

JANUARY 2021
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Lake District Life & LANCASHIRE LIFE

21 THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO IN 2021

It's the year
of the garden
Plans for your plot

LYTHAM
Foraging with top chefs

LIVERPOOL
A unique musical library

RAWTENSTALL
Perfect for dry January

PRESTON
A mum's loving lifeline

RUFFORD
The arrival of winter

Get *7 great*
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Songs that tell stories

By *Jeremy Blackmore*

Meet the two Liverpool musicians whose chats with some of the world's biggest stars - including Paul McCartney and Noel Gallagher - have made their podcast a must-listen for music fans.



picture: Simon Barber and Brian O'Connor

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Foraging feasts

By *Ellie Hargreaves*

Join some of the county's best-known chefs, Nigel Haworth, son Kirk and Hipping Hall head chef Oli Martin, who have been foraging on the Fylde Coast to make a meal of a new electric car.



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The year of the garden

By *Paul Mackenzie*

We all learned to love our gardens more during 2020. Keep up the momentum with plans - and expert advice - for your plot.

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ON THE COVER



A beautiful view of the Lake District, like the one on our cover, will be one of the just rewards for getting outdoors more in 2021.

Photo: *WoutervandenBroek. Getty Images/iStockphoto*

The stories behind the songs

Two Liverpool musicians' chats with some of the world's biggest stars have made their podcast a must for music fans

WORDS: Jeremy Blackmore

It began as a small DIY project hosted by two Liverpool musicians to help direct traffic to their website. Since then, over almost a decade, the Sodajerker podcast has featured interviews with some of the biggest songwriters in the world.

Now, the British Library has recognised the value of the Sodajerker catalogue as an unparalleled audio archive of the greats of popular music talking about their craft. All 178 episodes, and counting, have been preserved for posterity and future study in the Library's Sound and Moving Image catalogue.

Simon Barber and Brian O'Connor are the songwriting team behind Sodajerker. The

pair met at St Francis Xavier's College and attended Paul McCartney's Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts together. As well as interviewing the former Beatle for the podcast, they have spoken to a host of other legends and more contemporary artists, getting them to open up and shed light on their creative processes.

Now future generations will be able to hear those conversations.

Simon said: 'It's amazing to think that years after we've gone, some young researcher might go down and listen to our interview with McCartney and think, wow, they actually met the guy because by then he might be sort of folklore. So yeah, it's exciting.'

As schoolboys, the pair shared a common love of music and pop culture and after their time at

LIPA, toured as part of Liverpool band Santa Carla, releasing an album and two EPs.

When the band split up, Simon and Brian realised their true passions lay more in writing and recording. Progress though was slow and during one writing session in summer 2011 they hit on the idea of a podcast to drive visitors to their website.

They were huge fans of Marc Maron's pioneering US podcast WTF which features revelatory conversations with iconic personalities and modelled their approach on that.

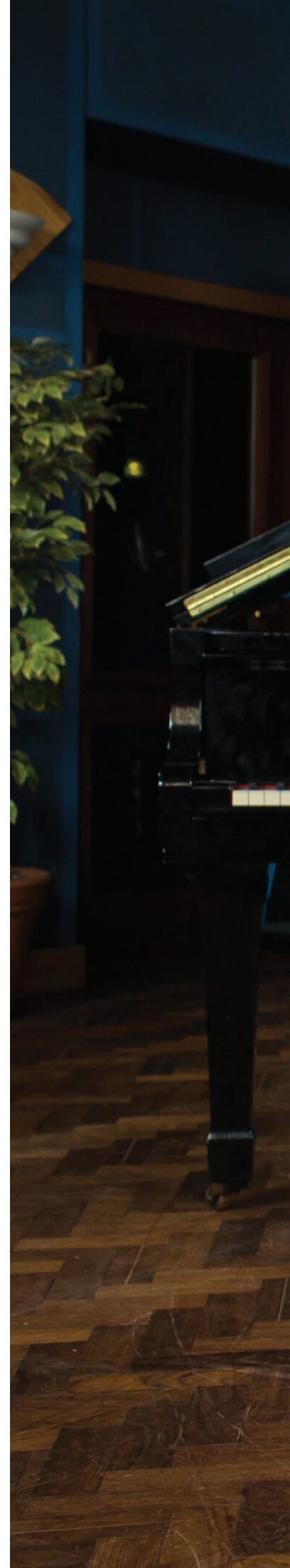
'All we care about is how they write songs, how their creative process works. They really respond to that line of questioning'

The first guest was Grammy winning songwriter Billy Steinberg, writer of pop classics including Like A Virgin (Madonna), True Colors (Cyndi Lauper), Eternal Flame (The Bangles) and I Drove All Night (Roy Orbison). They followed that up swiftly with 1970s legend Todd Rundgren. It established their credibility from the start.

Brian said: 'We knew it was going to be difficult to get people initially because we had no sort of pedigree. It never occurred to us not to aim high. Maybe that was slightly naïve but it turned out to work for us. We had a huge list of songwriters we admired, we're still ticking people off to this day, but we thought well, why not put Paul McCartney down? Why not



Simon and Brian with Paul McCartney





ABOVE:
Simon Barber and
Brian O'Connor in
the studio

put whoever down and just let's just see who comes back.'

These days the podcast has such a reputation that a Sodajerker interview is now a regular stop on the promotional tour for artists with a new album. McCartney's team approached Simon and Brian directly in 2018 when his album *Egypt Station* was released.

Befitting a podcast with two songwriters as hosts, the questions are different to those asked in other interviews.

'That can disarm them,' said Brian. 'You can see them visibly loosen up and relax. That's

always nice. You get a real sense of the person and who they are just by virtue of asking about how they do their job. All we care about is how they write songs, how their creative process works. They really respond to that line of questioning.'

And Simon added: 'It's lovely to speak to people who know the show already and we can get a great rapport. That leads to deeper conversations. We've almost graduated from what chord sequence did you use here, or how do you write a lyric, to something that's a more about how they live as creative people.'

After almost 200 episodes, they have identified some common themes that bind these great songwriters together and the ways they approach their craft. The most common one is just 'turning up', doing the work and not sitting there, waiting for lightning to strike. That means writing every day, even if the result is not great, working through ideas to get to the good stuff.

There have been many highlights for Simon and Brian over the past decade. Sometimes though, it's the smaller, more personal moments after

recording has finished that stay with them: sitting at Sting's dining room table while he played them snatches of Police hits on his bass; Alicia Keys ruffling Brian's hair while he posed for a photograph, or Paul Simon trying a Scouse accent.

Brian added: 'This all happened because one day we said, maybe it would be good if we did a podcast. From that came all these insane experiences. It will probably be some time before I can process all the stuff we've

'One good thing from the start was that it never occurred to us not to aim high'

done, we don't take any of it for granted.'

They have a busy year ahead leading up to celebrations marking the podcast's 10th anniversary in November with new original Sodajerker music.

'The podcast will keep going, but it's time to do something creative as well,' Brian said. 'It's getting a bit frustrating talking to these great people, you just come away so inspired. 'It's about time we did something with all that inspiration. The 10th anniversary is the perfect opportunity for something creative and put some music out.' 🌹



Noel Gallagher is one of the many high profile musicians to have featured on the podcast

WHAT THEY SAID

NOEL GALLAGHER

'Sometimes you'll persevere with it for days and it doesn't go anywhere and then some days they fall out of the sky, there you are waiting to catch it.'

'For me as a songwriter, the greatest gift is not coming up with the chords or the melody or the words, it's recognising there's something happening, to be switched on. Keith Richards talks about songs being in the air. I liken it to fishing and, if you're not at the river, you're not catching owt. And I go there every day of my life.'

PAUL MCCARTNEY

On melodies: 'If I'm lucky, it just comes. You've just got to be in the right mood and feel like, I'm going to write a really great melody now. And if you're lucky, you'll be like, oh yeah this is good. So, I don't really sweat over melodies. I'm very lucky. I have this thing. It comes to me quite naturally, touch wood.'

On writing: 'It's either guitar or piano. And sometimes, I will just switch. If I'm getting fed up, if I don't think I'm going anywhere on the piano, just see how this would work on the guitar. And it can somehow

lead you to a different place. I've got a couple of little tricks.'

Other Sodajerker stars

Martin Fry of ABC, who was born in Stretford

Liverpool's Ian Broudie, from The Lightning Seeds

Mike 'McGear' McCartney, who had hits with The Scaffold and is the brother of Paul

Tom Ogden, Joe Donovan and Charlie Salt, of Stockport band Blossoms

Kevin Godley of 10cc, who is from Prestwich