

August/September/October '26

Free

Gan On

Music in Sunderland

Looking back on festival season so far
Interviews with Orton and Trivia
Events you need to know about

PLUS

All about The Bunker Vinyl gigs

Learn how to get your music heard by
BBC Introducing



AUGUST ONWARDS '26

INDEPENDENT LIVE

GIG LISTINGS

07.08 *INDEPENDENT*
SOCIAL YOUTH CULT
+ MACHINER & HOLY BRAILE

15.08 *INDEPENDENT*
20TH BIRTHDAY GIG
LINE UP TBA

22.08 *INDEPENDENT*
BOGUS
+ BURNOUT, VYNAS & FLETCHER

29.08 *THE FIRE STATION*
MICKEY CALLISTO
OURDOOR SUMMER PARTY SHOW

29.08 *INDEPENDENT*
SHANNON PEARL
+ SUPPORT TBA

04.09 *INDEPENDENT*
SPANGLED
+ SUPPORT TBA

05.09 *INDEPENDENT*
CUD
+ SUPPORT TBA

11.09 *INDEPENDENT*
WOOL
+ SUPPORT TBA

12.09 *INDEPENDENT*
PORK PIE
+ SUPPORT TBA

18.09 *INDEPENDENT*
DEAD WET THINGS
+ TEARJERKER, EASY COMPANY & MORE

18.09 *THE SHIP ISIS*
ANI SANDWITH
+ SUPPORT TBA

25.09 *INDEPENDENT*
ARKAYLA **SOLD OUT**
+ CHERRYHOLT

26.09 *INDEPENDENT*
METEORA & EVANESENT
+ SUPPORT TBA

10.10 *INDEPENDENT*
HIVEMIND
+ SUPPORT TBA

16.10 *INDEPENDENT*
24 HOURS IN PARIS
+ SUPPORT TBA

17.10 *INDEPENDENT*
KERRANG'D
ALL THE BIGGEST KERRANG FM HITS

23.10 *INDEPENDENT*
TOPLOADER
+ SUPPORT TBA

24.10 *INDEPENDENT*
DEFINITELY OASIS
ONE OF THE UK'S BEST TRIBUTE ACTS

21.11 *INDEPENDENT*
REEF
+ RED REMEDY

28.11 *INDEPENDENT*
NE STREET BAND
BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN TRIBUTE

03.12 *INDEPENDENT*
DEATH OF GUITAR POP
+ SUPPORT TBA

04.12 *INDEPENDENT*
TREVOR HORN
PLAYING THE SONGS HE PRODUCED, PLAYED & SANG ON

05.12 *INDEPENDENT*
COURTNEY HADWIN
+ SUPPORT TBA



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WWW.INDEPENDENTSUNDERLAND.COM



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Image by Thomas Jackson



editorial

What a summer we've had!

Another successful festival season under our belts, and we're not even done yet!

We've seen events like Summer Streets, Huge Weekend, and Big Weekend happening across Sunderland over the last few months, alongside even more across the rest of the North East. Now we're looking forward to events and all dayers like Last Train Home in Darlington, The Gathering Sounds in Stockton, and more to see us through the rest of the year – we might even see a return of Ripples, which was the 2025, duo-venue offshoot of the much loved city-wide Waves festival.

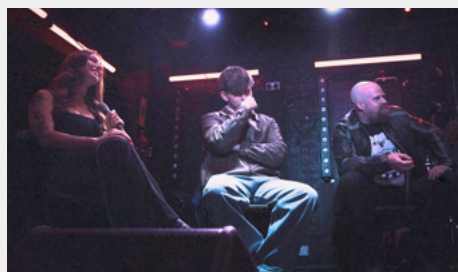
It's been a big few months for Sunderland, with the Music Cities Network hosting their Summit Week here, where we got to enjoy a whole week of gigs, conferences, and networking with our fellow music cities from across the water, including the A to B conference where, if you attended, you might have picked up a special bonus edition of Gan On, created as a guide for early-career musicians.

Alongside all of this, we of course enjoyed going to regular weekly gigs, with beloved local acts, as well as some exciting touring bands gracing the local stages.

As always, thank you for your commitment to the local music scene and keeping it thriving, we're so grateful that you pick up the magazine and take an interest in whats going on. So, without further ado...

Gan On, have a read!

Jenny



Lucy Shields

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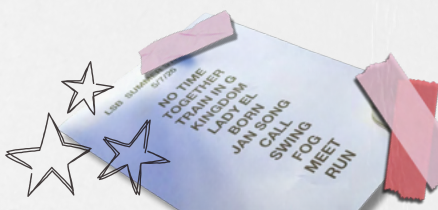
Jenny Dean

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Ben Hughes

Special thanks to:

Otto Cafe, The Bunker





Find out what's on
at The Bunker and
get tickets here



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WHAT'S BEEN GOING ON



H U G E W E E K E N D



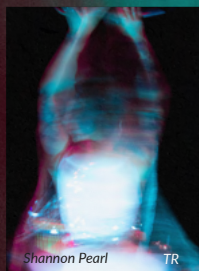
House Proud

TR



spacecadetbloom

TR



Shannon Pearl

TR



Social Youth Cult

TR

S U M M E R S T R E E T S



Summer Streets

BH



Jamagotchi

BH



Summer Streets

BH



Cortney Dixon

BH

E U P H O N Y



JP

KW



Wool

KW



End Credits

KW



Leazes

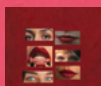
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Bones Ate Arfa

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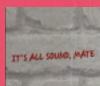
R E C E N T R E L E A S E S



Prospect of Power
Chapter One



Leazes
Hers



Geoffrey Doghead
It's All Sound, Mate



House Proud
Again



Luminous
Sugah



Trivia
Home - EP



SUMMER MUSIC WEEK

Images by
Thomas Jackson,
Christine Audsley,
Jordan Miller

From 18–20 June 2026, Sunderland became the first UK city to host the Music Cities Network (MCN) Summer Summit, with a week of wraparound events taking place in venues and spaces across the city.

The Summit brought together international delegates to explore how music can shape thriving, innovative and connected cities. It also marked the culmination of Sunderland's Year of Music, a twelve-month celebration of the city's rich musical heritage and vibrant contemporary scene.

Here's some of the events that took place over the week...

MCN Live

Six emerging artists from across Europe and Sunderland shared the stage at Independent, bringing together different sounds, scenes and cultures for an international showcase. Patrick Gosling, spacecadetbloom, and Prospect of Power represented Sunderland, while Migluma, Lemony Rug, and Velocity Made Good represented Vilnius, Hamburg, and Netherlands respectively.

A to B

A full day of music industry panels, practical workshops, live music and interactive sessions — all in the heart of Sunderland, the A to B early-career musicians conference brought together world-class music professionals, and honest conversations about building a creative career today. Guests and panellists included: Grammy award winning producer Eduardo De La Paz, Grace Stubbings and Eliza Lee from Venus Grrrls, Irked vocalist and Index co-founder Helen Walkinshaw, and more.

An Evening with The Futureheads

The event offered audiences a rare opportunity to hear directly from one of Sunderland's most influential bands, featuring band members Barry Hyde, Ross Millard, David 'Jaff' Craig and Dave Hyde in conversation about their journey from Sunderland's local music scene to international acclaim.

Also...

Royal Northern Sinfonia with Ben Lunn
TechNext Creative Hub Free Conference Day
Unity in the Community live music event

INTERVIEW ORTON

Tell me a bit about your background. Where did your love for music come from?

Music has always been a part of my life. For as long as I can remember, my Dad was always playing his CD's. Back then it was rock music.

One night, at a friend's house he brought out an Eminem CD... It blew me away. Instead of multiple instruments, the lyrics were the focal point of the music. Once I heard what words were capable of I was addicted. Delving deeper into Eminem's discography and finding other artists along the way.

I must have been around 11 or 12 when I first started writing my own lyrics. I see writing as a puzzle, finding the right words and piecing them together in a way that means something. It's also become a way to share my observations and perspective with the world.

Your EP Gan Canny is all about your hometown and life in the North East, was it always the plan to create a project with this theme? Did it feel easy to write about? Was it confronting at times?

Yes, the project was always going to be centred around the North East. Originally, it was titled 'From the Pitts', but I quickly realised I'd backed myself into a creative corner. There's only so many songs you can write about Durham before you start repeating yourself.

So I went back to the drawing board and shifted the focus to my experience of growing up here instead. I wanted to tell the story as I remember it... the good and the bad. Life isn't a fairytale, and I don't pretend it is in my music. But, the past is the past. All I can do now is learn from it and share those experiences through my music.

We caught up with County Durham based artist, and We Make Culture's Next Steps program alum, Orton to talk about his debut EP Gan Canny, a rap project built solely on North East production and North East collaborators. Rooted in themes of pressure, family and responsibility, the project delves into his perspective of life growing up in the North East.

What was the writing and recording process like?

Truthfully, the writing process became quite difficult. I wanted this project to be my best work to date, but that mindset created too much pressure and blocked what I really wanted to say. In the end, I stripped everything back and accomplished what I set out to do: create a project dedicated to our home.

The recording process, on the other hand, was a great experience. I stayed true to the North East theme by working with some incredibly talented producers from the region, and bringing the songs to life alongside them was one of the most enjoyable parts of making the EP.

**“Once I
heard what
words were
capable of, I
was
addicted.”**

You were part of the Next Steps cohort through We Make Culture, how did this support help you bring your vision to life? Were there any surprises or unexpected parts of the programme?

I can't thank We Make Culture enough. I'll never forget receiving the email telling me I'd been accepted onto the programme. It felt like a real moment of clarity. Finally, after years of passion, someone else could see the vision.

The biggest surprise for me was the creative freedom. The grant gave me the resources to bring the project to life, but I never felt like my creativity was being restricted. The team trusted my vision from the beginning, and whenever I had a question, they were always there to help. The whole process couldn't have been any smoother.

What is on the horizon for you now and what can we expect from you for the rest of this year?

I'm still creating every day and will be returning to monthly releases very soon. After taking a step back from social media for a while, my focus now is on rebuilding momentum and reconnecting with my audience.

Musically, I'm excited to start pushing beyond boom bap and exploring new sounds while keeping lyricism at the heart of everything I make. I never want to put myself in a box creatively.

I've also got a few live shows lined up, which I'm really looking forward to. So, for the rest of the year, it's business as usual, more music, more performances, and plenty more to come.

**You can follow Orton online
@orton_music**

**“Finally,
after
years of
passion,
someone
else could
see the
vision.”**

Ask the Experts

How to get your music heard

Shakk is the presenter of BBC Introducing in the North East, championing local emerging artists. We asked him about the best ways to get your music heard...

What do you look for when deciding whether to play a track?

This is probably the question I get asked more than anything, and I still don't think I've got a proper answer.

Obviously there are things you're listening for. Is the recording good enough for radio? Is the performance convincing? Everyone expects that kind of stuff.

Sometimes you know a track is good within ten seconds. Other times, it takes a few songs to really understand an artist.

When I was a teenager one of my mates kept telling me I'd love MF DOOM. I listened and couldn't see what all the fuss was about, so I left it there. Years later I heard Accordion and it was like I was listening to a completely different artist. It finally made sense. That made me rethink my whole approach to music.

I've also heard music that's been really polished and brilliantly executed, and still ended up choosing something more DIY and imperfect because it had that one line I wish I'd written myself, or simply made me feel more than a good mix ever could.

It doesn't matter whether the song is funny or really sad, I want to be able to feel whatever emotion you're trying to convey.

Some people make brilliant records straight away. Most don't. Most are still working it out, and as a music lover those are the songs I want to hear. You hear something that isn't quite there yet, but you can tell they're onto something. I'm then invested to see where they go next!

After a few songs, you can usually tell who's making music because they live and breathe it.

Those are the artists I probably enjoy supporting the most.

I also try not to judge an artist entirely on one upload. Sometimes you hear the potential before the songs are fully there, so not getting played first time genuinely doesn't mean we've written you off.

I want to be able to feel whatever emotion you're trying to convey.

What's the best way to submit music to BBC Introducing?

It's not complicated.

Everyone comes through the BBC Introducing uploader. That's how it works. BBC.co.uk/introducing.

When I press play on a debut upload, I don't know anything about the artist. I haven't looked at your socials. I don't know if you've been making music for six months or six years. At that point, I'm just listening to the song.

The bio and track notes come after that. We're not expecting a polished press release. Just tell us who you are. Why did you make this song? What are you working on? Any gigs coming up?

The ones I remember are usually the most straightforward. You can tell when somebody has written it themselves rather than copied something from a press release.

And upload a radio edit.

It sounds like a tiny detail, but there have definitely been tracks I've wanted to play and couldn't due to them being too long or having explicit language in them.

Music doesn't have those restrictions.

Radio does.

What's the best way to submit music to BBC Introducing?

People usually think about the artists who've gone on to have huge careers, and there are loads of them.

I always find myself thinking about where they started, because it was exactly the same place as everybody else. They uploaded a track.

I've even seen artists upload songs, disappear for a while to figure things out, then come back much stronger.

Every upload gets listened to. After that it's our job to send it in all sorts of directions.

That might mean a play on the regional show, being sent to one of the national stations, a live session, a showcase, or a festival opportunity.

Sometimes opportunities come from outside the BBC because plenty of people across the industry listen to our shows as well.

Any advice for artists hoping to get played?

Keep making music.

It's easy to get caught up in social media, marketing and everything else because that's what everybody sees every day.

Your songs still matter more than any of that.

Don't worry if you're still developing because nearly everybody is. The artists people look up to now didn't start there either.

And don't let one song decide how you feel about yourself.

There are only two hours in a BBC Introducing show. Some weeks there are simply more good records than we have time to play.

**“Don’t
worry if
you’re still
developing
...
everybody
is.”**

@shakkmusic

@bbcintroducing

WHAT'S TO LOOK FORWARD TO

Here's a selection of upcoming events and festivals to add to your calendar...

spoiler: loads



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28 AUGUST	
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LAST TRAIN HOME 5TH TRACKS
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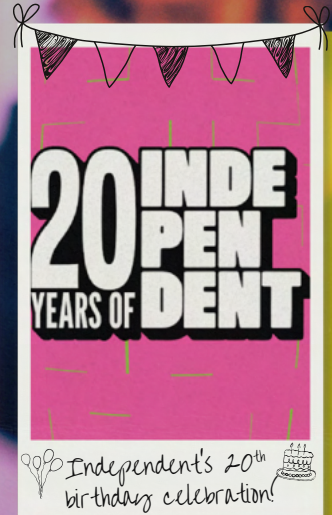
Lucia benefits
at the Cow & Egg
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Community
Confidence
Change



Who We are:

'Not A Statistic NE' provides safe spaces for peer support - We are a **North East** based Community Interest Company determined to finding and filling the **GAPS**. To reduce suicide and social isolation.
#SafeSpacesStrongLives

Volunteering:

We're always on the hunt for volunteers give us a shout and **Come Join The Team!**

Who We Support:

'Not A Statistic NE' is open to **EVERYONE** aged 16 and over, No matter what you're going through. We are here for **YOU**.
#HereForEveryone

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Project



Our Community based
design agency,
**Where Community
Meets Creativity**

Our Weekly locations:



Chatting with Critch about... **Vinyl Gigs**

Words by Erin Jardine, interview by Joseph Lynch

You might be one who is very in tune with the Sunderland music scene, but are you a Mackem Listener? Mackem Listen is the newest initiative from The Bunker: a project that will take some of the best Sunderland musicians from all sorts of genres and give them their own track on an exclusive vinyl. We caught up with James Critchlow to talk about it...

"The vinyl gigs are one of our biggest projects to date. We've got fifteen bands so far booked for the best of The Bunker. There will be more because we're collecting the best bands, and only the best bands that Sunderland has to offer from every genre. There's going to be two volumes that are coming out in 2027, so it's a big build, lots of different venues involved. It's getting backed by Sunderland Music City and all the rest. Thankfully, this has been made possible by the Arts Council, giving us a bit of funding to put it on, so very, very exciting."

The Bunker is the cornerstone of the Sunderland music scene, operating for and supporting over 7,200 musicians with rehearsal spaces, and 6,200 musicians with one-on-one sessions in 2025 alone. It is a rite of passage to play and rehearse at The Bunker, with successes such as The Futureheads and rising stars Swindled being involved with the organisation from early on in their careers.



The heart of music in Sunderland since 1982

The BUNKER



"The idea was Kenny Sanger's [The Bunker director]. He wanted to put together something that represents the city and all genres that are involved, and have a piece of work that people can look back on in decades to come."

Sunderland is filled to the brim with talent, with genres ranging from indie to riot grrl punk, from pop to metal and folk to techno. The support that the scene gives allows bands like Critch to promote themselves to a wider audience and nab spots on festivals such as After All Festival. It is also packed with music fans, with around 90,000 tickets sold for gigs and events in the past year at The Fire Station alone.



Images courtesy of The Bunker 35 group

"The Bunker runs on a lot of funding, so we're always putting in for different stuff. This is one of many that came through, and we're very lucky that people think highly of The Bunker. We've had news coverage as well, we're constantly making noise in the city. We're a community interest company as well, so all of that helps, but thankfully, because we've got the funding, we can put something like this together."

"The ones that have already happened: Hivemind have already played, and Lottie Willis has played as well. Both of those gigs were packed and energetic. Everyone loved them. The artists are buzzing with the audio and the video that they received. There was myself at Pop Recs alongside Tearjerker. Later on in the year, we've got Shannon Pearl, Isabel Maria, Patrick Gosling, The Last Time, Slalom D, Claudia, Thieves of Liberty and Celadore."

Whilst the world is fixated on streaming, physical media is on the rise, whether that be vinyls, CDs or magazines (wink wink). In research compiled by Music Week, vinyl sales have surged by 18.5%, with vinyls having a 15% share of total music revenue in the UK. This is largely due to Gen Z listeners actively seeking music in the offline sphere, and older generations looking for nostalgia in a digital world. Vinyls also give a level of exclusivity and dedication, proving that you're a true supporter and fan, and give you "day one stan" status; that is exactly what The Bunker is offering.

"It's one of the ways that you can invest in an artist the most. If you buy a vinyl for someone, that is more of a commitment than just listening on Spotify. But the vinyl gigs, Mackem Listen, which is the name that we're going under; the only way to get that will be through vinyl. So it will be a completely unique way to listen to the bands. You'll be hearing performances that you'll not be able to find anywhere else. It'll be completely unique and jam-packed full of bangers. And that's what makes it kind of exclusive because it'll not be available anywhere else. And once it's gone, it's gone. So people will have to be fast."



The Bunker was awarded a blue plaque earlier this year.

Catch the next Mackem Listen "vinyl gig" showcases: Saturday 29 August - Shannon Pearl + Isabel Maria at Independent, Saturday 26 September - Patrick Gosling + The Last Time at The Ship Isis.



Lottie Willis by Kieran Whitfield
Patrick Gosling by Jenny Dean

Thieves of Liberty, Isabel Maria, Celadore by Adam Kennedy

Gan On QUIZ



This month, our guest quizmaster is Managing Director of The Bunker, Kenny Sanger!

Kenny is well known around Sunderland. He has been director of The Bunker since the early 2000's, dedicating his life to helping grassroots artists and creatives, and making a safe place in the city for anyone to express themselves.

1. Which local music venue USED TO BE located on Stockton Road where Otto Cafe currently is?

- A. Independent
- B. Pop Recs
- C. The Bunker



2. How many goals did England score during this years World Cup?

3. What year did The Bunker open in Sunderland?

- A. 1975
- B. 1979
- C. 1982



4. Which artist won the Mercury Prize in 2025?

5. Finish the lyric: 'Start spreading the news...'

6. Who headlined Summer Streets on the Sunday this year?

7. What is the main colour of the new Sunderland away kit?

- A. Pink
- B. Blue
- C. Yellow



8. What year did Atomic Kitten reach number 1 with The Tide Is High?

9. Which band played at the Stadium of Light in May as part of their 'Circus' tour?

10. Which radio host presented BBC Radio 1's breakfast show from Keel Square earlier this year?



answers here

INTERVIEW

TRIVIA

Trivia is an all-female alt-rock band from Sunderland. Ebony Jade headed to a practice at The Bunker to chat to the band about their new EP and launch gig, released through the help of Serial Bowl records.

What has led up to the EP release?

We wanted to release an EP because we wanted something to show everyone what we have been working on. Going to live gigs is amazing; it's our favourite thing to do, and having something alongside it that shows who we are is what we have wanted for a long time. The tracks are personal to us, so it's nice to have something out there that we can look at like 'oh yeah, we made that'. It's about us and other people can know that.

What was the recording process like for you?

It was fun; it was a long process for the three days we were in the studio. Once we had gotten the drums and guitar down, we started hearing it come together. We sat in the room with Phil Jackson; he made it a really good experience. I can't imagine doing it anywhere other than The Bunker, as it is where we often practice and where we are most comfortable. It was exciting as we had never been in the recording studio before, and when we were, we weren't treated as children; we were just a band going in to record. That was cool, because we felt like a proper band and not just teenagers making music.

What is it like adding a third member to the band?

I feel like we sound a lot fuller now with a second guitarist. I feel like if we were to get anyone else, it wouldn't work because Ava gets the craic, she gets along with us, and she fits in instantly. She learnt all the songs really quickly; she's even helped us write new songs. We sound so much bigger than we ever have, and it just felt easy. We were a 2-piece for so long, we were unsure of whether we wanted to rock the boat or not. We knew Ava was really talented, but there was still a possibility of it not working, and it just did straight away. She was like the piece we have always been missing.

Ava: It's been a great experience so far. Trivia is the first band I've ever joined and for it to be such an established band already, it's felt great to be a part of it. They have been teaching me more about the music scene, and it's great fun.

How does it feel releasing an EP at such a young age?

It's like a flex. I feel when you're young you aren't taken as seriously, it's always "it's just a joke" or "they're really good for being so young" but I feel when we have an EP people stop saying "they're really good for a teenage band" and start saying "they're a really good band" and I feel when people start referring to us for being Trivia, and not the young girls, we feel as we've accomplished more than we thought we could. Obviously, we are young, and for as long as we are teenagers, we will be looked at in that way, but by having something to represent us behind us, people will see we're taking this seriously and are going to be around for a long time.

What does 'Home' mean to you and why is it so important?

Lydia: It means everything to us; I'd say it's special because it's the first actual thing we're releasing. It's our favourite songs we've performed over the last year, all put into one. It makes me happy to listen to the EP, and we hope other people will feel the same way.

Hannah: The EP means a lot as we have worked so hard on it. No matter where we go, 'Home' will always be the first thing we ever released as a band, and it'll stay there; it'll keep meaning what it means, and it'll keep being personal to us forever. We hope it will become personal to others, being so young, we want to relate to our audience, who are our own age. If other people can relate to it, we've accomplished something. We don't write just for us; we look around us at what other people are thinking, what they are going through. We just hope it touches them the same way it does us.

By Ebony Smith

Find them online
@triviabanduk

Image by Kieran Whitfield

SPOTLIGHT

ON **SPOTLIGHT**

By Scott Hays

Spotlight makes a huge point of providing safe, paid performance opportunities and touring experience across the UK. From your perspective, why was guaranteeing fair pay and real-world gig conditions so essential to the DNA of the programme?

It was key because this is what young people wanted. We developed the programme after touring a group of 111 young people across the country to different NCS sites in 2022. This allowed them to perform for peers of a similar age and get paid for playing whatever they wanted in front of a new audience. When reflecting with the young musicians afterward, they told us that this kind of support and work was hard to find. Most of them had been given opportunities 'for exposure', which is something we don't believe in. A young person singing to entertain is work, just the same as a young person washing dishes at a local pub. Performing takes time, dedication, and expensive equipment; they should be paid for it. Regarding real-world gig experience, we wanted to give musicians unfamiliar with gigging, or those lacking the necessary equipment, the opportunity to gain it. Generally, performers must reach a certain standard before they can start booking, but how do they get there? Our booking system allows younger people with less experience to still get paid for their performances. We believe these sorts of opportunities are essential for young people to develop skills and grow, especially those coming from a disadvantaged or deprived background.

The music industry can be a minefield for young people. How does spotlight explicitly help young people navigate industry agents, networking, and health & safety?

At Spotlight, we try to set an example of what a good industry agent should do and how workers should be treated. These young people must be aware of the expected standards and necessary safety measures before entering the music industry; otherwise, their mental

The North East is experiencing a massive cultural surge, and at the heart of South Tyneside's music scene is Spotlight, a youth-led initiative designed to bridge the gap between emerging local talent and the wider UK music industry. By swapping cutthroat competition for community support, Spotlight gives young artists aged 14–25 the tools, confidence, and touring opportunities needed to turn their passion into a sustainable career.

health could suffer, which is often overlooked in this industry. By giving them safe, professional experience, they become more aware of expected standards. We collaborate with organisations like ATG Entertainment and Newcastle University to provide workshops and support for our young musicians. Also, we give them opportunities to meet organisations that can support them in different ways in the future, such as BBC Introducing, Mind, Index, and more. It's important to us that the young people we work with lead the way by telling us what they want and what will benefit them moving forward. They are the heart of the programme and will stay there.

“Performing takes time, dedication, and expensive equipment;  they should be paid for it.”

Beyond individual mentorship, Spotlight focuses heavily on peer connections—helping young artists form bands, run workshops, and collaborate. How do you curate and foster an environment where local musicians build a supportive network rather than competing against each other?

All of our young people are in the same boat and understand each other's struggles with the music industry. We always try to give young people opportunities to work together and build connections, as this is vital to the music industry. It's important to us to give these chances to all our young people as fairly as possible so they can grow their skills and showcase their talent. To prevent this competitive attitude, we share everyone's achievements when we see them or are told about them, and we support each young person as much as possible with their questions or by signposting them to other organisations. Because Spotlight is also such a relaxed environment with varied opportunities for different experience levels, the young people are assured there is always a chance for them.





A massive element of the programme is taking young talent outside the region for national touring opportunities. What reaction do you see when these young artists step onto stages across the UK, and what does bringing that experience back do for the local scene in South Shields?

One of the main things that we have found is that our artists all share the same desire: to break out of their local scene. They want to develop and play to new audiences across the country to become familiar with the area and potentially play there again. There is so much talent in the North East that should be shared with people across the country. When we've taken our young people touring, they have expressed how lovely it is to not only see more of the country but also to learn how touring works, what happens behind the scenes, and who they will meet and speak to. One of our bands actually returned to play due to connections they made on one of our tours, which allowed them to continue developing their audience in other places of the UK than just the North East. Bringing back this experience not only puts a spotlight (pardon the pun) on South Shields and the North East as an area of talent, but also shows aspiring young people who want to tour and perform across the country that it is possible. The fact that we can make this happen and inspire the musicians we work with and those we don't is rooted in Spotlight's values and is the reason the programme was created.

Spotlight is actively inviting local schools, colleges, and businesses to back the next generation of music talent. As Culture Coordinator, what is your vision for how the business and education community in South Tyneside can get behind the movement over the next year?

South Tyneside's culture team is already starting to bring a lot to the area, such as the Next Big Thing and opportunities for musicians to play bigger stages and events to reach larger audiences. We also have local music venues, such as Garden Lane and Ignition, that are connected with local colleges, youth groups, and organisations and are committed to regularly giving opportunities to upcoming musicians in the area, which is fantastic to see. We believe there is strength in numbers and envision different organisations built on supporting young people who want to pursue a career in music coming together to build and create more opportunities for artists. These organisations are all popping up in South Tyneside, which is phenomenal to see. The area must utilise the opportunities arriving and keep making important connections that are going to have a lasting impact on the area and, most importantly, the upcoming musicians in it. It involves looking at how we can work together to strengthen bids and build more meaningful opportunities - such as more touring, performing, learning, and hands-on experience - that will bridge the gap from education into real work. Last year, we started a Spotlight Northern Music Alliance with a few local organisations. We envision this becoming a more united front where anyone working with musicians can develop programmes that use our collective strengths to build lasting change for the music industry in the North. There has already been so much movement over the last few years regarding the music scene in the area, with Generator in Newcastle and Sunderland becoming a Music City. Keeping this momentum going will be key to ensuring that the music industry thrives and musicians can keep creating, learning and pushing for their dream careers.

SPOTLIGHT

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And find us

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Live Reviews

MCN Live @ Independent



Migluma by Christine Audsley



As the grand finale of Sunderland's Year of Music collides with the global Music Cities Network Summer Summit, Holmeside's premier live music hub, Independent, played host to MCN Live.

The concept was brilliant in its simplicity: pairs of local and international acts trading sets across the venue's split-level layout.

Prospect of Power proved exactly why they are one of the region's most anticipated alternative trios, Lemony Rug brought a wave of warmth to the room, and spacecadetbloom delivered what can only be described as a masterclass in modern shoegaze. Lithuania's Migluma threw a complete curveball into the evening's structure, operating on a playground of hardware electronics, the night reached a fever pitch with the Netherlands' Velocity Made Good, and Patrick Gosling closed out the showcase in triumphant, anthemic fashion.

Celebrating its 20th anniversary this year, Independent remains the crown jewel of Sunderland's grassroots music scene. This was a blueprint for how global creative networks can make a local room feel entirely electric.

Scott Hays

CRITCH & Tearjerker headline Pop Recs

There's an electric voltage coursing through the North East alt-scene right now, and this Antiquity, Claudia, Tearjerker, and Critch gig is a statement of intent.

Antiquity perfectly sum up why Sunderland has music city status. Four young men from the Bunker band club initiative playing one of the cities big stages. While rough around the edges, the introduction of two giant inflatable sharks by the band into the packed out crowd caused havoc as pints of beer were sent to the floor.

Claudia proves why they've quickly become one of the region's most intriguing acts. Blending riot grrrl sensibilities with classic punk, their set is a masterclass in tension and release. Jagged, chorus-drenched guitar lines weave around a hypnotic rhythm section, while precise, biting vocals lean into themes that highlight how messed up the world is right now. They build dense walls of noise only to tear them down. They deliver a performance that is angry, and utterly uncompromising.

Tearjerker have been absent from their home town now for what seems like an eternity. Tonight the boys are back in town and oh how we have missed them. The Sunderland outfit immediately shifts the room into high gear with their trademark brand of melodic punk rock. Fast-paced, driving basslines anchor crunchy machine gun-esque guitar riffs, but what truly sets Tearjerker apart is their keen ear for a massive, emotionally charged hook. Blending classic North East punk with anthemic heart, their raw, high-energy set leaves the room moving from start to finish.

Closing out the night, Critch operates at maximum velocity with swagger, high-octane riffing, and distinct Northern grit that shines through. A sledgehammer rhythm section fuels razor-sharp guitar lines and fast, punchy vocals. Delivering songs packed with working-class attitude and ferocious precision, Critch are slowly taking over the world.

Four distinct sonic identities, one shared, uncompromising drive, and two inflatable sharks that caused havoc. Nights like this prove the local DIY ecosystem is thriving.

Scott Hays



@benhughesphoto

Summer Streets

July 4th and 5th saw the return of the famous Summer Streets festival. After 12 years, the beach based beauty has cemented itself as part of a summer essential for families, music lovers, and creatives all across the North East. What started as a day out in Thompson Park, now has turned into a weekend of fun that extends far beyond music. Stage schools, craft sessions, workshops and more took place as musicians took to the various stages. It's rare that a festival will tick all of the boxes for a class day out: busy, accessible, free, and a great lineup of course, but Summer Streets manages to do it all, and this year was no exception. Headlined by Martin Mcaloon of Prefab

Sprout and Jamagotchi, as well as stages dedicated to promoting young musicians and students, all elements of the music scene had seemingly been involved this year, from creating early musical memories with Tiny Tweekies, to longtime local legends Lindisfarne. A personal highlight of the weekend had to be seeing punk legends Slalom D performing Harbour Walls by the harbour, and seeing how proud they were to be doing so.

Lucy Shields

Single/EP Reviews

Polyfillas - An Assortment of Punk Originals (rel. 4/9)

Polyfillas' much-anticipated debut album rewards long-time fans by perfectly encapsulating the band's energy and honesty across eleven expertly crafted punk bangers.

The aptly titled longform release tears through classic punk chordschemes evocative of Stiff Little Fingers and The Damned, while occasionally venturing into post-punk and ska. Showstopper 'Repeat the Defeat' gets a spine-tingling album remaster, benchmarking how far this troupe has come as recording artists.

Enigmatic front duo Ava and Jamie were recently married, a magical day eclipsed almost immediately by the release of this brilliant album. Polyfillas are here to stay!

Chris Thompson



Cherry Knowle - Zombie

Experimental, with sinister undertones, clawing at the senses to drag them down to the depths where this band is well at home; Cherry Knowle are not content to sit in comfortable normality, and their mission is to create music that their audience can not just listen to, but feel. This new track, and it's accompanying David Lynch-esque music video, fits the post-punk trio's identity well enough to be evident that it has come from them, but not so much that you think you can predict what's next. *Zombie* is a stark, tongue-in-cheek commentary on material possessions and the rat-race of life, set to a synth heavy track that doesn't go easy, in a good way!

Jenny Dean



Lydia Harvey - Learn To Love Me

Lydia Harvey's *Learn to Love Me* holds a crafted piano ballad that highlights her inspiration and confidence as a songwriter. Inspired by artists such as Taylor Swift and Hozier, she blends heartfelt storytelling with a distinctive drum driven sound that gives the track its own identity, whilst still being able to hear who inspired her. Her powerful vocals shine throughout, adding emotion and depth. The combination of delicate piano melodies and dynamic production creates an interesting listening experience. *Learn to Love Me* is a promising release that showcases Lydia's talent and marks another exciting step in her musical journey.

Ebony Jade



Ten Eighty Trees - Bittersweet Coming of Age EP

Ten Eighty Trees return with *Bittersweet Coming of Age*, a lively four-track EP showcasing their impressive musicianship and knack for huge, anthemic hooks.

The record spans an expansive mix of genres. From the huge sing-along melodies of the title track and the classic rock riffage of *Don't Quit*, to the fiery garage-rock energy of *The Family Secret* and the soaring, 90s melancholy of *Broken* (goodbye).

However... by trying to co-exist in too many different styles simultaneously, the EP occasionally falls between genres without a fully clear direction or drive. Still, its strong choruses and infectious energy make *Bittersweet Coming of Age* an undeniably enjoyable safe listening experience, just not one that's pushing any boundaries into new territories.

Scott Hays

Trivia - Home EP

Trivia have been hitting the live scene with support and festival slots over the past couple of years, and have finally made the jump into releasing a full EP, which does not disappoint. The all-female, three-piece prodigy band who debuted their second guitarist at their headline launch gig at Independent in July have amassed over 10,000 streams in just a couple of weeks. The 5-track EP is chock full of angsty bangers set to driving guitars and lyrics to shout at the top of your lungs; from the titular *Home*, to the final track *Tonight*, Trivia have given listeners 20 minutes of non-stop punk fuel. With this release being so monumental for Trivia, I can't wait to see what's next for the band, and since they have just been picked up by Serial Bowl Records, we should have a lot to look forward to.

Jenny Dean

MIXTAPE MIXTAPE MIXTAPE



The team at Music City are some of the biggest local music supporters in Sunderland, so you know you can rely on them for a good recommendation. For this issue, Emily, Frankie Marty, and Michelle shared their top picks of the summer.

Lottie Willis - Better of You

Lottie is back with this gorgeous 80s tinged pop anthem, her voice sweet like honey while singing the track's melancholic lyrics. The guitar solo feels straight out of a John Hughes movie, and the production is super smooth – we've currently got it on repeat at the SMC office.

spacecadetbloom - crucify

Unsurprisingly, the Spacey's latest track goes hard. We first heard this song played at MCN Live at Independent, and were instantly impressed with how massive it sounds. The shoegaze rockers create a hazy and delicious wall of sound permeated by Scarlett's ethereal vocals like a siren calling out through the thrashing guitars.

Daniel Maple - Little Me

Daniel's vocals are sublime as ever on this track. 'Little Me' is beautiful and timeless; it's a song that could resonate with audiences today in 2026 or of decades past. The harmonies are rich and dreamy, and the subject matter is something we can all resonate with. Make time to listen to this track.

Frankie Archer - The Lover's Ghost

We were blown away by Frankie at this year's Washington Folk Festival and this latest offering from her LP, is a heart wrenching neo-folk anthem. It dances between a soothing folk melody to spikes of electronic drama, narrated with Frankie's velvety vocals and stellar storytelling.

Sorley - Left to Right

Fresh off the back of BBC Radio 1 Big Weekend, Sunlun's Sorley has released this new banger. 'Left to Right' conjures the feeling of a Friday night whenever you listen to it. The breakdown section goes particularly hard and has us all bopping along in the office. He's currently creating a new beat every day on his Instagram, so definitely check that out!

Red Remedy - The Line

The opening riff of 'The Line' is dripping in nostalgia, hooking you in before the heaviness rips through and floods your ears, and before you know it you're throwing your head back and forth at your desk. It's angry and charged - perfect to get your energy flowing.



20 INDEPENDENT YEARS OF

Iconic Sunderland music venue Independent is set to celebrate its 20th birthday in style with a bumper gig on Saturday 15th August.

Longtime disciples of Sunderland nightlife will rejoice in the show's lineup, featuring the best of local music old and new, with a special Sounds of 2006 set from Stockton Road Hit Squad to commemorate the birth year of Inde P.

Independent first opened on Holmeside in 2K6, over the road to where it is now, and those old enough to remember the dodgy smoking terrace overlooking the Gala Bingo car park will also remember the clouds of sweat, the dirt-cheap doubles, and some of the noughties' most iconic indie stars venturing through Sunderland. The likes of Jamie T, The Zutons, Klaxons, and of course our very own The Futureheads made Independent the place to be on a Saturday night for the mop-topped skinny jean-wearing delinquents that Ku Club could no longer contain.

With its sister venue White Rooms/Plugged Inn (now the radgie pub Joseph's/The Toy Shop), Independent plugged the hole left by other live music venues like Manor Quay and The Point, and solidified its status as the bedrock of grassroots music in Sunderland. Musicians and DJs alike have cut their teeth at Independent, with the venue showing a ruthless dedication to championing local talent despite live music becoming more and more unprofitable.

Twenty years on, Independent continues to attract nationally acclaimed artists alongside the best emerging local talent, recently landing incredible bookings like Red Rum Club, Slowthai, Lottery Winners and The Snuts, not to mention international touring artists like Courtney Barnett celebrating sold-out shows on Holmeside.

Closer to home, local standouts like Tom A. Smith and The Lake Poets have hosted memorable shows at Inde, while recently the venue was chosen to host the Music Cities Network annual conference off the back of Sunderland achieving Music City status. And it's no wonder - every week we see new and emerging talent given a chance to showcase themselves on the big stage. Just a couple of weeks ago we saw 15-year old all-girl troupe Trivia sell 120 tickets at the venue, smash their debut headliner, and still make it home before bedtime.



Kieran Whitfield

Not enough can be said about Independent's unwavering commitment to developing local talent. In an era where grassroots venues continue to disappear across the UK, Independent continues to give local musicians a goal, a benchmark, and a platform to showcase their development.

Twenty years is well worth celebrating - we're talking about multiple generations of music fans and local talent, and Independent has been there through it all. This show is the ultimate opportunity to show gratitude for the diamond in Sunderland's music scene while enjoying what will no doubt be another memorable night in the venue's storied history.

By Chris Thompson

What's Goin' On at...

'Our Summer Parties are without a doubt our favourite time of year, and we can't wait to welcome you back to our outdoor space.'

The Fire Station's summer parties return with a bang this summer for their third edition of big outdoor shows out the back of the venue in their 'parade ground' area. In previous years we've seen massive acts such as Inspiral Carpets, Elles Bailey, Ferocious Dog and Trevor Nelson alongside local legends such as The Kane Gang, The Futureheads and Tom A. Smith; this year is no different with the series expanding to 10 shows across August (and one in July).

Manchester indie icons Pale Waves are heading East to perform on the opening weekend. Following a sell out show inside the Fire Station late last year, the band are back for their second Wearside experience fresh from touring arenas across Europe with Louis Tomlinson and bang in the middle of a busy festival season. The lineup is completed with some BBC Introducing picks from across the region including Venus Grrrls, Courtney Dixon and Esmerelda Road.

Fellow North-Westeners The Lottery Winners join the party a few weeks later. It's been a couple of years since they performed at Independent and since then their stocks have skyrocketed. They're one of the hardest working bands in the industry, constantly away on tour and playing shows – the biggest of which was a UK & Europe wide stadium tour with

Robbie Williams last Summer – which appears to have catapulted the band onto the next level of their career with what seems to be constant huge shows since then on. Again the lineup is completed with some BBC Introducing picks on support duties, this time featuring Eighty Eight Miles and Swindled.



THE FIRE STATION

These are two of my personal favourite bands who I've seen quite a few times throughout the years (probably 10+ times combined). It's really refreshing to see more modern indie-pop artists playing in Sunderland whilst still releasing music (not only on their rise or on their way back down). Kudos to the booking team for securing these two.

The final weekend of the Summer Parties gigs sees a Sunderland native take to the stage. Famed for his viral clips from Britain's Got Talent and the Paris bohemian rhapsody flash mob, Mickey Callisto will return for another hometown show. Once again, Mickey has previously sold out the inside venue at The Fire Station alongside a sold out UK tour at the end of last year. These days it seems Mickey spends most of his time jet setting around the world, performing gigs and partying across all corners of Europe so it's a real privilege to have him back in Sunderland for a big outdoor show.

The rest of the series is made up with shows from Kula Shaker, John Grant, Maximo Park, Peat & Diesel, Fleetwood Mac's Rumours, Ibiza in Symphony plus an opening night Silent Disco party.

By Ben Richardson

To find out more about what's going on, and get tickets for upcoming gigs, head to thefirestation.org.uk

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GIG LISTINGS

August-
October

02/08	An afternoon with Jamilah	The Grove
02/08	Slalom D	Trillians
03/08	Eric Johnson	The Fire Station
06/08	Cryin Wolf	Little Buildings
06/08	Cane Rouge	The Cluny
07/08	Social Youth Cult	Independent
12/08	National Mackem Day	Sheepfolds Stables
13/08	Deathrattle	The Cluny
15/08	20 th Birthday Gig	Independent
14-16/08	New Horizons Festival	The Grove
20/08	Paulie Boy Blues	The Cluny
21/08	spacecadetbloom	Independent
21/08	OBC Jazz: David Gray Flextet	Sunderland Minster
22/08	Bogus	Independent
28/08	Claudia & 24 Hours in Paris	Vixen Bar
29/08	Shannon Pearl & Isabel Maria	The Bunker (vinyl)
31/08	Robin Trower	The Fire Station
04/09	Spangled	Independent
04/09	Nano Kino	The Cluny
05/09	CUD	Independent
05/09	Reverie	Diego's Joint
05/09	Last Train Home Festival	Darlington
05/09	Smooove & Turrell	Pop Recs
10/09	Chris & Tony Griffiths	Pop Recs
11/09	Wool	Independent

12/09	Pork Pie	<i>Independent</i>
13/09	Lindisfarne	<i>The Fire Station</i>
13/09	Isabel Maria	<i>The Cluny</i>
18/09	Summer's Ending	<i>Independent</i>
18/09	Ani Sandwith	<i>The Ship Isis</i>
18/09	OBC Jazz: Mark Williams	<i>Sunderland Minster</i>
22/09	Vox Lumiere: METROPOLIS	<i>The Fire Station</i>
25/09	Arkayla	<i>Independent</i>
26/09	Meteora & Evanest	<i>Independent</i>
26/09	The Last Time & Patrick Gosling	<i>The Ship Isis</i>
26/09	Martin Stephenson band	<i>Pop Recs</i>
26/09	The Gathering Sounds fest	<i>Stockton</i>
02/10	Claudia & Slalom D	<i>Pop Recs</i>
04/10	The Primitives	<i>Pop Recs</i>
08/10	Grace Petrie	<i>The Fire Station</i>
09/10	Pit Pony	<i>The Grove</i>
10/10	Hivemind	<i>Independent</i>
10/10	Mercury Rev	<i>The Fire Station</i>
16/10	24 Hours in Paris	<i>Independent</i>
16/10	OBC Jazz: Tom Waits for no Man	<i>Sunderland Minster</i>
17/10	Kerrang'd	<i>Independent</i>
21/10	Reef	<i>Independent</i>
22/10	The Undertones	<i>The Fire Station</i>
23/10	Toploader	<i>Independent</i>
23/10	Swindled	<i>The Cluny</i>
24/10	John Bramwell	<i>Pop Recs</i>
27/10	Scarlet Rebels	<i>Independent</i>
28/10	The NE Street Band	<i>Independent</i>
30/10	Shannon Pearl	<i>The Cluny</i>

* **Gan On recommends**

Got a gig coming up? Let us know!
 Email areet@ganon.co.uk or message @ganonsun
 to be included in the November - January listings



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