

Story Wall Audio Guide - Transcription

[English]

Panel 1 - Origins

This is a building we imagined as a beacon. A hub for creative minds to meet in. In 156 years it's seen quite a lot. Circus acts, choir boys, unexpected cannon shots. There's been local musicians and world-famous singers, show dogs, mermaids, political figures.

Though telling this history is a daunting task, to plan for the future we must understand our past. Brandon Hill, Frog Lane, Cannons Marsh, River Avon, River Frome, Temple Church, Castle and St. Philips Church and Priory.

This site has been occupied since the 13th century, first by the White Friars Friary, before changing hands in the Tudor times to a merchant called John Young, who named it The Great House. None other than Elizabeth the First visited in 1574 and she was so taken by John Young's welcome that she knighted him.

The building was then turned into a school named after Edward Colston, a name I'm sure you've heard. Colston was a notorious merchant and slave trader whose names would be placed on many buildings, statues and streets in this period.

The site was then purchased by the Colston Hall Company who wanted to build "a commodious and accessible hall." Fancy words for a place that was warm and welcoming to the public for meetings and all kinds of entertainment.

You may have noticed the distinctive brickwork with its eye-catching red and yellow bricks and intricate patterns. This was the work of architects Foster and Wood. In The Lantern, the Byzantine-inspired patterned tiles on the bar pillars are designed by Giles Round, a beautifully modern take on a past style.

On September 20th, 1867, the hall had its opening night. 3,400 people came, including a meeting of the London Missionary Society. 1873 brought the hall's first music festival, showcasing a choir of 200 local singers.

"A hearty and continued cheer" from the audience was said to ring throughout. From the start, this was the vision of the hall, a welcoming place of culture fit for all. And with every new generation, a new identity is born.

Panel 2 – Forgotten Acts

In the 1880s the hall wasn't just for bands and opera stars. There were magic and circus acts, both brilliant and bizarre. Stuntmen and acrobats made crowds gasp and cheer. All manner of mind-bending shows happened here.

One popular performer in the late 1800s was Carlos Trower. A tightrope walker and abolitionist who lived a stone's throw from the Hall on the Christmas Steps. His act involved a nail -biting combination of intricate acts.

He would wheel a barrow, cook a steak and walk in a sack, all whilst teaching on a rope suspended 50 feet in the air. I think we can all agree he took multitasking to a whole new level.

In 1888, Bristolian illusionist Herr Dobler was known as the king of conjurers for his fancy rope tricks and slick sleight of hand.

Though he always made clear his tricks were no more than strategic illusions, he took his anti-spiritual stance seriously, calling out people he believed to be frauds.

The Davenport brothers were two popular magicians performing at the same time, who claimed to have supernatural abilities.

Dobler was having none of it and wrote a whole book exposing them as charlatans.

Speaking of the supernatural, a fascinating act we dug up from the archive was the manfish. The Western Daily Press dubbed him as, "not a disagreeable being of the Merman type." Otherwise known as Professor Atwood. This early answer to David Blaine was sit at the bottom of a tank, full of water for two or three minutes at a time. time, sitting, smoking and eating.

The fantastical acts kept on coming, with the acrobatic feats of the Bristol Laderists and Pepper's Ghost, a troupe who innovated an early form of moving images by setting up huge paintings on revolving rollers. This would be accompanied by music and lighting to make for a dazzling sensory experience. Remember, this was long before film technology emerged, so this was pretty cutting edge at the time, and a thrilling draw for audiences looking to see something new.

This act wasn't without its casualties though. During one performance, an inexperienced stagehand accidentally discharged nine cannons at once. The whole stage went dark and 26 square feet of plaster came crashing down from the ceiling.

Luckily, no one was harmed. But you can imagine the panic as the crash of the cannons echoed through the Hall.

A dynamic duo by the name of the Bohee Brothers landed in England from Canada in the 1880s. They capitalised on the growing popularity of the banjo by playing with, composing for, and teaching the instrument. They played the Hall to huge acclaim at least three times in the 1890s, and one of their students was none other than the Prince of Wales, who would later become King Edward VII.

It was no mean feat for two black Canadian musicians to make a name for themselves in a stubbornly racist society. They worked within the contradictions of their time, playing anti-slavery songs while also performing in minstrel shows that peddled ugly racist stereotypes, including white performers in blackface.

These cultural tensions would continue to unfurl with the shifting plates of a changing world, as the events that would unfold next show, art and politics have always been toe to toe.

Panel 3 – Fire & Storm (1888)

Then the 19th century was packed with events. The boom of an organ and the yells of dissent. Suffragettes fought as musicians played, even fire filled the hall on one fateful day.

In 1877, Bristol audiences were introduced to contemporary composers through the Bristol Monday popular concerts. The brainchild of Bristolian musician and teacher, George Risley, who would also go on to oversee the enlargement of the Hall organ in 1905.

Risley was an unusually dedicated man, squeezing music into all hours of his packed schedule.

By day, he taught music and played in the cathedral. And then, with a private key, he would let himself into the Hall where he would play from 8pm in the evening until 3am.

A musician who also made good use of the organ was blind musician Alfred Hollings. He was described by critics as a marvellous player with a wonderful memory. While his fingers travelled up and down the keys, he incorporated songs shouted out by the audience during the piece, such as three blind mice. A little tongue -in -cheek.

Several decades later, another talented blind musician would play the hall as a fledging little -known soul singer and pianist. That musician's name is Stevie Wonder. But that's another story. We'll get to that later.

Prince Alfred, son of Queen Victoria, was the Duke of Edinburgh. He had a passion for music as well as expeditions and adventure. In 1891, he played the violin right here in Bristol for an audience of nurses in aid of the Bristol District Nurses Society. In an unusually progressive move for the time, half of the musicians in the orchestra were also women.

On September 1st, 1898, disaster struck. A huge fire that began at the neighbouring Clark & Co. clothes factory, spread to the Hall and completely destroyed it. One report described how the fire reduced the venue to "heaps of smouldering embers." Remarkably, the hall was rebuilt in just two years and was welcoming visitors again by the 27th of November 1900. Sadly, this wouldn't be the last time the Hall would be ravaged by fire.

At this point in history, political tensions were also heating up. The call for women's right to vote was getting louder and louder, and by the early 1900s, the Suffragettes were using attention-grabbing tactics to further their cause.

In May 1909, Suffragettes Vera Holmes and Elsie Howey hid in the grand pipe of the organ and interrupted a speech by Liberal Party politician Augustine Birrell. Can you imagine how cunning and quiet they'd have to have been to not get caught? Just as well the organ had been enlarged a few years before. Else, they might have got stuck.

This is not the last time the Hall would host protest. It was a place to gather and fight for progress. Not everyone would agree on what that meant, but it remained a venue where anyone could vent.

Panel 4 – Dogs, Dolls and Flowers (1910s)

Rising from the ashes of the great fire in 1900, the Hall hosted not just choirs, but the best opera singers of the age, who stunned with focal grace and range. These were formidable women whose big voices captured the hearts of audiences all over the world.

Dame Clara Butt was a beloved control to a singer known for her rousing ballads and impressive vocal range.

Clara King from Humble Beginnings is the daughter of an oyster fisherman. They moved to Bristol when she was 10 years old where her talent for singing was soon spotted. She was offered a scholarship to the Royal College of Music with her community in Totterdown rallying around to support her.

Clara didn't forget her roots when she made it big. She returned to the city to marry fellow singer Kennelly Rumford at Bristol Cathedral and they both came to the Hall every year to perform together.

She was a huge draw as a singer and also a muse for her fellow artists. Inspiring a show called Edward Elgar Sea Pictures. For the premiere she made a dazzling appearance fully dressed up as a mermaid.

As the First World War shook the country's foundations, building morale was crucial. The Hall lent itself towards those efforts becoming a temporary recruitment centre and providing entertainment for troops recovering in hospital.

Opera diva Elsie Griffin was a voice who kept hope alive. In the hearts of British soldiers, she sang for loved her rousing renditions of 'Danny Boy' and 'Roses of Picardy'.

Like Clara Butt, she started small before hitting the big time. She attended St Michael on the Mount Primary School and then worked at the Fry's Chocolate Factory. She sang during the morning prayer meetings as part of a group affectionately called The Fry's Angels.

She also sang solos at many local concerts and let her voice to a 500-person choir for a concert in the Hall. All this practice did her in good stead for what would be a hugely successful singing career.

The Hall continued programming an exciting variety of acts. Thousands of dogs of all breeds scampered into the hall to compete in the great dog shows in 1893 for a £700 prize.

A flower show filled the Hall with stunning blooms of all colours. In the orchestra pit, palm trees were positioned so they towered over the musicians. It was quite the exotic display for visitors who were serenaded by a lush soundtrack as they wandered through this botanical wonderland.

Perhaps most popular of all was the twice-daily animated picture show by Ralph Pringle, a Bristolian pioneer of early cinema. In the featured video, we can see local people engaging in various aspects of daily life. An astonishing 70,395 people came to see these local stories brought to life by cinematographers Mitchell and Kenyon.

Included amongst the footage were the Pill Harbour, Bristol fire brigade, the water police, Bristol Rovers and the Bristol Veterans Parade, all featuring in the moving pictures. You can imagine how thrilling it would have been for local Bristolians to see their own communities showcased and celebrated, all accompanied by the Bristol artillery volunteer band.

Always at the cusp of artistic evolution, the H all celebrated local folks' contributions, not just staging singers from around the way, but also showcasing the humble day to day.

Panel 5 – The Little Theatre (1923)

The 20s swooped in with a swelling jazz riff. Attitudes were changing and crowds were less stiff. Not everyone welcomed this change in vibe and so the battle of the brows came to life.

As we enter the roaring 20s, a time when the formal stylings of Classical music began to go on furl into the free flow of jazz. New attitudes were growing, along with a hunger for art reflecting the changing times.

The Hall hosted the Russian pianist Sergei Rachmaninov, who was dubbed “the poet of the piano.” For his genius compositions, the large span of his hands meant he could reach up to 13 notes at a time, giving him a range of technical expression that set him apart from his peers.

It's easy to assume the transition from classical music to more modern was seamless, but how were people really responding to the changes in culture and music?

Well, it was a divisive issue at the time, with lots of heated debate about changes in music and audience behaviour.

In one camp there was despair at the Hall appealing to so-called low brow culture, such as wrestling, boxing and popular ballads. In the other, these critics were considered snobs for their conservative tastes.

Why should the Hall only cater to the high brow, they argued? Not everyone wanted to attend opera concerts and orchestral symphonies. Did that mean they didn't belong in the hall? Newspapers dedicated many inches to this clash of values, which just goes to show that culture wars are nothing new.

There was even disagreement as to how an audience should show their appreciation for a performance. You've no doubt noticed the contrasting ways crowds behave at different concerts. You wouldn't clap politely at a death metal gig or start a mosh pit in the middle of a concerto. But sometimes the rules of how we should behave aren't that clear.

In the 1930s, a clapping debate ensued, with some people arguing that “the loathsome non-stop clapper” was disruptive to the concert experience. Clara Butt often inspired and encouraged long, loud encores at her performances. Later, The Rolling Stones would have a similarly rowdy crowd at their concerts. Both these artists were accused of encouraging crowd hysteria.

One critic defended Clara's fans saying, “She sings us songs we can understand, songs that bring out hearts into our mouths and generous tears to our eyes. We go on applauding her because we love her and she loves us.”

It wasn't just musicians who were treated to applause. Upstairs in The Lantern became home to The Little Theatre, established by Ronald Russell and Peggy Ann Wood, and The Rapier Players who produced a new play every week and performed six days out of seven for 40 years. It was later taken over by the Bristol Old Vic, where the likes of Daniel Day-Lewis would perform.

Come along for the next leg of the Hall story. With tales of change, struggle and occasional glory.

Panel 6 – International Pops (1920s-30s)

In the 1930s, all kinds of things happened. On March 15th, 1932, we begin this chapter.

The Doors of the Hall welcomed the British Women's Symphony orchestra, just four years after women won four equal voting rights. An all-female ensemble created the symphonies, as ladies would play on their trumpets and timpani.

One reviewer described them as "Surprisingly well played." "With confidence and enthusiasm." But the audience were amazed.

"A very full, sonorous tone, which, however, is always characterised by a certain smoothness and suavity, the prerogative of lady -stringed players."

"Although not playing them in the brilliant manner of their male brethren, nevertheless, do not rob them of their essential mobility of tone."

There was the London Philharmonic, led by Sir Thomas Beecham. Then Sir Adrian Bolt conducted proceedings. And the BBC Philharmonic played for 80,000 children, all attending from schools and different backgrounds to access Classical music. And to this very day, the Beacon has continued this legacy of providing access to the arts. Giving young people opportunities to play music is just as important as the concerts themselves.

Classical music was a draw for the public, who got here legendary pieces conducted, many by Thomas Beecham. The Liverpool Philharmonic, a variety of voices, young prospects to the iconic, from Italian to Russian to Chinese to British, the world's greatest sopranos, a 15-year-old violinist, rising singers, Conchita to Scotney, the world's greatest female pianist.

From music to talks at the Hall all had relevance. The colossal circus arrived with huge elephants. They even had to strengthen the stage to support the weight of several tons of trunks, tusks, and incredible frames.

In this decade, Charles Lockier would begin a long-decorated love affair with the Hall, organising 40 years of events. A prolific promoter, always making bookings, always looking for the greatest artists from all genres, all over the world. Passionate about introducing them to Bristol's music lovers.

In the 1930s, all kinds of things happened. Controversial things, like the British Union of Fascists, led by Oswald Molesley. While many black shirts attended over 6,000 Bristolians demonstrated and protested.

You see, the whole had it all. Fascists to pacifists. It also had talks from human rights activists. Like Paul Robeson, a star in this chapter, a singer, a scholar, an athlete, an actor. And an activist with a message of equality, of loving each other.

"His words echoed from the halls he bellowed. Souls have no colour. As an artist, I come to sing, but as a citizen, I will always speak for peace."

Rapier players. Over 900 performances. 50 world premieres. Incredible audiences. Shakespeare to Chekhov, Strindberg to Ibsen, and many just costing a shilling or sixpence.

In the 1930s, all kinds of things happened. And in spite of the war, the Hall wasn't abandoned. As the next chapter shows, while the country would fight, The Little Theatre was described as a "beacon of light".

Panel 7 – The show must go on (1940s)

Through the 1940s, Bristol was determined to keep the show alive. “Bristol will not be starved of music.” When World War II broke out, the Beacon didn't break stride. Unbreakable spirits danced beneath unexploded bombs the show had to go on.

The Bristol Blitz first hit on November 2, 1940, each time dropping thousands of incendiary bombs. But also from above, towered in antenna from BBC Radio, playing talent from London's air raid shelters.

With its radio comedy broadcast, Richard Murdoch and Arthur Aske making us all laugh, and the BBC Symphony Orchestra moved here, 700 staff members arrived for the new year of 1940.

With the backdrop of Blitz bombs, hoping they don't land, the Beacon staged its very own variety programme called ‘Keep Smiling’ twice a day. Twice a day throughout the entire war, a smile was what Bristol was fighting for.

When the war broke out, live entertainment was banned. But after one week, the government soon overturned this, and Charles Lockier planned regular shows. The first being Leslie ‘Hutch’ Hutchinson, a major star of the 20s and 30s, and a huge figure in wartime entertainment. A black, Caribbean, bisexual man who all through World War II, travelled around volunteering to entertain the troops. But later, a scandal, a racist agenda which tainted people's view, wrecked his legacy, and robbed him of the credit he was due.

Through ongoing panic, the short breaths, the long nights, through blackouts and dark. The hall kept its spotlight. As audiences slipped gas masks under their seats, the performers placed on their stage masks and for a couple of hours, this was the world. And the war was just some play, some place elsewhere.

“Bristol shall have music.” “Where is forgotten?”

Bristol audiences sang their cares away. “We want to play our part in Bristol in providing as much relaxation as we can in these days of tension.”

“We all slipped our gas masks under our seats and sat back to forget the war jitters.”

“Bristol is giving variety a real boost during these dark days.”

When they left the auditorium, those war jitters came back fast. Signs of “Danger, unexploded bomb” and “Always carry your gas mask.” But still the smiles would stay and the music would play. The songs they took home would sing of new days. And their smiles became gas masks, protecting their songs, comedians whose punchlines were unexploded bombs.

Until 1942, when one incendiary bomb sparked fire, and while some might have hid, Hall manager Bill Bates put it out with a dustbin lid. And so, the Hall survived, as did the music. As did the smiles whenever the tunes hit.

The Squadronnaires were the RAF's own dance orchestra, raising morale for both troops and the audience. Swing bands and jazz, they kept paying all of it.

Fela Sowande, a Nigerian organist accompanying Adelaide Hall, the world record holder for most enduring recording artist releasing music over eight entire decades.

Adelaide Hall turned the Hall to a jazz bar. 'Lupriga' played to make everyone dance, like the war was over. And it almost was. The last aerate in Bristol was in May '45. And although through the war the Hall survived, through the blitz and the bombing, to somehow avoid it, it was one singular cigarette, which in the end destroyed it.

1945's fire brought destruction to it all. So while the country began its rebuild, so did the Hall. Through six long years of war, the Hall danced till the end. Now six long years, they'd wait, until it opened again.

Panel 8 – Jazz Explosion

The hall reopened in the 1950s as a jazz explosion took over the city. Six years since fire, six years since the war, the hall was reopened, the return of music, the only gunfire now was to test the acoustics.

And the sound had improved with much more comfortable seating, as well as enhanced ventilation and heating. And the Duke of Gloucester paid a visit for the Festival of Britain, with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra playing the opening concert.

The hall's grand reopening was a roaring success. The 50s and 60s saw even more international jazz legends. Stan Kenton, Duke Ellington, Sarah Vaughan, Lionel Hampton and Louis Armstrong. March 1959, a night of raucousness.

He told Bristol's crowd, You're a jumping audience! Armstrong was incredible. His personality invaded the hall like a warm fire in winter. Beans the master of the trumpet. And the hall was determined to keep raising its levels.

March 62, the Queen of Jazz, Ella Fitzgerald, a night they described as simply stupendous. Fish are jumping, and the cotton is high. You're a daddy, daddy's rich, and my momma's good looking. So hot, little baby, baby, baby, baby, don't you cry.

No, no. From the moment the First Lady of Song made her entrance, nobody was ever as good. And you get the feeling nobody ever will be. Jazz took their breath away. We had Ray Brown on the double bass.

Miles Davis' legendary trumpet played. From 1956 you could finally see the greatest American bands after a band on a UK touring which had lasted 20 years. And now here was Stan Kenton performing in Bristol.

After two decades blackout the hall was packed out with 4 ,000 jazz fans. Jazz at the Philharmonic had its first tour of Britain. A star started a lineup of the finest musicians that jazz had to offer.

Ray Brown and Max Bennett, the Dill Jones trio, Dave Shepherd, Herb Ellis. Then in 1960 there was an all night carnival of jazz till 7 a .m. over Eight hours in eight different bands played to a walker's floor of over 2 ,400 fans, a night of frenzy jiving.

Coffee by the Gallon catnaps on the floor between dancing to the talent on a line up that featured a Bristol -born Bill headlined by the jazz band of one Aka Bilk. And it wasn't just jazz, there's a whole lot more.

The best of rock and roll began to tour, Buddy Holly and the Crickets bounced on stage to roar, the like of which had never been heard in the city before. And there were public talks, including Arnold Eyelore of the Small World Transatlantic Balloon Flight.

He delivered a riveting speech to an attentive venue, describing how his crew had been rescued after the balloon itself had failed. In hearing his tale of being lost at sea, Bristol had found inspiration, a passion that would inflate the future of the city's skies.

And to this day, balloons are an iconic part of Bristol's identity. There were Creole jazz bands, pop bands and orchestras, actors and activists, the hall hosted all of them. Two decades with jazz music aged like the whiskey.

Legends played here, some were made here in the 50s and 60s.

Panel 9 – Beatles, Rock n Roll and Beat pop (1960s)

By the 60s, Rock and Roll had taken over the hall.

Let's start this story in November of '64, at the final night of The Beatles tour, an incident that went down in Bristol folklore. As four students climbed way up high in the gantries, holding items you'd usually find in the pantries, and as the band finished singing, 'If I Felt', right before their finale, the students dropped flower bombs all over Paul McCartney. And George, John and Ringo, all covered in flower which fell from the rafter, but they weren't mad. In fact, they were collapsing with laughter. While the manager of the hall, Ken Cowley, was fuming, the Beatles found the flower nothing but amusing.

The Rock and Roll fever brought madness to shows. Along with falling flower came The Rolling Stones, and they performed three times in the year '63, as 2,000 fans chanted the same thing consistently.

"We want The Stones! We want The Stones! We want The Stones!"

The hall's management was so concerned that when the Stones returned, they asked the band to "behave". Afraid the Stones fans would cause mayhem.

Then, in another concert in '71, Mick Jagger would scatter golden petals as wild dancing bodies leapt at the stage. But in May '66, Bob Dylan's show was quite the opposite. Even his most hardcore fans just couldn't get along with it, because his new electronic sound just drowned out his lyrics, and the so-called 'Judas Tour' had fans out the door before the show finished.

"It's a noisy, ear-splitting disaster."

"His lyrics were swamped in the amplified din."

"My heart sank."

But better believe that Soul, Jazz and Blues were still thriving. Once again, the Hall had icons arriving from a Tamla Motown special, Martha and the Vandellas, Smokey Robinson, The Supremes, a whole load of legends, and alongside them, Stevie Wonder, a boy wonder then just 14 years old.

But the problem was most of the tickets just hadn't been sold. Until Paul Stevenson, one of the Bristol bus boycotts leading figures, who two years earlier led the lines on the pickets, distributed no less than a thousand free tickets to the community of St Paul's, packing the hall and making the show a success.

But St Paul's had its own venue, The Bamboo Club, full of Calypso and Mento, ska tunes and dub, and regular reggae nights captured a zeitgeist for the Caribbean community too often cut off for the nightlife.

But when they hired out the hall, they bought a brand new flavour for a huge West Indian cricket team fundraiser.

Some of the greatest musicians performed in those stage lights. Jimmy Hendrix and Pink Floyd performed on the same night. In September '67, and for 40 minutes, his Hendrix would play on three different guitars in the most surprising and unthinkable ways.

"He played each one of his three guitars in every possible way. He played them with his teeth, the stage, his bodyguard's head, a microphone stand and the drum kit."

"When the last number, Purple Hayes, was announced, I thought the end of the world was upon us."

After Jimmy Hendrix came Jimmy Smith, with his jazz pop and Indian Ragamix, called 'Eats Meets West'. And the best of all worlds, were gracing in the hall. Otis Redding, Ray Charles, Chubby Checker, Chuck Berry, Jerry Lee Lewis, Jerry and the Pacemakers, making memories too plentiful for one decade to contain.

And professional wrestling provided regular fixtures, with stars like the wrestler Billy Two Rivers. And all types of people, Johnny Quango, a former ballet dancer, even the Bond villain, Oddjob Harold Sakata. In fact, thousands would pack up the hall for these showdowns.

The high-flying antics were often considered too laboured by traditionalists, who consistently tried to make it disappear. But wrestling shows would go on for over 50 years. In fact, the Hall was Bristol's leading venues for fights. Former boxer Len Mundan promoted many shows there in the 60s. Jamaican -born Bristol boxer Dervin Airey often fought there in the 60s and 70s. And it's where Bristol's Ross Hale won the British Super Lightweight title in 1994. But the Hall would stage its final fight in 2004. After decades of wrestling with its own identity, it seemed that eventually the highbrow's won the war.

By the '60s, the Hall had updated its definition of everything. From Hendrix's delicate Fender strings, to thick ropes of wrestling rings, rock n roll, pop and soul. There was endless amusement. From power bombs of wrestlers, to flower bombs from students.

Panel 10 – Bowie, Stones and Bob Marley (1970s)

Sen-sational. The word used to describe David Bowie in 1973. The Bristol Evening Post wrote: "Bowie bowls him over, clothes changing from bellowing Japanese robes to a ballet dancer's cat suit. Stage presence? 11 out of 10."

And that would be the flavour of a decade of events. And as decades changed, so did the music. The line-ups more varied and some would dispute this. For example, 'A Night With Blondie, The Ramones, The Clash and The Buzzcocks' were described as "the unintentional festival of punk rock." By the Evening Post who hated the crudeness and colours, giving props to The Clash, but they clashed with the others.

"An unintentional festival of punk rock opened last night in a flurry of bizarre dress, surly aggression and deliberately crude music. The bands last night shared, to varying degrees, punk rock's contempt for the over-elaborate. Unlike the others, The Clash worked out something approaching a slick presentation with dramatic lighting and posed rock stars' dances."

In 1976, Bob Marley and The Wailers brought a world tour to Bristol, 'Rastaman Vibration'. Sent shivers through spines, inspired through struggle, roots rock reggae and the message, "Get up, stand up, stand up for your rights."

November 12th, '73, make sure you don't miss it. Shirley Bassie is in Bristol and they all want a ticket. But for a front-row seat, it's a long night and a long queue as fans camp till sunrise with blankets and hot soup.

"I always queue for Shirley Bassie. It's all for my six-year-old daughter, Susan. If I don't get front-row seats, she won't forgive me."

In 1973, Bristol felt the full force of roller mania. 2000 fans on their wildest behaviour. To see the chart-topping Bay City Rollers, the full force of police still couldn't control them.

"Go Wilders, Roller Mania! Erupts in Bristol!"

"The loudest sounds I have ever heard in my life."

100 policemen, 50 stewards, inside and outside, a crowd hyped to see a show postponed from two months prior.

"Teenage girls became the most riotous choir as hysteria descended. Roller Mania had landed."

And a roll on the '70s! Elton John arrived a rainbow striped suit, gigantic heeled shoes, a glittering coat and the whole staff were worried about his piano acrobatics, but the show was out of this world when the Rocket Man landed in Bristol.

"He swaggered on stage, as always, in a shiny silver and rainbow striped suit. A glittering coat and gigantic heeled shoes."

"The piano chatted out notes like a machine gun."

"Tremendous."

Speaking of showmen, Freddie Mercury's next on the scene hits song after hit song from the legendary Queen. As the band packed the hall and the whole place was rocking to 'Don't Stop Me Now' and the 70s showed no signs of stopping. They packed the hall and left as conquering heroes in a blaze of smoke bombs and rock n roll.

But it wasn't all rock, it wasn't all punk. It was everything. In 1970, there was a Senegal African Ballet. As audiences were captivated by singers and dancers and musicians the hall was broadening and drawing in new cultures.

And it wasn't all riots, there were quieter moments. An electron lecturer, a new type of showman. In fact, the hall hosted all types of talks from the sciences to seances even lectures on cooking appliances, a wildlife festival, screenings of films but all kinds of adventures the venue would fill.

And it felt like it thrived when all culture was equal. And to this day the Beacon drives to welcome all people.

Panel 11 – Contemporary Music evolution

Surfing on the swell of psychedelic fusion music came new wave. A melting pop broadening punk into synthesized pop, dance jazz and rock collided with protest at its heart. In this time of evolving music, audiences were tested with the unfamiliar.

After three years during 'Clear of the City', due to a wince-inducing review that labelled him a no-hoper, the Welsh wonder Tom Jones returned heroic in 1989. As did the one and only Nina Simone, her first show at the hall since 1967, Bristol waited 22 years for the return of a legend.

"Joined by the blockheads, kicking off with dramatics, 'Hit me with your rhythm stick', Ian Dury dressed in whites spat a mouthful of stage blood up into flight. That stained red where it landed, what a start to the night."

As someone whose unbalanced walk showed a life lived with polio, even when successful, record labels didn't want his withered arm exposed in music videos. Protest trembled under his lyrics.

1981 is when 'Spasticist Autisticus' was written. Words wrapped in defiance, truth and grit, a war cry to challenge how disabled people were described in a tone that patronised that he viewed as counterproductive.

That same year brought more red rebellion from hell cat Toya Wilcox, who came on stage like a hurricane.

"The amazingly dressed punks and sartorial extremists who packed the show and heightened the sense of unreality."

While pop music shifted from punk to new romantic, St Paul's fought back against the force that was meant to protect. But to their citizens was oppressive. While police stopped and served sometimes twice a day, beat with buttons for reasons they wouldn't say.

The raid on the black and white café was to tip and point for the tension. We saw the riots of St Paul's erupted in 1980 and left a hum of disruption.

Two years later, a performance from a multiracial band UB40 Play 2 saw that gigs showing.

"Britain's problem is not a case of black against white, but of an oppressed generation and an uncaring establishment."

Barrington Lloyd Anderson birthed a Comey, an African dance company, with a vision to change the UK dance landscape.

In 1982, the Hall saw his craft delivered by the master alongside 200 school children performing dance from the Black Diaspora. Black Roots, a St Paul's reggae group, used their music to

document a post -thatcher reality. When unemployment was on the rise and racial tension was bubbling.

“Whenever there is injustice, Roots Reggae have a part to play. It eases the mind of the oppressed. That's what Roots Reggae is. It's for the underprivileged people.”

Stepping up in 1986 to headline at the Hall. A charity concert with Bristolians performing all of the music. Their stage debut. Promoting the celebration of the United Nations International Year of Peace. They performed in dedication to the eradication of nuclear weapons.

“Another small voice raised in opposition to war.”

That same year, in 1986, St. Paul's Carnival started. Organised by families, locals and activists. Using music and food to challenge negative narratives that would change Bristol forever. And the musical landscape that grounded it.

Panel 12 – Bristol Sound

The 80s brought a foundation of rebellion and musical evolution that was birthed in St. Paul's.

Mento to dancehall, calypso to ska, reggae and rare groove. Welcome to bass culture.

Speakers stacked high in the streets, one on top of the other, wheeled out at weekends, tended to by rastas, deep dub and stomach pit bass, lovers slow dancing at house parties. Malcolm X Center, The Dug Out, The Bamboo Club and Trinity.

The children who had seen great music in the Hall now had grown older. Influenced by the Jamaican diaspora, who breathed life into underground counterculture, garage and two step, acid house and rave, electronic soundscapes, a teardrop for the unfinished symphonies that played.

In '98, Robert del Naja said "That out of respect for the truth of history, Colston Hall should be renamed, that the building should not continue to celebrate the name of someone who took part in the slave trade." When it wasn't, a boycott followed, from one of Bristol's greatest names.

This is when the Bristol Sound started its global takeover. With diversity and multiculturalism at its creative centre. Though it took a couple of decades for it to find a home in the hall.

Experimental fusion music found a way of blurring the lines, bringing in underground flavours experienced on the outside. The trip-hop of Portishead had reached overseas.

1998 was the first time a live gig allowed crowds to stand. Extra tickets and extra demand. We have to move seats for the 1994 Dummy, Wondering Star. Roads numb lead to a glory box stealing beauty.

Then, in 2012, with collaboration at its core, Art Space, Life Space, Invisible Circus, Coexist, Code Architects and Circomedia, team up with the Hall. "All aboard!" Travelling across the country on a UK-wide tour, a joyfully chaotic series between Western and African artists. A cross-cultural musical project set up to build a level playing field and create the unexpected.

Visual storytelling has always had a life in the Hall. Film came from theatre, came from retellings of the war.

In 2015, Asian Dub Foundation, brought dubstep and bhangra together, playing along with a cinema screen showing George Lucas' dystopian fantasy set in a post-apocalyptic future. A sci-fi classic shown as a screen spanning the stage, a night at the cinema, and a music concert.

That same year, Akua Naru, on the stage of our very own Lantern. After the UK Prime Minister said it was time for the UK and Jamaica to "move on from slavery to avoid discussing reparations."

“When slavery paid for all of this,” she said referring to Great Britain, to a grieving audience between songs she sighs. “My heart is broken.”

To mark 150 years of Bristol Beacon being open, there was a nod to the music that in the past it hadn't shone a light on.

In 2017, it was time to celebrate and accept that over time, there had been those who had turned a blind eye to the experience of those with the shades of skin darker, who had to take to the streets to shout, “Black Lives Matter.”

To align with truth, the Beacon programmed a show like no other. Roots Manuva, Horace Andy, Dawn Penn, Bristol's own Tanya Lacy, the sound of software loops and programmed break beats is where drum and bass would meet with the formidable sounds of Outlook Orchestra playing along Bristol Harborside.

“A moment of true triumph and recognition bring the underground inside.”

“There are so many ways music can be reimagined.”

In 2018, profoundly deaf percussionist Evelyn Glennie teaches the world how to listen. Explain how she memorized the pitch of frequencies, understanding sound by feeling vibrations, de- and re-constructing jazz standards in the hall in an explosive interaction. This chapter bought with it an intuitive generation who refused to be held back by musical convention.

Panel 13 – Regeneration & Renaming

So much has happened in the belly of this building. Hopes and dreams and tragedy and music.

How many grandparents and those before them and then again before, how many thousands of bodies have these walls kept warm?

Through circus elephants in dog shows, local choirs and illusionists, wrestling, Little Theatre, boxing and hidden suffragettes, gas masks and blitzes, fascists, discarded cigarettes.

A space that started through shares from the public couldn't ignore that over the years many had felt excluded. Held back from entering a building from which a slave trader's name protruded.

We don't feel an association with Edward Colston. We want to move forward. He had been dead 150 years before it opened.

“Drum roll, held breath,
New name, Bristol Beacon.”

Against a backdrop of Colston statue being thrown into River Avon.

2020 is time now to think about the next generation. The Beacon is a vehicle through which people could be creative. In communities and care homes, in schools, there is music.

“Strobing concrete slabs to restless disco.”

Newly announced cellars, where homegrown talent can thrive. Learn how to mix and record, make music in the live room, inclusivity and illumination. It's time to raise the roof.

Challenging ideas of what an ensemble should be. The Paraorchestra opens blending art forms and technology. Collaborating with a group of local refugees to tell stories of journeys through the infamous 'Odyssey'. With an exhibition from the Bristol legend that is Big Jeff. Head banging at the funk committed to all the music there is. To be reborn “in this playground made of stars.”

To share heartbeats and participate every journey needs a spark, inspiration through a masterclass make room and step aside there's so many people to connect. In bustle and silence, stillness with time to reflect.

Bristol
that brick and that car and that house
And that streetlight strobing concrete
slabs to restless disco

A beacon
bright, blink twice, look up, out and over

new lick of paint, rhythm switch,
cymbal shimmers and bubbling riffs

Bristol

Chaos chrysalis curled like a treble clef
Familiar, mysterious, that song kept
under your tongue like a sugar lump

A beacon

The first gig that took you by the collar,
how the light and the bass boiled over
Its thin lid, everyone sharing a heartbeat

Bristol

obvious and elusive, myth and
mundane, surviving the strange,
emerging shed of shame and sonorous

A beacon

you and you and you and especially
you, constant tapper of tables and kneecaps,
come bless this place with graceless noise

Bristol

our home, because of, in spite of, in
light of, in thrall to, in time with,
in debt to every single one of you

A beacon

wink of prism, trill of ivory
two drumsticks in a kid's hands
Galaxies exhaling with the arc of an arm

Drum Roll.

Held breath.

New name.

Bristol Beacon

It's Time.

November 30th, 2023 is when these doors reopened. Whatever comes next depends on those who choose to take on the baton. We might be at the end of this story, but really it's just the beginning.

So, find your seats, raise the curtain, take to the stage. Welcome to Bristol Beacon.