

John Robb: I'm John Robb and you're listening to hearmanchester.com, a series of 10 audio portraits exploring the rich and varied history of Manchester from the towpath of the Rochdale Canal that cuts through the heart of one of the greatest cities in the world.

Manchester's musical heritage is as famous as any part of its history and culture. The Bee Gees, The Buzzcocks, The Fall, New Order, The Smiths, Simply Red, The Stone Roses Happy Mondays, Oasis any many many more, have all come from here and gone on to become world famous. But for every big name there have always been 20 smaller bands gigging away, full of characters, untold stories and hope.

Writer and broadcaster CP Lee is lecturer in Cultural Studies at Salford University and a member of a good few bands in his time. We are just by the Bridgewater Hall, underneath Albion Street in the centre of Manchester.

CP Lee: By 1907 there were more cinemas per capita than there were in London, there were lots of local filmmakers. So if you went a bit further left down Oxford Road, just past Albert Square you would have come across the studios of the Llama Film Company, established in 1899. They did great things like get a team of actors, put them in British army uniform, get them on a tram to Heaton Park, then have them running up

and down the hill. That night put it in the cinema 'The Relief of Mafeking'.

JR: So in musical terms who are the unsung heroes of Manchester?

CPL: I could give you names..

JR: Go on then...

CPL: Well, Spider Mike King Band, The Mandala Band, people who laboured away for a thousand years with a dream and a vision, hundreds and hundreds of bands, I've got a data-base of now nearing two thousand names of bands who've existed over the last 50 years in the Manchester area.

JR: One unsung is 'Tosh' Ryan whose label Rabid Records gave an early home to the Manchester artists such as Buzzcocks, 'Jilted John', 'Slaughter and the Dogs' and plenty more. Tosh's unsung heroes go back well before the days of punk. We spoke overlooking the waters in Canal Street.

Tosh Ryan: From my point of view it goes back further than what most people consider Manchester's music scene, I grew up in the 1950s playing in dance bands and wanted to be a jazz player but was never very good, you know, was never good enough, so my heroes would be from the jazz period, people like Joe Palin

the pianist who died recently a few months ago, saxophone players like Wally Hauser – people who are not known at all, people who used to frequent the Band on the Wall before it became a kind of blues club, when it was a proper jazz club, they're the people I'd like to see more recognition for, because Manchester really was a hotbed of modern jazz in the 50s – it played host to Ronnie Scott, Tubby Hayes, all the big names of jazz, and quite a few Americans as well.

CP Lee: Every weekend along here in the 1940s and 1950s, along Oxford Road and Oxford Street, dozens and dozens of pubs, all of them with live music all playing basically jazz music. Here we've got the Palace Theatre on the right, on our left where the Midland Hotel is, was the People's Music Hall, and that is where Dan Leno appeared in 1888 after he'd become clog dancing champion of the world and the finals were held in Rochdale and the judges used to sit under a table with a stopwatch and you'd clog away and the one who'd do the most number of clogs in a set space of time was the winner.

Garfield Allen: My name's Garfield Allen, I run the Green Room theatre which does experimental theatre and live art in Manchester and I'm the artistic director and chief executive officer and since they've built the new flats along the canal opposite the Green Room they've opened up a new alleyway and it takes you

about twenty seconds to get to water. There are lots of unsung heroes at the Green Room, we start out with nurturing emergent talents and see them through with their careers 'til they sort of fly the nest, but my real unsung hero has to go to a chappy called Jeremy Shine; he runs an organisation called MIA which is Manchester International Arts and he's been running that company for a very long time and he's brought street theatre – spectacle street theatre playing to publics of tens of thousands of people in the streets of Manchester.

Benji Reid: Okay, my name is Benji Reid I am a hip-hop theatre practitioner and I'm the artistic director of Breaking Cycles Theatre Company. I work out of Manchester. Hip hop theatre is the fusing of hip hop language which can be break dancing, b-boy, MC and graffiti, and fusing it with traditional theatre. The idea that is that when you take two disparate languages and bring them together you create something that is new, that is vibrant and fresh.

So what hip-hop theatre is is modern physical theatre, dance theatre. For me I don't know what an unsung hero is, but what I do know what we do is try to find an alternative, to kind of the bland mundane hip hop that is coming out now, that is commercially viable. What we're trying to do is find a way to use hip hop as a force for positive change but do it in a unique

and very interesting way – and maybe this shouldn't be popular maybe this is something that shouldn't go out to the masses, because at the moment it's still quite pure, it's untainted by trying to be anything else, but speaking to the people, and maybe sometimes there are spaces for unsung heroes, maybe this is my space, maybe I don't need to be celebrated any more than what I have been already.

JR: *I've just come up from the canal, by the Bridgewater Hall there's a little basin up a few steps and just by the Barbirolli statue I'm speaking to Eleanor Roberts, who's an archivist who works at the Bridgewater Hall. We're talking about unsung heroes and what I'm interested in is Hallé – a lot of people know his name but don't seem to know an awful lot about him.*

Eleanor Roberts: No, well he was born in Germany and he arrived in Manchester in 1848 having travelled over from Paris where he was living and studying at the time and of course Paris in 1848 kicked off with lots of revolutionary goings on and he'd just had a young family and decided it wasn't safe to stay there, so initially he went to London, but London was full of musicians who all wanted to do the same as him which was teach and also organise recital, chamber concerts, that kind of thing, and he was sent a letter from Herman Leo who was a Manchester textile magnate, basically, who said

have you thought about Manchester? I think you could do really well here. Hallé wrote back and said 'I will come if you can guarantee me a good number of pupils,' so Leo obviously contacted anyone and everyone who had someone who might want to learn the piano and contacted Hallé a bit later and said here you go, so he came.

JR: One of the key things about Hallé – he set up his orchestra here – it was for the people wasn't it, it was very Mancunian – it wasn't elitist, he wanted it for everybody.

ER: He did yes he always had, in inverted commas, 'cheap seats,' they were still a shilling but the cheapest available entertainment in the Free Trade Hall at the time was still sixpence so it wasn't a lot more – and an awful lot of classical music concerts at the time tended to be for subscribers so you basically paid in advance for all the concerts and Hallé never did that, he always had tickets available in the gallery for people who could just turn up.

JR: And did a lot of normal mill workers go to the concerts?

ER: It's impossible to say now, obviously, but there's a story from Hallé's autobiography, he was sent a letter from a gentlemen who worked in one of the mills who had sent him a length of

cloth by way of saying thank you for all the many, sort of, years of pleasure his concerts had given him and the letter's quoted in the autobiography and it's not that of a particularly well-educated man, so I think there were some there, yes, definitely.

There's another story that I think you'll like which is in his autobiography, about his local postman who arrived to deliver letters one Christmas and who was a bit the worse for wear – obviously people had been offering him a little tot to keep out the cold. By the time he got to Hallé's house, Hallé was worried he wouldn't finish the round, so he put the chap to sleep on his sofa, took the bag and finished the postal round for him and then came back, which I think is a lovely story.

JS: What a top bloke, we like Hallé... what a great unsung hero of Manchester, Charles Hallé.

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