

# MANCHESTER

→ SOUNDING OUT

## The world's first industrialised city, situated in north-west England, boasts a thriving and varied music scene, as Kevin Bourke reveals

Fixated on Factory, mesmerised by 'Madchester', spellbound by The Smiths, and overawed by the Oasis soap opera, the media might make it seem as if there's no real world music or folk scene in Manchester. Of course that's nonsense, although it has to be said that penetrating the numerically large but tight-knit Chinese and Italian communities in the city could prove overly daunting for a brief visit.

Much more accessible – and one of the real musical spines of Manchester – has always been the traditional session scene around the city's many Irish pubs. "Pubs like The Jolly Angler are where musicians meet up in Manchester to swap and learn tunes... and have a good time," points out local resident Mike McGoldrick, the flute player who began gigging across the country while still at the school he attended alongside the Gallagher brothers. You're more likely to come across sessions, though, if you head down to Levenshulme, otherwise known as 'Levenshulme village' and home to the biggest Irish community outside London.

On the way you'll pass near Ancoats in east Manchester, which became a centre for Italian migration in the mid-19th century, with traditional trades such as ice cream production and barrel piano making based in this part of the city. It's pretty much all gone now, though, and just about the only active reminder is the Madonna Del Rosario procession, occurring this year on July 3.

Like many post-Industrial northern cities, the centre of Manchester, around Piccadilly and the Victorian splendour of the Town Hall, was a rather seedy area in

the 70s. Now it's relatively thriving, with massive old cotton warehouses turned into dwellings and the biggest Chinatown in Europe just yards south of Piccadilly Gardens.

If nearby Liverpool is twinned with Memphis, and it's not entirely fanciful to suggest that Manchester's logical Tennessee twin might be Nashville, then this area is Manchester's very own East Nashville. Partly because of the Celtic connection but also because of the number of folk and country-influenced songwriters and musicians, not to mention actors and writers, you can bump into on their own fondly-imagined boho beat in the dimly-lit, impeccably hip bars.

If you head in the direction of the fashionable suburb of Didsbury along the 'Oxford Road Corridor', you'll find yourself passing by not only Cornerhouse, the first café-bar-arts complex of its sort in the country, but also the university and its associated venues and bars before arriving in the neon glare and 24/7 hubbub of Rusholme's 'Curry Mile' – home to the large South Asian population.

At the other end of the scale, the hugely-ambitious Manchester International Festival blazed onto the scene four years ago with *Monkey – Journey To The West*. Perhaps only the world's first industrial city would have had the nerve to commission and stage a new opera, based on a Chinese legend, from musician Damon Albarn, artist Jamie Hewlett and Chinese actor and director Chen Shi-zheng! Nor is this year's just-announced third festival any less potentially mind-boggling.



The pedestrian area around Manchester's neo-Gothic town hall

BEN BLACKALL

Staff Benda Bilili, Ladysmith and Ravi Shankar are just some of the forthcoming gigs at Bridgewater Hall

### VENUES

#### Bridgewater Hall

State-of-the-art concert hall home of the Hallé Orchestra, but also the place to see forthcoming concerts by the likes of Staff Benda Bilili, Ladysmith Black Mambazo, Ravi Shankar or Emmylou Harris in comfort and with sound that can be peerless on a good night. They're not too keen on you dancing, though.

**Lower Mosley Street, M2 3WS, 0161 907 9000, [www.bridgewater-hall.co.uk](http://www.bridgewater-hall.co.uk)**

#### Instituto Cervantes

Official Spanish language and cultural centre that often hosts flamenco shows or such unexpected treats as Manu Chao's dad and respected writer Ramon Chao, talking about *The Train of Ice and Fire*, his book about Mano Negra's journey through Colombia.

**326 Deansgate, M3 4FN, 0161 661 4200, [www.manchester.cervantes.es](http://www.manchester.cervantes.es)**

#### Royal Northern College of Music

Like a slightly funkier version of the Bridgewater Hall and vibrant with music students, this comfortable, mid-size concert hall is where Baaba Maal played on his recent *Tales From The Sahel* tour.

**124 Oxford Rd, M13 9RD, 0161 907 5200, [www.rncm.ac.uk](http://www.rncm.ac.uk)**

### LISTINGS

There's so much going on across Manchester, in fact, that no one info source can really keep up with it. You can get a gist, though, of what's on in Friday's *City Life* supplement in the free *Manchester Evening News* or in local listings magazine *Chimp*.

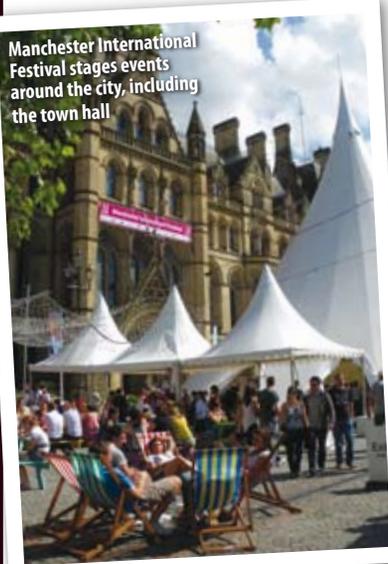
## FESTIVALS

### Manchester International Festival

The 2011 event includes Amadou & Mariam with *Eclipse*, a series of concerts staged entirely in the dark, using music plus narration written by Malian storyteller Hamadou Tandina; Damon Albarn playing with Tony Allen in an opera and Björk with the world premiere of her multi-media project *Biophilia*.

**June 30-July 17, 2011, various venues, 0161 876 2198, [www.mif.co.uk](http://www.mif.co.uk)**

Manchester International Festival stages events around the city, including the town hall



### Manchester Irish Festival

This showcase of Irish culture in the city has grown into Europe's biggest Irish Festival, with the 2011 event attracting an estimated 200,000 people to over 200 events at 56 venues. As well as big venue-filling headliners like Van Morrison or Sharon Shannon, highlights include all-day traditional Irish music sessions and the two-week tradfest in Levenshulme.

**Mid March 2012, various venues, 0161 234 3999, [www.manchesteririshfestival.co.uk](http://www.manchesteririshfestival.co.uk)**

### Cultural Collage World Music Festival

The second edition will feature over 25 events across 14 different venues in the city. This year's highlights include Kanda Bongo Man, Ska Cubano, the Bissarov Sisters and Alejandro Toledo & The Magic Tomboinos.

**May 5-14, various venues, [www.culturalcollageworldmusicfestival.org.uk](http://www.culturalcollageworldmusicfestival.org.uk)**

### Platform 4

August weekend free festival of street theatre, music, dance and strolling performance from UK and international companies, produced by xtrax.

**August 19-21, [www.xtrax.org.uk](http://www.xtrax.org.uk)**



Platform 4 is a free festival featuring street theatre, music and dance

## PUBS AND BARS

### The Jolly Angler

This pub near Piccadilly train station is definitely one of the places to check out if you want to catch some informal session music and don't mind some perilously rickety furniture and a clientele who, if they fish recreationally, make the pub's name only half misleading.

**47 Ducie St, M1 2JW, 0161 236 5307**

### Odd

Atmospheric Northern Quarter bar (there's an offshoot, called Odder, on Oxford Road) offering food, drink, quizzes, short films, club nights and live music.

**32 Thomas Street, Northern Quarter M4 1ER, 0161 833 0070, [www.oddbar.co.uk](http://www.oddbar.co.uk)**

### M19

Just one of the many Irish bars in the Levenshulme area, almost any one of which might boast live music on any given night.

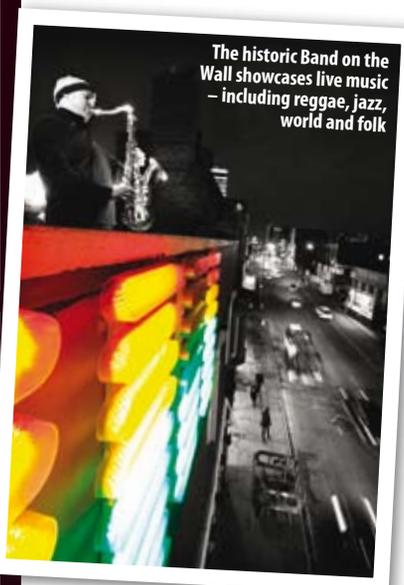
**847 Stockport Road, Levenshulme M19 3PW, 0161 224 8135, [www.m19bar.com](http://www.m19bar.com)**

## CLUBS

### Band on the Wall

Historic and much-loved city centre venue, which only recently re-opened after being expanded and generally spruced up. Live music, featuring lots of reggae, jazz, world and folk, plus popular club nights.

**25 Swan Street, Northern Quarter, M4 5JZ, 0161 834 1786, [www.bandonthewall.org](http://www.bandonthewall.org)**



The historic Band on the Wall showcases live music – including reggae, jazz, world and folk

### Bury Met

Considerably closer to the centre of Manchester than you might think, at least once you've mastered the Metrolink, this intimate venue regularly hosts the likes of Lau, Karen Matheson and Jim Moray. Upcoming highlights include Orkestra del Sol, the Martin Simpson Band, Heidi Talbot and Moïshe's Bagel.

**Market Street, Bury BL9 0BW, 0161 761 2216, [www.themet.biz](http://www.themet.biz)**

### Deaf Institute

Funky little multi-room venue which benefits from its proximity to the various students union buildings and bars along the so-called 'Oxford Road corridor', which will also lead you to the Curry Mile of Rusholme.

**135 Grosvenor Street, M1 7HE, 0161 276 9350, [www.thedeafinstitute.co.uk](http://www.thedeafinstitute.co.uk)**

### Ruby Lounge

Small-ish venue on the edge of the fashionable Northern Quarter which they say 'nods from the 21st century to all those perfect 1950s Lounges and to a time when live venues gave a damn about the people enjoying them.'

**34 High Street, M4 1QB, 0161 834 1392, [www.therubylounge.org](http://www.therubylounge.org)**

## SMOOTH OPERATIONS

Based in the Saddleworth Hills just north of Manchester, Smooth Operations are a veritable roots powerhouse in a typically Northern "let's just get on with it and have some fun while we're doing it" way. They're the independent production company behind not only the Mike Harding and various Mark Radcliffe radio shows, but also the BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards, the broadcast coverage of Celtic Connections and the Cambridge Folk Festival, and a whole raft of radio documentaries such as the 2006 *Radio Ballads*, and *The Ballad Of Africa*. Upcoming on BBC Radio 2 on May 18 is *The Freewheelin'* Bob Dylan, for which British folk artists are re-recording the songs from that album. Ralph McTell, Thea Gilmore, Martin Carthy, Karine Polwart, Martin Simpson, and Coope Boyes & Simpson are amongst the participants.

"We find over and over again that there's an obviously underserved audience who are hungry for the sorts of specialist music programmes we make," says managing director John Leonard. "We decided right at the outset that we would never be just another independent chasing interviews with Britney Spears or whoever but would make programmes about the music we loved, employing people who understand the music."

**[www.smoothoperations.com](http://www.smoothoperations.com)**