

London's

greatest

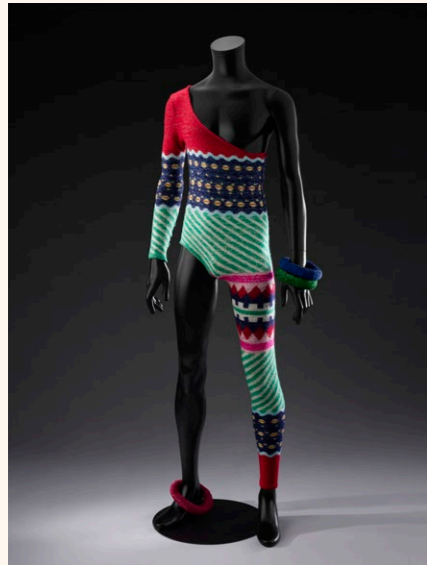
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This month, as the British capital unveils the grand opening of the David Bowie Centre, we trace the city's musical heritage that shaped the rock star and countless other icons



IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK (THE SOUTH BANK CENTRE); COURTESY OF THE VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM (ALADDIN SANE STAGE WEAR)

Words **Lucie Grace**



“Everyone’s in Brixton, there’s a street party,” came the call.

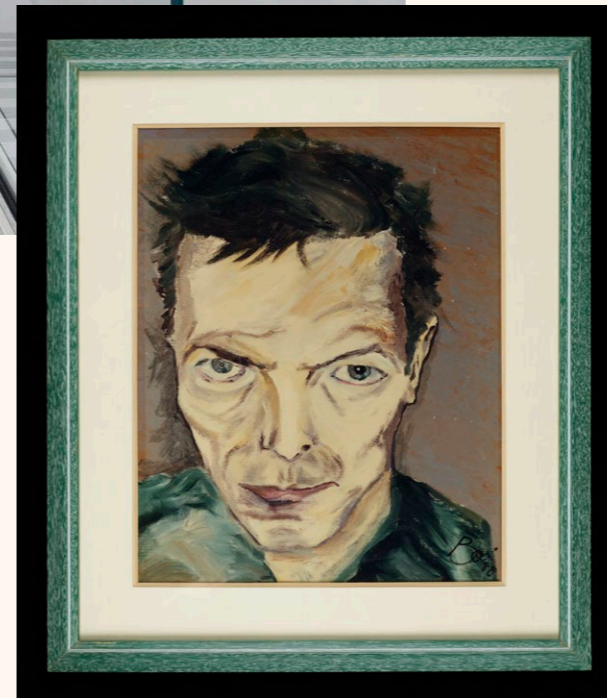
It was a cold January day and David Bowie had just died. Without hesitation, I jumped on a bus to the south London town where my hero, Ziggy Stardust, Aladdin Sane, The Thin White Duke, aka David Bowie, was born and raised. I was met by thousands of other fans having sing-alongs, bonding in an outpouring of communal love, grief, joy and loss in the square outside the local cinema, which had changed its sign to read: “David Bowie, Our Brixton Boy. RIP.” He didn’t have a funeral, but we’d held our own. It felt cathartic to celebrate the otherworldly genius who had released his 26th studio album just months earlier, on his 69th birthday.

Now, nine years later, the illustrious Victoria and Albert Museum, an institute that’s the epitome of multifaceted creativity, is opening up David Bowie’s



Previous spread: The Southbank Centre; David Bowie’s Aladdin Sane costume, designed by Freddie Burretti

This spread from left: Bowie’s Ziggy Stardust catsuit, designed by Kansai Yamamoto; David Bowie Centre at V&A East; contact sheet for “Dead Man Walking” music video; lithograph of Self-portrait (Mustique) by David Bowie, 2002



IMAGES: COURTESY OF THE VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM (ASYMMETRIC CATSUIT), HUFTON + CROW (V&A EAST STOREHOUSE)

personal archives, a colossal collection donated to the V&A and housed at their new East Storehouse in Stratford.

Madeleine Haddon, curator at V&A East explains, “Bowie embodied a truly multidisciplinary practice – musician, actor, writer, performer and cultural icon – reflecting the way many young creatives today move fluidly across disciplines and reject singular definitions of identity or artistry. For Bowie fans and those discovering him for the first time, we hope the centre can inspire the next generation of creatives.”

I can’t help but wonder – could such an artist have come from any other city? Through the ages, London has been centrifugal to musical talent, with world-famous events, streets and venues pumping out scene after scene of cutting-edge genres.

I covered this legacy and how it lives on today in my new book, *An Opinionated Guide to Music London* (published in September by Hoxton Mini Press), selecting over 50 sites of importance in the capital. Whittling them down to a manageable few was a challenge, but if you have a few days for a musical pilgrimage across the city, we’ve got you covered.

We must start with The David Bowie Centre, opening on 13 September at V&A East Storehouse. The exciting public-access archive is a must for all culture vultures – a collection of over 90,000 artefacts spanning the diversity of Bowie’s interests and influences, his output and inspirations.

Legendary musician and Bowie collaborator Nile Rodgers has selected treasures for the inaugural exhibition, including the suit worn by Bowie during the Serious Moonlight tour for the *Let’s Dance* album; photographs by Chuck Pulin of Bowie, Rodgers and guitarist Stevie Ray Vaughan working on the recording of *Let’s Dance* in New York; and personal letters between Bowie and Rodgers from 1993.

To visit The David Bowie Centre, book a ticket in advance. Mega fans can also book one-to-one sessions with archivists to request viewing up to five objects



This spread from left:
Handel Hendrix House
in Mayfair; guitar
jamming session at
Hendrix's den; one of
the rooms in Handel's
house



from the vast collection, which includes costumes, instruments, awards, notebooks, diaries, letters and much more.

From Stratford, take the Tube to north London to visit Abbey Road, home to the internationally renowned recording studios and one very famous zebra crossing – this one's for The Beatles fans.

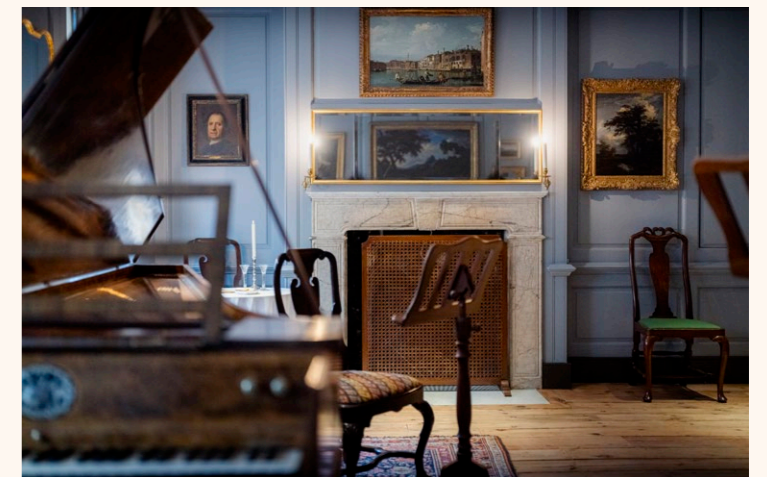
Originally from Liverpool, the band put this address in the history books when they named their 11th studio album after the street, with a photo of the “Fab Four” walking over said crossing on the cover.

Some visitors recreate the scene (while being careful of traffic), but it's the studios that hold the real history, as the site where, over the course of seven years, more than 200 songs forming 12 albums were produced.

You don't have to be Beatle-mad to enjoy this place though; acts like Adele, Amy Winehouse and Oasis have also recorded here. It's a fun place to visit; you can leave your mark on the studio's graffiti wall and peruse the gift store for merchandise.

Next, head down to Mayfair to visit the elegant Handel Hendrix House that's dedicated to the lives and works of two very different geniuses: baroque composer George Frideric Handel and rock icon Jimi Hendrix, who lived at 25 and 23 Brook Street respectively, over two centuries apart.

A ticket gives you access to both houses, which couldn't be more different in décor, yet both give you a sense of the musicians who once lived there and the colossal impact they made on their respective music scenes. Visit Hendrix's house on a Friday lunchtime to experience live guitar performances adding another dimension



IMAGES: KAIN TIETZEL AT FNRBLR.COM (SIDEBAR - SOUNDS OF THE UNIVERSE)

London's best record shops



Reckless Records, Soho
Established in 1984, Reckless has survived the highs and lows of vinyl's popularity for over 40 years and is a trusted treasure trove for collectors, selling rare LPs of every genre imaginable. **30 Berwick St; reckless.co.uk**



Rough Trade East, Brick Lane
Rough Trade has four London stores, but the Brick Lane branch stands out for its stellar in-store gigs, which regularly feature performances by big-name acts. **Old Truman Brewery, 91 Brick Ln; roughtrade.com**



Sounds of the Universe, Soho
Owned by the Soul Jazz Records label, this eclectic store has been specialising in rare grooves and multinational music since the 1990s and is still thriving today. **7 Broadwick St; soundsoftheuniverse.com**

to the ambience, or Handel's house on Saturdays for classical pianists doing the same.

Spend the following day in London's West End, starting your endeavours at Denmark Street, just off Charing Cross Road.

Known in the 1960s for its swathe of music industry offices, the likes of David Bowie, The Rolling Stones and mod godfathers The Kinks would hang out in the cafés of this iconic address.

Nowadays, it's lined with instrument shops selling just about any musical equipment you can imagine. Hank's Guitar Shop, Rose-Morris and Wunjo Guitars, to name just a few, are staffed by technicians who can help you browse new and vintage equipment.

The heritage is brought alive by gig venues like The Lower Third and record stores such as Rough Trade, which recently opened on this prestigious street that's truly back in fashion.

A short walk up to Oxford Street leads you to The 100 Club, whose walls have certainly seen some action since it opened in October 1942.

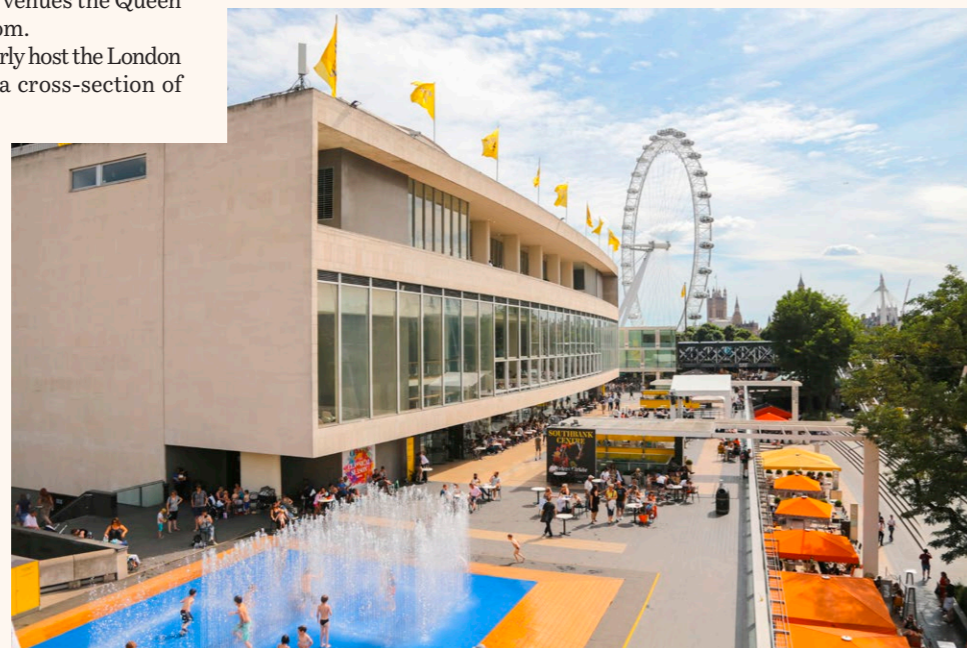
From jazz icons like Louis Armstrong playing here in the 1950s to its rebirth as a key venue in the punk scene of the 1970s, The 100 Club has seen it all.

Photos of past performances line the walls, with bands like The Sex Pistols and The Clash captured in full swing. Over 80 years into its story, The 100 Club remains relevant in the 21st century, hosting early Libertines gigs and secret shows from the likes of Green Day.

If you're a savvy planner, book yourself a show at the Southbank Centre; this complex, perched on the Thames, is an unmissable destination.

The sprawling site includes the Royal Festival Hall – its largest space – as well as sister venues the Queen Elizabeth Hall and the Purcell Room.

The RFH's wooden interiors regularly host the London Philharmonic Orchestra, playing a cross-section of



Clockwise from top: Abbey Road's famous crosswalk; Southbank Centre; Royal Festival Hall's riverside terrace

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK (ABBEY ROAD, THE SOUTHBANK CENTRE); INDIA ROPEL-EVANS (ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL)

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**Spend the day
 in London's
 West End,
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 endeavours at
 Denmark Street**”

traditional and contemporary classical suites.

The huge hall also hosts titans of rock, pop and alternative music throughout the year, with the highlight being the annual Meltdown festival season, which sees a different artist select fellow musicians and bands to take the stage for 10 days. This year, British rapper and actress Little Simz leads the way, programming yet another brilliantly eclectic lineup.



Malaysia Airlines flies between Kuala Lumpur and London 14x weekly.

The best of the rest

Live music venues worth checking out



Ronnie Scott's

Open since the 1960s, this internationally renowned jazz bar has hosted legends like Ella Fitzgerald and Sonny Rollins – and the calibre remains just as high today. Expect soul singers, hip-hop and funk artists. Advance booking is recommended. **47 Frith St; ronniescotts.co.uk**

The Lexington

The Lex is a bourbon bar downstairs, nightclub and gig space upstairs. The latter saw Charli XCX swing by to throw her *Brat* album release party, plus you can catch gigs by acts on the rise. **96–98 Pentonville Rd; thelexington.co.uk**

Jumbi

This lively listening bar in buzzy Peckham serves excellent Caribbean cuisine by day and DJs spinning afrobeats and bougie cocktails by night. Expect a thriving dance floor on a Saturday evening. **133 Copeland Rd; jumbipeckham.com**