet.

To go back to where it all began, let's rewind 50 years to the first-ever Knebworth event, referred to as the bucolic frolic. The feature the likes of Van Morrison and the Doobie Brothers playing to a crowd of 60,000. This esoteric event quickly morphed into the Knebworth Festival, more than doubling in size and hosting the likes of Pink Floyd, The Rolling Stones, and Led Zeppelin during the 1970s. In the 1980s, the Knebworth Festival disappeared, and the venue became better known for hosting one-off summer spectaculars for some of the country's biggest names at the peak of their powers.

In 1986, over 120,000 fans made a pilgrimage to Stevenage to witness what was to be Queen's final gig with the legendary Freddie Mercury as frontman. A decade later, Oasis played to a quarter of a million over two nights at the peak of their fame. And not to be outdone, in the summer of 2003, Robbie Williams played three consecutive nights at Knebworth to a total crowd of almost 400,000 people.

Today, the real highlight of Stevenage's musical calendar is the Old Town Live Festival, held every summer throughout the streets of Stevenage. The family-friendly event boasts music from a wide range of genres, packed with plenty of hidden gems to discover.

And if live music isn't quite your thing, the High Street, which is just a 15-minute walk from the station, has plenty more to offer. For example, if you're in the market for a

new guitar, then check out Coda music on the high street. Who knows? You might rub shoulders with members of the Prodigy and Supergrass, who reportedly shop there.

So, whether you're looking for some live bars or a great guitar to bring home with you on the train, Stevenage is a town that hums with musical history.

London Liverpool Street

East London's life of grime

Situated on the edge of East London, London Liverpool Street is a stone's throw away from the heart of culture, art and music in Shoreditch. Bustling with music venues, pubs, clubs and recording studios, the area is full of musical talent and history.

One iconic venue in the area is the old Blue Last on Great Eastern Street, just a ten-minute walk from the station. The pub became a legendary music venue known for hosting established and upcoming acts. Arctic Monkeys reportedly broke the ceiling during their set, while Mumford & Sons, Florence and The Machine and Amy Winehouse have also graced the stage.

But Liverpool Street Station is also the gateway to East London, which in recent decades has been at the forefront in the growth of a new musical genre, Grime, considered by some to be the most influential new British music scene in decades.

In the early 2000s, an artist from nearby Bow took the building blocks of UK garage and drum and bass and created a new, darker sound, telling the real stories of the crowded and often chaotic East London neighbourhoods of their youth. It was Dizzy Rascal's 2003 album *Boy in the Corner* that catapulted the genre into the wider public consciousness. The 18-year-old's dazzling storytelling took listeners on a journey into Tower Hamlets council estates, teenage rivalries and turf wars, and Dizzy Rascal reaped the rewards in 2003 with the Mercury Music Prize.

Fellow East Londoners like Kano and Lethal Bizzle picked up the baton for Grime until a new wave of artists found mainstream success with the sound in the 2010s. Hailing from all across London, Stormzy, Skepta and AJ Tracy took Grime from its East London roots to nationwide popularity, and satellite Grime scenes can today be found across the world, as far afield as China, Australia, Brazil and Japan.

Rapid gentrification and one-off events like the 2012 Olympic Games means parts of the East End have changed beyond recognition in the past two decades. But it remains a rich tapestry of cultural influences that have spawned some of Britain's most innovative music and is definitely worth a visit.

Manchester

Introducing 'Madchester'

While nearby Liverpool may have had the Beatles, Manchester had everything else. Oasis, The Stone Roses, The Smiths, James, New Order, Joy Division, Elbow, The Happy Mondays, The Chemical Brothers, they all came from here. The city is so mad for music they even named a genre after it. Madchester.

But let's start at the beginning. On the 4th of June 1976, when the Sex Pistols performed a chaotic gig at Free Trade Hall, just a 20-minute walk from Manchester Piccadilly Station. The crowd was small that night, about 40 people, but they left feeling inspired. Some say that in a typical Mancunian way, they were inspired to do even better. And many of those from the crowd that night did just that, with audience members going on to form bands like The Smiths, The Fall, Buzzcocks, Joy Division and New Order.

It wasn't just musicians who were inspired by the gig that night, in attendance was Tony Wilson, a TV journalist who went on to become a co-founder of Factory Records, the record label behind some of Manchester's most successful acts. Riding the wave of his record label successes with New Order, Tony Wilson and the band opened the Hacienda nightclub in 1982, in a former Yacht builder's shop and warehouse on Whitworth Street West, just a 20-minute walk from Piccadilly Station.

And I remember, 1986, on the train making this pilgrimage up to Manchester to go and see New Order play at G-Mex and just worshipping at the feet of Bernard Sumner, And Julian and Stephen, and of course Peter Hook.

It was sensational. The club soon became the centre of Britain's dance music scene, pioneering the squelching sounds and bass lines of Acid House in the UK throughout the 80s and the 90s. As Acid House took hold of the city, guitar bands took note, and the likes of The Stone Roses and Happy Mondays began to combine elements of the genre with their own spin on rock music.

To describe the emerging scene, Tony Wilson himself coined the term 'Madchester' and so a genre was born.

At the same time, the Boardwalk on Little Peter Street, a 20-minute walk from Piccadilly Station, hosted local bands like The Verve and The Charlatans on their way up. In fact, it was here, on the 9th of October 1991, that a then unknown new band going by the name of Oasis played a gig, with brothers Liam and Noel Gallagher sharing a stage for the first time.

Three years later, the band's debut album, *Definitely Maybe*, became the fastest selling album in British history, while their follow-up, *What's the Story Morning Glory*,

topped even that, selling almost five million copies en route to becoming the UK's fifth bestselling album of all time.

Some Might Say - the album's first single and Oasis' first number one - featured artwork shot on the disused platform at Cromford Railway Station in Derbyshire, inspired by the song's refrain of standing at the station in need of education.

But Oasis' hysteria didn't stop there. In 1996, they went on to play to over 250,000 people over two nights at Knebworth in Hertfordshire, a far cry from the band's humble roots and Manchester's Boardwalk.

While both the Hacienda and the Boardwalk have since shut their doors, Manchester is filled with plenty of places worth visiting for Oasis fans. Why not head to Johnny Roadhouse Music on Oxford Road, where Oasis and many other musicians have been buying their instruments for over 50 years? The shopfront itself has had its own moment in the spotlight, as animated versions of the band walked past it in the video for the Oasis song The Master Plan.

More recently, the Manchester music scene has continued to thrive, and in 2018, the city was voted the rock and indie capital of the UK, thanks to its abundance of small and medium-sized music venues, places like The Academy and Band on the Wall on Swan Street, both under half an hour from the main train station, have hosted an eclectic mix of artists over the years. While Night and Day Cafe, located in a former chip shop on Oldham Street, has seen bands like Elbow, Arctic Monkeys and Manic Street Preachers pass through its doors on the way to stardom.

You don't even have to venture further than two minutes from Manchester Piccadilly Station in order to experience places that have directly inspired hit songs. Exit the station onto the road aptly named Station Approach, and you'll be walking in the footsteps of Elbow singer Guy Garvey, who was inspired by the street when writing their song, Station Approach.

There's so much to Manchester's music scene that it's almost impossible to fit it into a short guide like this. My advice to you is to get out there and explore everything the city has to offer, whether you're an Oasis fan, a live music fan or you just want to go for an adventure, Manchester is a city you'd be mad to miss out on.

Doncaster

There's only One Direction to Doncaster

If you're a pop fan who wants to visit a destination off the beaten track, somewhere with a bit of musical pedigree, then there's only one direction you should go. See what we did there? It's only Doncaster: home of pop heartthrob, Louis Tomlinson.

Louis was born and raised not far from Doncaster Racecourse. I have such fond memories of Doncaster Racecourse, doing 90s anthems show, and the rain pouring, the heavens opening, and everyone picking up and using chairs as umbrellas. And the crowd was immense.

Back to Louis. Louis' family still reside in Doncaster, but his musical journey began in the Hall Cross Academy, just 20 minutes from Doncaster Station. Here, he was cast as the lead Danny Zuko in the school's performance of Grease the Musical. This was said to have given him the confidence and the determination he needed to audition for the X Factor back in 2010.

It was during X Factor that he met the other members of what would become One Direction. Despite coming third, they immediately signed to Simon Cowell's label, Syco Records, and what followed can only be described as world domination. They went on to become one of the bestselling boy bands of all time, with more than 70 million records sold and over 200 music awards, including several prestigious Brit Awards.

In July 2017, Louis released the solo single Back to You, which was filmed at Doncaster Rovers FC Stadium, a 30-minute walk from the station.

Doncaster is also home to music legend Tony Christie, well known for his beloved Is This the Way to Amarillo. The song had moderate success when it was originally released in 1971, but when re-released as a comic relief single in 2005, it became a sensation. It topped the charts in both the UK and Ireland.

In 2022, Tony returned to Doncaster for a show on home turf at a three-day music festival, DN One Live. Celebrating the 50th anniversary of David Bowie's iconic Ziggy Stardust gig at Top Rank nightclub, the festival took place in Sir Nigel Gresley Square, a short 10-minute walk from Doncaster train station.

Speaking of festivals, if you're thinking about visiting Doncaster in the summer, you will not want to miss the fantastic Askern Music Festival, which brings together local acts and bigger talent on the same stage.

Or if you're looking for something a little bit more intimate, The Dome just outside the city regularly hosts live gigs. For something other than live music, the Danum Gallery Library Museum, just a 10-minute walk from Doncaster station, often hosts exhibitions and events related to local history and music. It's a great place to learn about Doncaster's musical past, plus it's also the home to the Doncaster Rail Heritage Centre.

So, whether you're looking for the way to Amarillo or just seeking one direction or another, Doncaster is home to a lot more music than you might expect.

Newcastle

There's a Sting in the tale of Newcastle

Newcastle. It's home to what has to be one of the most musical accents in the country, so it'll come as a little surprise to hear that it has not only produced some incredible musical talent but is also home to a number of world-class venues and backstories. Just head 20 minutes from the station, for example, and you'll come to the NX Newcastle, which in recent times has hosted gigs from famous acts like Calvin Harris, The Libertines, Sam Fender.

But back in 1963, when the venue was known as the Majestic Ballroom, it hosted a little-known band called The Beatles for their first ever visit to Newcastle.

Another influential venue in the history of the city was Club a'GoGo on Percy Street in Newcastle's Haymarket, a still bustling part of the city just over 15 minutes from the main station. It was here that local act The Animals, who had a hit with the song House of the Rising Sun, had a residency in 1962. The venue was demolished in the late 1980s and the Eldon Garden Shopping Mall now stands in its place. So next time you're enjoying some retail therapy in the city, you can do so knowing the ground you're walking on was instrumental to Newcastle's music scene.

But now back to The Animals, and they were said to have played five-hour sets as they honed their craft, and all the effort obviously paid off. They soon found success both in the UK and abroad. And it was while on a tour of the US that they discovered a gifted guitarist by the name of Jimi Hendrix. You heard of him?

Impressed with his talents, the band paid for his ticket and flew him all the way from New York to Newcastle for his first UK tour in 1966. The following year, Jimi returned to the UK and made a beeline for Club a GoGo.

This time, a 15-year-old named Gordon Sumner was in the audience. He was in awe of the virtuoso guitarist and was said to have left the venue with his ears ringing and his worldview altered. A former teacher, he was given his nickname, Sting, due to his black and yellow stripey jumper. He formed a band called The Police, where he made a big impact on the UK and the international music scene and is still going strong today.

If, however, you're looking for some more current music, Newcastle has that in abundance too. Sam Fender, for example, from North Shields, a 20-minute tram ride from the city, is often described as the North's Bruce Springsteen, and his career has gone from strength to strength. But he's never forgotten his roots, and in 2023, he came back to Newcastle for a series of homecoming gigs at St James Park, the football ground of his beloved team, Newcastle FC, which is only a 14-minute walk away from Newcastle station.

In January 2024, Sam teamed up with Noah Kahan for a new version of Noah's track, Homesick. Sam's contribution to the song refers to the static cranes that he remembers from his childhood in North Shields. The influence of his birthplace on his music is undeniable.

There are also a few artists from the region who have come to stardom via completely unconventional routes. Take Anthony McPartland and Declan Donnelly, now better known as Ant 'n' Dec, and who are arguably the biggest presenters on British TV. The pair first met as child actors on Byker Grove, which led them to a short-lived musical career. With their hit, Let's Get Ready to Rumble in 1994.

Eight years later, in 2002, reality TV show Popstars the Rivals attracted an unknown Geordie, Cheryl Tweedy, who went on to form part of one of Britain's most successful girl groups, Girls Aloud. She embarked on her solo career in 2009, going on to become the first British female solo artist to have five number one singles in the UK.

Whether you're looking to hunt down a few old tunes or uncover something new and brilliant, Newcastle is the musical angel of the North with something to suit everyone's tastes.

Leicester

Leicester's brimful of talent

Leicester's musical history is as diverse as the city itself, with different music styles filling the streets from sounds of the Caribbean at the largest carnival outside of London to the soothing classical symphonies at De Montfort Hall, a 12-minute walk from Leicester station.

I remember seeing Depeche Mode when they very, very first started out at De Montfort Hall, one of my first gigs.

But if you had to choose one band to represent the city and its mesh of influences, then you'd be hard-pressed to find a better choice than Tjinder Singh's, Cornershop, a band that mixed uniquely Indian sounds with elements of dance and indie rock. Their first gig was held in 1991 at O'Jay's on Gower Street, a 20-minute walk from the train station. But their biggest success came as their track, Brimful of Asha, caught the ear of Norman Cook, who remixed it in his now famous Fatboy Slim style.

The song went on to become a huge success. It went to number one in 1998 and went double platinum in the process. But Cornershop weren't the only big name to come from the city. After all, Leicester produced the bass player for one of the most significant names in rock royalty, John Deacon of Queen. John was born in Leicester

in 1951 and moved with his family to the suburb of Oadby in 1960. He played in local band The Opposition until 1969, when he left the city for London to study electronics.

It was there that he met his bandmates Brian May, Roger Taylor, and of course, Freddie Mercury. He became part of one of the biggest bands in the world, wrote some of the most iconic hits of the 70s and the 80s, and helped change the face of music forever.

Another local band to have achieved international success are Kasabian, who formed while at college in Leicester, 1997. The following year, they played their first ever gig at the Shed, a venue on Yeoman Street, just a ten-minute walk from the station, which has also seen the likes of Arctic Monkeys and Ellie Golding pass through its doors on their way to stardom.

That Kasabian gig set the stage for them to build a stellar career that has included six number one albums. There are plenty of venues in Leicester to catch live acts while you're in town. The previously mentioned De Montfort Hall has seen some of the biggest names of every genre grace its stage over the past 100 years.

As the home of the Leicester Symphony Orchestra and having hosted London's Philharmonia Orchestra for more than 20 years, it has always hit the right note with classical bands, but it's also seen more than its fair share of pop and rock idols pass through its doors. The Beatles, Led Zeppelin, The Clash, The Rolling Stones, and David Bowie have all made their mark on Leicester from here.

For something on a smaller scale, check out The Donkey on Wilford Road, which calls itself a small venue with a big reputation, or the upstairs stage at Firebug on Milestone Lane. And if you fancy a festival, then there's the Caribbean Carnival in August or the Leicester International Music Festival, featuring classical music in September, a five-minute walk from Leicester train station.

Whatever you're looking for and whatever you're hoping to do with such a melting pot of musical styles, Leicester really is a music lover's dream.

York

Form a Bond with York

The historic city of York is filled with incredible architecture and beautiful old buildings, but it's also home to a few hidden hotspots for artists looking to make their mark on the city.

Let's begin our tour of the city at Kennedy's, found in the hub of York's historic quarter, Little Stone Gate, conveniently a 15-minute walk from York train station. Kennedy's hosts all sorts of live music, from live jazz to acoustic sets, dance floor fillers and open

mic nights. Three minutes' walk around the corner you can also find Dusk, a live venue that's sure to keep you dancing all night.

For those after something a little more electric, why not head a bit further afield to the Fulford Arms, a grassroots music venue that regularly hosts up-and-coming bands. Just a 15-minute bus ride from the train station or a similar walk from the University of York campus.

One band from York that did manage to navigate the path to fame was Shed Seven, an alternative rock band who became part of the iconic Britpop scene in the 90s, earning a reputation for their raucous live shows. They wrote unapologetically honest and infectious music, reflecting their deep connection to York's historic music scene. And while their initial fame in the 90s earned them 15 top 40 singles, they recently enjoyed a resurgence. They finally secured their first number one in the UK charts in January 2024, some 30 years after their debut release, with a new album ironically entitled *A Matter of Time*. Hats off to you, Rick Witter, hats off.

York is also the home of John Barry, the Oscar-winning composer who wrote the James Bond theme tune with Monty Norman. His rather grand family home is now the Pavilion Hotel, about half an hour bus ride from the city centre.

If on your visit you're looking for the latest releases or hunting down a few classics, then there are plenty of record shops well worth checking out. FortyFive Vinyl Café on Micklegate is a unique mix of a café and a record store. An easy 15-minute walk from the station, you can listen to music with a drink in hand, all while searching for that special record. And if you prefer something a bit more traditional, then drop by Earworm Records, 10 minutes further on in Powell's Yard, which has an excellent mix of new and second-hand records from every genre you can think of.

So, whether you're looking for beautiful architecture, great live music or eclectic record shops, you'll be sure to find them all in York.

Stoke

Let Stoke Entertain You

If you want to be entertained, then Stoke is the place to be. The city is the hometown of some of the biggest names in pop, rock and metal, including Mr. Entertainer himself, Robbie Williams.

Robbie was born in Stoke in 1974 and went to St Margaret's Catholic School in the suburb of Tunstall. One day, his mother saw an ad for auditions for a boy band and, having seen her son's talent for performing, encouraged young Robbie to try out. He

went along and, at just 16 years old, Robbie became the youngest member of one of Britain's biggest boy bands, Take That.

He spent five years with Take That before beginning his incredibly successful solo career with huge hits like Angels, Rock DJ and, of course, who could forget Robbie imploring crowds to Let Me Entertain You.

But Robbie isn't the only Entertainer to hail from Stoke. Saul Hudson, better known as Slash from the iconic 90s rock band Guns N' Roses, was raised in Blurton, a small Stoke suburb, a 30-minute walk from Longton train station. His American mother worked as a costume designer, whereas his father was an English artist. His mother's work led the family to move to Los Angeles when Saul was around five years old but Stoke always had a place in Slash's heart. Later, he said, "I do miss living in England, especially Blurton, because that time was so sweet to me".

Slash made a further nod to his childhood home when he released his second live solo album called Made in Stoke in 2011. The album was recorded at Stoke's Victoria Hall in July 2011, a venue that's now established itself on the country's touring circuit and regularly hosts famous faces. It consistently attracts big names in both music and comedy to Stoke on Trent, so at just a 25-minute walk from the station, it's worth seeing what's on during your visit.

The ace in Stoke's metal music scene is, of course, Lemmy, bass player and vocalist for Motorhead. Lemmy was born with the much less rock and roll name of Ian Fraser Kilminster, in the Burslem area of Stoke-on-Trent. Recently, plans have been approved for a statue of Lemmy to be built in the marketplace in the town, a 30-minute bus journey from Stoke-on-Trent's station. Burslem is now set to become a pilgrimage destination for the band's fans, as well as an opportunity for others to learn more about his life and work.

As well as metal, Stoke has soul and is considered to be one of the birthplaces of Northern Soul, a music and dance movement that came out of the British mod scene in the late 60s and early 70s. In fact, the city was such a mecca for Northern Soul fans that for a time it was affectionately known as Soul on Trent. Back then, fans from all over the country would make the trip to visit famed nightclub, The Torch, which was credited with birthing the modern all-nighter.

Sadly, the club has since closed its doors, but the site is still marked by a plaque in Hose Street in the Tunstall area of Stoke, a 20-minute walk from Longport train station.

You can still experience the Northern Soul experience today at the famous Kings Hall in Stoke, at their Northern Soul all-nighter event, conveniently located less than a 10-minute walk from Stoke-on-Trent's railway station. This same venue is where The Beatles first played in Stoke before their first album was even released, and singles such as Love Me Do and Please Please Me were chart hits.

If your soul is searching for something a bit more modern, the cultural quarter in the city centre houses the Regent Theatre, a beautifully restored art deco theatre offering everything from western musicals to national ballet productions.

Live music can also be found at a number of venues throughout the city, including the Sugar Mill and The Underground, both of which are walkable from the Stoke on Trent station and host big-name bands alongside up-and-coming artists from the local scene.

Whatever you're looking for, Stoke is a city that won't fail to entertain you.

Liverpool

Liverpool: music eight days a week

Liverpool will always be the home for young lads named John, Paul, George and Ringo, a group of friends who formed a band and went on to change not just music, but the world. Welcome to the home of the Beatles.

The band began in 1956 when John Lennon aged 16 and a few of his friends from school played in a skiffle band called The Quarry Men. While performing at a church fête with the group, John met Paul McCartney and Paul was later asked to join the band as a rhythm guitarist. A year later, Paul invited his friend George Harrison to watch the band play and audition. John thought that George was too young, however after several months of persistence, he joined as their lead guitarist.

Fast forward to the early 60s and John's schoolmates had left, and John, Paul and George were on the hunt for a full-time drummer. Pete Best joined for a brief time, however in August of 1962 they were introduced to Ringo, changed their name to the Beatles and the rest was history.

In Liverpool, much of that history began in The Cavern Club on Mathew Street, just a 10-minute walk from Liverpool Lime Street Station. It was here that the Beatles honed their live performances, performing regular lunchtime gigs. At one of those concerts, they were spotted by Brian Epstein, a local businessman who would become their manager and help them secure their first recording contract.

The band went on to become one of, if not the, biggest band the world has ever seen, pushing boundaries and selling tens of millions of records, with hits including Eight Days a Week, Let It Be, Yesterday, A Hard Day's Night - also the title of their movie.

Fun fact for you, the opening scenes of the comedy film were actually captured at London's Marylebone station.

Many of the songs referenced people and places from around Liverpool, and today you can still visit the likes of Penny Lane, Strawberry Field and even Eleanor Rigby's Grave in St Peter's Church, which are all within walking distance from Liverpool Lime Street Station.

But Liverpool's place in Britain's musical history doesn't just rely on The Beatles. In fact, it could be argued that The Beatles would never have found this success were it not for the rock and roll phenomenon that became known as Merseybeat. Liverpool had always been a musical city, but it was the import of American rock and roll records via the city's docks that really changed the sonic landscape. The locals hungrily embraced the new sounds coming from across the Atlantic and gave it their own Liverpoolian stamp. Soon the city was heaving with musicians and sounds were being exported back to the US in what was nicknamed the British invasion.

Acts like Jerry and the Pacemakers, Cilla Black, the Searchers became household names and Merseybeat, along with the Beatles, of course, helped place Liverpool firmly on the musical map.

In fact, in 2015 it was designated as a UNESCO City of Music and in 2003 won a Guinness World Record for producing the most number one hit singles on the UK chart per head of population.

If you want to explore another more modern side of the city's music scene, then head down to Erics or so on Mathew Street. This tiny basement club played host to punk and reggae acts in the mid-70s, many of which went on to become hugely successful. Post-punk acts like Echo and the Bunny Men, Teardrop Explodes, and electronic experimentalists, orchestral manoeuvres in the dark all played here early on their path to stardom.

And from here you don't have to go too far to find another monument dedicated to the history of Liverpool's music scene. Mathew Street is also home to the Liverpool Wall of Fame, which is about a ten-minute walk from the station and features every number one hit single from a Liverpool-based musician since 1952. There are 54 in total.

The wall was unveiled in 2001 by Lita Roza, who topped the charts with How Much Is That Doggy in the Window in 1953, making her not only the very first Liverpoolian to have a number one single, but the first woman to achieve a number one hit in the UK chart.

And if after all that you feel like there's still more music you want to explore, then there are plenty of other options to whet your appetites. You can head to the British Music Experience, the UK's only museum dedicated to celebrating British music, in the Cunard building on Liverpool's waterfront, a 20-minute walk from Liverpool Lime Street station.

Or to find out what a day in the life was like for the Fab Four, take the Not-So-Long Winding Road to the Beatles Story Museum in the Britannia Vaults also on the waterfront.

So, whether you're a day tripper or here for eight days a week, Liverpool is a city that has plenty to keep you entertained.

Carlisle

Carlisle calling!

As far as train journeys go, trips to Carlisle are some of the most beautiful in the country. As you enter the city, you're surrounded by spectacular natural beauty, a rich cultural history and of course a fascinating musical history too.

As you leave the station, turn on to English Street. Head ten minutes up the road and you'll come to the Crown and Mitre Hotel, a true Carlisle institution with impressive Edwardian style features, log fires and a sweeping open staircase.

But as beautiful as it may be, it hasn't always been as welcoming to strangers as it is today. Back in November 1963, a famous band was playing at the Lonsdale Cinema. Having finished their gig and thirsty for a drink, the band stumbled upon the Crown and Miter and decided to head in. However, legend has it that they stood out like a sore thumb in the fancy institution and within five minutes were asked to leave.

But John, Paul, George and Ringo didn't hold it against the town and The Beatles returned later that year to such a wild reception that they had to be smuggled out of the cinema in a post office van.

A few years later in 1967, the Lonsdale Cinema also played host to another superstar on the music scene, Jimi Hendrix. He wasn't a household name at that point and was fourth on the bill, alongside some other incredible names from the era. And when we say incredible names, Engelbert Humperdinck, also Cat Stevens.

While the venue, previously down the road from Carlisle Station sadly no longer exists, it remains in local's memories as one of the beating hearts of Carlisle's musical history.

The Cosmopolitan Ballroom, often known as The Cosmo, was another well-known venue in the 60s in Carlisle. It was here that Pink Floyd performed in July 1967. The Who also were fans of the venue and performed there three times between 1966 and '69. Over the years, The Cosmo also hosted rock bands like Deep Purple, The Yardbirds and The Sweet, who had a number one hit with Blockbuster.

If you fancy a festival with a beautiful backdrop, then don't miss out on Kendal Calling. Just take a 15-minute train journey from Carlisle to Penrith and you'll find the breathtaking grounds of Lowther Deer Park. What originally began as a small two-day festival for 900 people in 2006, has grown to become one of the highlights of the festival calendar, with bands like Stereophonics, Kaiser Chiefs, Foles and Elbow playing over four days to enthusiastic crowds of up to 25,000 people.

For a more intimate night out, the old fire station is Carlisle's main entertainment hub. A 10-minute walk from the station, with perhaps the best sound system in the town today, hilarious comedy shows, tribute acts and drag performances, there is an event for everyone.

With so much music and history to offer in a beautiful part of the country, it's definitely worth a visit.

London King's Cross / London St Pancras

Raving in King's Cross / St Pancras

Welcome to London. Not only the nation's capital, but one of the world's premier clubbing destinations. Much of Britain's dance and rave scene, including its iconic clubs and the very first superstar DJs, can be traced back to the area around King's Cross.

To see where it all started, we have to go back to the late 1980s, when the warehouses behind London's King's Cross station, which had been hubs of activity during the glory days of steam trains, lay abandoned and run down. At this time, legislation around raves was changing, with the large-scale parties fuelled by electronic dance music, which tended to go on into the early hours and beyond, being pushed away from open-air venues towards indoor locations. So, there was a growing appetite for large underground spaces that could host these huge events, and the former Coal Drops Yard area of King's Cross fitted the bill perfectly.

Prior to the regeneration of Coal Drops Yard, one of the former warehouses was home to Bagley's. I can hear your nostalgic feels, as I say that. A photography studio that photographer Tony Askew was reportedly renting for £3 a week. As Tony was struggling to make ends meet, in 1989, his son asked him if he could put on a party at the studio. He agreed, and then 2,000 ravers streamed through the door, each handing over a handsome £20 a head. And that was that. The studio was swiftly converted into a nightclub, with Tony as manager.

Bagley's went on to become London's biggest nightclub in the early 1990s, and the centre of the capital's rave music scene. It gradually expanded to host five room dance spectacles like The Mud Club, Freedom, Pushca and World Dance, with a

capacity of 2,500 revellers. Within its walls, punters could lose themselves in the music and dance like no one was watching, sharing a euphoric, transcendent, and some say, almost religious experience.

When it finally closed on New Year's Day 2008, Bagley's had played host to almost 20 years of nightlife, with millions of clubbers having poured through its doors. Today, where Bagley's once stood, you'll find the regenerated Coal Drops Yard, a brilliant destination, just a five-minute walk from Kings Cross station.

For families looking to cool off kids in the splash fountains, fashion seekers looking to buy their next piece from a multitude of small boutiques, or friends wanting to get together over a drink, the structure of the warehouses also remains the same, so ravers can still retrace their steps to some of the most iconic nights in dance music.

Just opposite Bagley's, another nightclub opened in 1993. The Cross, started by brothers Billy and Keith Riley was originally opened as a pre-club drinks bar next to Bagley's, but the local council ended up granting the Riley brothers a full club licence - so they started hosting nights of their own. The club saw many famous DJs become residents, including Danny Rampling, Nigel Dawson, Norman Jay and Judge Jules himself. Closing on the same day as Bagley's in 2008, The Cross actually reopened as a pub in 2022, close to the site of the original club.

The Riley brothers didn't just open The Cross. In 1999, Keith Riley opened Fabric Nightclub in Farringdon, around a 30-minute walk from Kings Cross station, or just one stop using City Thameslink. Occupying the former site of the Metropolitan Cold Stores, a meat storage cellar, Fabric's cavernous underground space could hold up to 1,600 revellers, and quickly earned itself a reputation for shuddering bass and hedonism. The club has garnered a reputation as one of the world's premier nightspots, with DJ Magazine anointing it the world's best nightclub in both 2007 and 2008.

So, whether you're raving at Elephant and Castle's Ministry of Sound, Hackney's Colour Factory or Vauxhall's FIRE, just remember it all started here, in the former industrial wastelands around Kings Cross.

But if raving isn't your cup of tea, another stalwart of the London Kings Cross and St Pancras music scene comes in a somewhat different form - and that's the twin upright black pianos on the station concourse itself. One was originally donated by Sir Elton John and has since been played by thousands of people passing through the station, including some famous names. Jools Holland, Tom Odell, Alicia Keys and Rod Stewart have all made surprise performances on the St Pancras piano, and I'd highly recommend keeping an ear out for it as you make your way through the concourse because you never know what piece of music you'll hear or who will be playing it.

Watford

Follow the Yellow Brick Road to Watford

Our next station on this musical train tour is Watford, home of Watford FC, and while football is not the theme for this guide, it's a town where football and music are inextricably linked.

Let's take a journey to nearby Pinner, a half-hour bus journey from Watford and the birthplace of one Reginald Kenneth Dwight, a singer whose real name you might not recognise immediately, but whose stage name is known the world over, Sir Elton John.

As a child he attended Pinner County Grammar School, now Pinner High School, which also saw several other famous artists pass through its hallways, including Simon Le Bon, lead singer of Duran Duran.

While his artistry eventually took Sir Elton around the world, a part of him, the footballing part in particular, has stayed closer to home. Always a devoted Watford fan, when he was presented with the opportunity to get on the pitch at the grounds on Vicarage Road - 20 minutes' walk from the station, he grabbed it. Although it wasn't football, he was playing, but a concert to a crowd of 30,000 fans.

In 1976 his love affair with the town took a new turn as he actually ended up buying the football club, becoming its chairman and president and taking the team from 92nd in the Football League to, at one point, the very top.

Sir Elton stepped down as chairman in 2002, however he remained the club's Honorary Life-President and as big a supporter as ever.

And it's fair to say Watford returns the love. Not only does it proudly feature two giant murals of Elton, one on the side of Watford Library, just a 12-minute walk from Watford Junction Station, and the other at the football stadium, and rather brilliantly, at the end of 2023, the town renamed Occupation Road to Yellow Brick Road, of course, after his classic hit.

But Watford isn't all about football. To explore more of the modern-day music this town has to offer, you could head to the Watford Colosseum, a historic venue which is a mere 12-minute walk from the station, hosting various concerts by both local and international artists contributing to Watford's cultural vibrancy. Additionally, the town offers live music experiences at lots of local pubs, such as The Horns, so you're sure to find somewhere to pop into during your visit.

Back to the stars, and the other famous musicians who grew up here, and in the wider Hertfordshire area too. Geri Halliwell of the Spice Girls was born in the town and grew up on Jubilee Road, a 20-minute walk from Watford Junction. While George Michael and Andrew Ridgley met at nearby Bushey Meads School, just outside Watford in the little town of Bushey.

It was here the two friends formed a short-lived ska band called The Executive before becoming Wham! and releasing monster hits such as Wake Me Up Before You Go Go, and Club Tropicana.

But for many, Wham! will be known for its festive classic, Last Christmas, which George supposedly wrote in his childhood bedroom in Hertfordshire. When it was released in 1984, it reached number two in the charts and has hit number two on several occasions since, but strangely never number one at Christmas. That all finally changed at the end of 2023, when the song finally secured the coveted Christmas number one spot for the first time.

With so much rich musical heritage to uncover, make sure you add Watford onto your music destinations bucket list.

Southampton

Re-re-winding Southampton's music history

Okay, so let's re-rewind to when a major star began to emerge from the coastal town of Southampton. It was in the late 1990s that Craig David hit the scene with his mix of Garage and classic R&B sounds.

Walk 20 minutes or so from Southampton Central Station and you'll find Holyrood estate where the singer grew up. During his childhood, Craig David watched his father play bass in a local reggae band, and by the time he hit his teens Craig was joining his dad at local dance clubs. The club DJs often let him get on the mic, which gave him the confidence he needed to help develop his career as a singer and MC.

His first encounter with fame came in the 90s when he joined forces with Mark Hill and Pete Devereux, a duo otherwise known as The Artful Dodger. They first met while working on a project at a youth centre linked to Southampton Football Club, about a 20-minute walk from Southampton train station. But it wasn't until a couple of years later when they needed a vocalist for some tracks, when Devereux and Hill enlisted the young singer's help.

The Artful Dodger also ran their own label, and it was through this that they put out their first big hit, *Re-Rewind*, featuring the young Craig David. The single was released in November 1999 and made the top 10, narrowly missing out on the number one spot to Cliff Richards' *The Millennium Prayer*. Nevertheless, the track soon became a club anthem and is often considered to be the first time the musical genre of Garage crossed over into the mainstream.

The collaboration not only shot both acts to fame, and launched Craig David's solo career, but it also paved the way for the UK garage movement that was beginning to sweep the nation. Soon, other garage acts like Sweet Female Attitude and So Solid Crew were dominating the airwaves, pioneering dirty basslines and sparse, moody atmospherics that would later become a feature synonymous with styles of music like grime.

What remains is an unconditional love for UK Garage - it's a sure-fire crowd pleaser for DJs across the country, not just within the Southampton music scene. The Engine Rooms is said to be the South Coast's biggest independent live music venue. Just a 15-minute walk away from Southampton's Central train station, you'll find a beacon for live music and electrifying club nights, where you can discover why it claims to be the cornerstone of Southampton's cultural scene.

Brighton

Praising Brighton Like We Should

If you're looking for sun, sea and sounds - then Brighton is the place to be with musical history spanning over 50 years. With a train station right in the heart of the city for easy exploration and a beautiful four-mile beach populated with pubs and clubs and live music venues up and down the promenade, the town is a music lover's heaven.

The beach itself went down in Brighton musical history, when local hero Norman Cook (AKA Fatboy Slim) curated the Big Beach Boutique II in 2002 - a free, one day beach festival designed to host 60,000 people celebrating their love of the big beat music Cook had made popular. On the day however, over 250,000 people descended on the city ready to party and brought the entire place to a standstill.

Despite being raised in Reigate in Surrey, Norman will forever be associated with this seaside town, having cut his teeth in the Brighton Belle nightclub, and student favourite "The Basement" - a 20-minute walk from the station. Here he helped lay the foundations for what would become a thriving Brighton hip hop scene. He is recognised as a pioneer of electronic dance music, and despite his hits like Rockafeller Skank, Right Here, Right Now and Praise You taking him right around the world, Norman will always be a Brighton boy at heart.

But Norman's Big Beach Boutique isn't the only famous festival in the city. The Brighton Fringe Festival takes over Brighton & Hove through May and June offering live music acts but also theatre performances and comedy shows for all ages. And with a thriving gay scene, it's no surprise that it hosts a festival that is the pride of LGBTQ+ everywhere. Fabuloso in the Park runs over two days featuring main stage artists as well as Cabaret Tents, QueerTown, dance tents and music of every flavour.

In fact, Brighton was associated with another musical event popular with the LGBTQ+ community when it hosted Eurovision in 1974. Despite winning the competition for the previous two years, Luxembourg decided it couldn't afford to run it again and so The Brighton Dome - a venue just ten minutes south of the train station - agreed to keep the competition on track. That year went down in history as an unknown band from Sweden won - and became one of the biggest groups in the world overnight. Of course, the band was Abba, with their hit song Waterloo (not to be confused with the train station in London)!

But if you're looking for a musical souvenir from your stay by the sea, Brighton is said to have more record stores per square mile than anywhere else in Britain. For those of you hoping to pick up some classic vinyl, or a record from an up-and-coming local band, try independent record shop 'Resident' in the North Lanes. Or "The Record Album" (that's the name of the shop) which is right outside the station. Or, if you're a fan of the Bella Union record label - home of countless legendary acts from around the world, such as Flaming Lips and Tim Burgess - then take a six-minute stroll to Church Street, where you'll find the label's very own record store, full of rarities and musical treasures to remind you of your Brighton adventure.

Of course, if it's live music you're looking for, then Brighton has one of the handiest venues for train travellers. The Green Door Store - which is located right underneath the arches of Brighton's train station - it's a uniquely community-spirited venue with a huge range of acts that really highlight the eclectic nature of this city's tastes. With musical acts seven days a week, it's seen everything from local musicians to mega-acts like The Who!

For a slightly tamer night, The Hope & Ruin is a five-minute walk down Queens Road from the station - or there's Dead Wax Socials in the town's famous Lanes, which offers drinks, records, and a live band to create the perfect ambiance for a weeknight treat.

So, whether you're looking for a sunny rave beside the sea or fancy some tracks that will take you deep underground - Brighton's electric music scene and bohemian atmosphere will always be sure to make you feel right at home.
