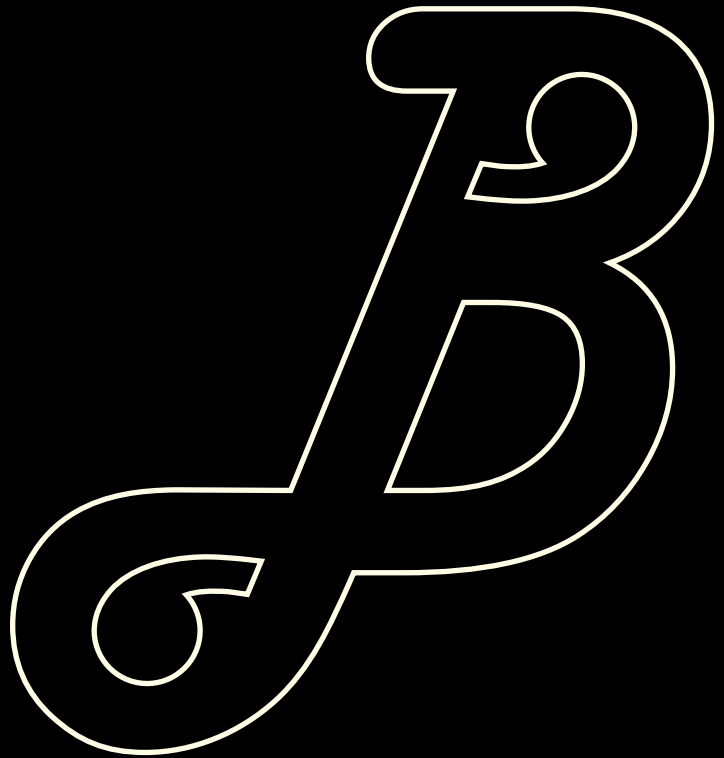


# BARROWLAND BALLADS



First published 2019.

Graphical House Publishing  
53 – 61 King Street, Glasgow, G1 5RA, United Kingdom

## RECOLLECTIVE

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A CIP catalogue reference for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-9997126-3-1

Typeset by Graphical House in Aachen Bold & Neue Aachen Pro  
Printed and bound in the United Kingdom by Pressision, Leeds

Supported by:



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For all the Barrowland staff –  
past, present and future



Previous page:

The Barrowland Ballroom's neon sign in all its gaudy glory.  
 05/09/18  
 20:27:23

This page:

Better than a feather?  
 Colonel Mustard and the Dijon 5's Barrowland star cap.  
 22/12/18  
 19:11:39

Fan's ticket stubs and set list from the legendary June 1984 Siouxsie and The Banshees concert.  
 08/08/18  
 18:56:56

# Contents

Intro		006
Chapter One:	<b>Like Floating</b>	028
Chapter Two:	<b>A Wee Night Out</b>	052
Chapter Three:	<b>At First I Was Afraid</b>	086
Chapter Four:	<b>Green Shoots</b>	108
Chapter Five:	<b>Ghosts Of My Youth</b>	130
Chapter Six:	<b>Hold On</b>	148
Chapter Seven:	<b>Are We Good For Doors?</b>	172
Chapter Eight:	<b>The Whole Shooting Match</b>	198
Chapter Nine:	<b>Before And After</b>	220
Chapter Ten:	<b>Barrowland Legends</b>	240
Acknowledgments		254

# INTRO

Of course I ask this question: What's it like to play on the Barrowland stage? I'm talking to Donnie from the Vatersay Boys. His band has just been inducted into the Barrowland Hall of Fame and when I poke my head around the band room door to introduce myself he pulls me in for a photograph with his award. Sitting with him in the wood-panelled dressing room, beautifully lit by the light bulbs around the mirrors, are his band mates. There must be sixteen people at least squeezed into this small room. The gig hasn't even begun and it's a party. I ask Donnie for a quick chat and he says, 'Sure, what time is it?' It's nearly seven o'clock. I follow Donnie out of the main band room and along the black-painted corridor, past the dark drapes and up the ramp to the stage. Donnie walks to his drum kit and picks up a bottle of unisex cologne. I wear that same one! I say, in disbelief, but what I should be saying is, How the hell did I get on the Barrowland stage? Why am I interviewing you up here? There are real punters out there, filling up the hall, and there are gorgeous waves of talk and laughter coming up to meet us on the stage.

That was one of my most bizarre interviews for our *Barrowland Ballads* book, a project that has been over a year in the making and many more in the imagining. With the blessing of Tom Joyes and the Barrowland management Chris, Mitch and I have been documenting the day-to-day life of the Barrowland Ballroom. We've interviewed musicians and gig-goers, promoters, stewards, crew and staff. I knew I wanted to write about the day of a gig, from the load in at 8 a.m. to the clean-up overnight; who does what and when and where and how do the hours pan out? I wanted to get us through the soundcheck and the ticket checks and the purchasing of drinks to that sweet collective inhalation when the ballroom lights flick to black and the band steps on to the stage. I wanted to write about the cloakroom staff handing back coats and bags and the stewards assisting the last of the punters out of the building before the cleaners get to work and when they've gone, how the Barrowland belongs to one man again; the nightwatchman, and sometimes his dog.

So what is it like to play here? I ask Donnie. I know it's their sixteenth sell-out show in the same number of years. 'Oh, it's horrendous, you don't

want to do it,' Donnie says. What can you see from here? I ask. 'I can see everything. I've got vision like an eagle.' His voice booms over the kindling crowd. How has it panned out since your drum lessons aged eleven with Lester Penman? 'I'm still playing. Sixty-one and still doing it. I just got an award this week.' I know! I posed for a picture with you in the heady dressing room. How do you feel about that, the Barrowland Hall of Fame? 'I'm aghast, agog,' Donnie says. And that's it. The interview concludes. Donnie sits at his drum kit, he's joined by two of his fellow musicians and before I've even left the stage they begin the first bars of a ceilidh tune and the punters have started to dance. Soon the dance floor is a whirl of twirling couples and the bagpipes and piano accordion and fiddles that join the drums and guitars on stage fill the hall with a bright riotous sound and Donnie, at the back of the stage at his drum kit with his eagle eyes, takes it all in.

I also interviewed Jacquie. She played the drums in the first ever band to play a set at the Barrowland Ballroom. Yes. She supported Simple Minds in 1983 with her band Sophisticated Boom Boom. She's a school teacher and union activist now, and she meets me wearing glamorous shoes, her hair a Debbie-Harry blonde. We're sitting in the alcove in the main band room and Jacquie holds imaginary drum sticks in her fists. She tells me about the black gloves she wore because she got blisters, how she used to hit the snare drum flat on the rim so it made a cracking sound, how drumming was physical and demanding, how sometimes her shins bled when the foot pedal swung back because she'd pressed it so hard and how if she was to play anything on the drums now it would be heavy metal. That gig they played at the Barrowland Ballroom: 'I remember it being really loud. For us it was a big gig. Powerful,' she says. Mel Gaynor, Simple Minds' drummer let Jacquie use a couple of his cymbals and he gave her some drumming tips too. Jim Kerr watched them from the wings. 'A wee bit of encouragement,' Jacquie says. She was nervous and excited. The gig was a sell-out. 'There were hunners and hunners of faces in the audience,' and the crowd was nice to them. 'We were a jingly-jangly girl band and they were there to see Simple Minds. But we felt a bit of love for us.' She was a wee 'gothy punk girl from Castlemilk' who formed a band out of a bit of fun one night in the Hellfire Recording Studios, supported The Clash and did a John Peel Session, and she and her band mates started off the gigs in the Barrowland Ballroom.

For our research we explored the empty ballroom, Mitch sketching and making notes of furniture, equipment and the contents of cupboards for his dialectogram and Chris taking photographs from angles and viewpoints that are inaccessible on gig nights. We were there in the audience for many Barrowland gigs; Chris in the pit taking photos of the band or the audience, Mitch sketching, and me pressing punters for stories and memories.



Del Amitri's fans wait for a tune  
29/07/18  
21:24:15

One such conversation involves an uncle and his nephew at a Gerry Cinnamon gig just before Christmas. Chris and Corey. They've taken the train from Port Glasgow and Chris has told Corey: 'It's Gerry Cinnamon, it's the Barras, that's a combination that's going to be seismic.' Corey seems awfully young but his back is straight and his feet are planted and he looks up for it. Around him there are groups of young men in trainers and skinny jeans, and young women with shiny hair and immaculate make-up. There are people passing by with pints in plastic glasses, couples standing arm in arm and a pensive angular indie kid holding the hand of a porcelain-faced girl. We've just had the support – Rianne Downey playing a slowed down version of 'Country Roads' and Dylan John Thomas with his zip-up top and confidence – and now the sing-along songs are on before Gerry Cinnamon plays.

What's your uncle told you about this place? I ask Corey. 'Carnage,' Corey says. Is it how you expected it? 'No.' What did you expect? 'I thought it would be a bit more modern.' That reminds me of a young woman I spoke to, also at the Barrowland for the first time, who said it reminded her of her



—  
Gig night at the Ballroom.  
The venue flickers to  
life...

•  
05/09/18  
20:37:12

—  
Artist at Work:  
Recollective's resident  
wordsmith Alison Irvine  
interviews Fatherson  
in the Main Band  
Dressing Room.

•  
02/09/18  
19:59:11

school's assembly hall. There is nothing modern about the Barrowland other than this young crowd. Yet they're keeping up the tradition of a Barrowland crowd being the best crowd, singing along to the songs of their parents or grandparents that are played over the PA: Oasis, Beck, Bob Marley, Johnny Cash, without inhibition, claiming the songs for themselves – I wouldn't be surprised if they burst into 'Blanket on the Ground'. The hall is hot and buzzing and crazy but also reassuring. The Barrowland Ballroom will be fine, I think. Then the lights go out and the crowd is jumping and whistling and Gerry is lit up on stage, joy on his face, giving it his all and the crowd is taking it all and sending it back with love.

With the help of tour guide and Barrowland expert Gareth Fraser we put on tours of the ballroom, met devoted Barrowland fans and collected their stories. Many people we spoke to told us about parents or grandparents who had met at the ballroom. There are memories of those days in this book. It was a dance hall before it was a concert venue, don't forget (with a brief spell as a roller disco). Opened on Christmas Eve 1934 by Maggie McIver as a venue for her stallholders to socialise, it was a thriving dance hall until a fire destroyed it in 1958. It was rebuilt in 1960 and thrived again until its popularity declined after the murders of three women who had gone there to dance.

We interviewed the staff and made them pose for photographs and tell us minutiae of their daily working lives. It was a pleasure to meet this hard-working, funny, kind-hearted bunch and we are extremely grateful for their enthusiasm and patience.

This book is not a catalogue of bands and artists who've played the Barrowland; we probably won't even mention your highlights or standout concerts. It's about what it's like to play at the Barrowland, yes, and what it's like to go there to see a gig, but above all it's about the staff who work in the Barrowland and know it far better than we do. They're the people who come to work on busy days and quiet days and who create for us on gig nights that special warmth and down-to-earth atmosphere for which the Barrowland is famous and beloved.





—  
Guests see behind the scenes on a Recollective tour of the Ballroom.

07/07/18  
17:45:39



—  
Barrowland Ballroom  
'super fan' Johnny  
has the run of his  
favourite venue.

07/08/17  
15:24:23



—  
Artist at Work:  
Recollective  
Photographer, Chris  
Leslie captures the  
unique feel of the  
venue's interiors.  
·  
27/07/18  
18:06:01



—  
Artist at Work:  
Recollective Illustrator,  
Mitch Miller burns lead,  
capturing the revellers at  
the Christmas Party.  
·  
19/01/19  
21:35:22



# OFFICIAL MERCHANDISE



'Erryer T-shirts!: The  
Official Merchandise Stall

07/08/17  
12:29:06



The final steps into the  
Main Hall  
07/08/17  
16:25:10

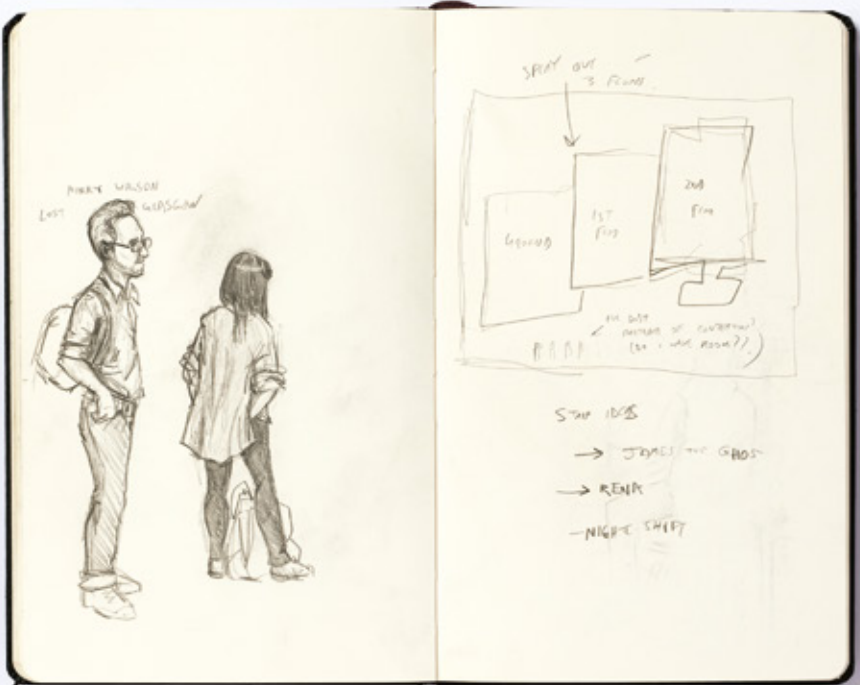
...we ran tours of the Ballroom, met devoted Barrowland fans and collected their stories.

2018  
TOUR



"JAMES IN  
THE  
GEORDIE'S  
BYRE  
CORRIDOR  
- ALLEGED  
GHOST!"







The dance floor is the main attraction; all honeyed wood and violet and red spots of light.

# ONE

## Like Floating

Tam's burger bar is next to the merchandise kiosk in the area known as the crush. It's tucked into an elegant wood-panelled corner and has a pull-up counter and a set of white metal shelves on which Tam displays his crisps and cans and peanuts and behind which two 1960s mirrors hang. A sign reads The Strathyre Bar but that's from decades ago. The burger bar's actual name is written in white push-in letters along the top of Tam's price list. Tam and Anne's Barrowland Burger Bar. Underneath, the letters spell out: burger 3.50, hot dog 3.50, crisps 50 and so on.

The tartan border of the original sign matches the tartan on the counter top of the merchandise kiosk next door. When the counter top peeled and wore away at the corner, the late Des, maintenance man for decades, painstakingly painted the tartan back on. In the Barrowland Ballroom there is such a thing as tartan paint. I'll come to Des later.

Back to Tam. For Barrowland staff he is relatively new. He's only worked in the ballroom for seven years, taking over the kiosk from his sister-in-law Josie after she died. Josie was friends with Rena the toilet attendant and the toilets being just round the corner from the burger kiosk, the two of them in quiet times would talk and joke and pass the time.

Tam was thrown out of the Barrowland Ballroom on his stag night for being too drunk. He was eighteen then and he's sixty-five now. He's lost fourteen stones in weight and he's also lost part of a tumour that began in his pituitary gland and caused his weight gain. Remains of the tumour are wrapped around an artery in his brain but he's stable and he's able to work his two jobs. By day, he is a maintenance man in a drugs and alcohol addiction centre. By night, as you now know, he is proprietor of Tam and Anne's Burger Bar. He's always worked two jobs, starting with his milk round and paper round aged nine, so being ill and unable to work was one of his hardest times.

'You couldn't be depressed working here,' he says and pours two cans of Irn Bru into two plastic cups, efficiently, turning his hands inwards as he pours like Bobby the Barman from the TV comedy *Still Game*.



'It's Bobby the Barman!' He's heckled by two women.

'Fuck off Isa!' Tam is good with a comeback.

The women find that hilarious and relate the encounter to their friend: 'I said he was Bobby the Barman and he said "Fuck off Isa!"' (Isa, if you haven't guessed, is also a character from *Still Game*.)

'How much for a burger?' one of the women asks. She's Pammy. She has blonde bobbed hair and red lips.

'Three fifty,' Tam says.

'Three fifty for a burger? They'd better be good. I'll take one,' Pammy says.

Tam cooks a burger. His metal fish slice scrapes the hot plate. Today is a good day for selling food because it's Barralodasoul, an all-day event which starts at 2 p.m. and finishes at 11. He'll make up the rent on his burger bar easily.

He's not a loud man, his movements are languid, and he watches the folk beyond his bar with gentle, perceptive eyes, leaning slightly on to his counter to engage. But he's got a quick tongue.

'Three fifty please.' He hands over the burger.

'I tell you what, since you're a nice man, here's three fifty,' Pammy says. She got him that time.

Upstairs in the main hall you won't find the Barrowland of hot jumping bodies, all eyes on the stage where euphoric musicians raise their beating hearts towards the crowd. Today there are tables and chairs around the edges of the dance floor, stalls of clothes, records, photographs and paintings for sale. The main bar is open but there is no gig night rammy. The dance floor is the main attraction, all honeyed wood and violet and red spots of light. Dancers slide and scoop and turn, their feet agile, their arms expressive, their faces tilted upwards. There is ample space to dance for these movers in wide trousers and vest tops or short dresses or button-up tops. And they're good movers too. On stage a DJ wears headphones, her image displayed on two screens either side of her decks. The music isn't live but it's loud and juicy and plump, filling up this hot and handsome hall.

This is Barralodasoul, a Northern Soul and sixties R&B event, one of many events the Barrowland Ballroom hosts as well as its traditional music gigs. It's the closest thing to the tea dances of the 1960s on a Wednesday afternoon when Stewart, the only bouncer on duty, collected glasses and teacups and admired the delicate steps of the couples travelling in the same direction around the floor. Today Stewart sits behind a table on which crisps and water and sweets are set out. Over at the far side of the hall is where you'll find it, in front of the doors to the kitchen for touring caterers, beside the main bar and next to the Barrowland mural with its black and white images of singers and dancers and guitars and microphones and the Barrowland sign an orange flash in the centre. This is the tuck shop and he and his wife Linda open it on most gig nights.



More of Stewart and Linda later. As well as this soul all-dayer the Barrowland hosts wrestling displays, film screenings and freestyle dance competitions where children with bendy backs and elaborate hair-dos limber up in preparation for their two-minute turn around the floor. There are benefit gigs and occasional weddings. Of course there are the concerts. We can go back to 1983 for the first concert when Simple Minds headlined and Sophisticated Boom Boom supported and there are people at Barraloadasoul today who were at the gigs that came thereafter. Pammy and Sharon, the shiny-haired women who bantered with Tam at his burger bar are such punters. Teenagers then, mothers of grown-up children now and an enduring love of music in the years between, they can tell you about the Barrowland Ballroom of the eighties, they can tell you how the Barrowland absolutely and definitively altered their lives and influenced who they are and what they do today.

Tam works every Barrowland event, sometimes with his wife Anne, sometimes alone. He stays until he sells out or accepts there will be little more trade. If it's a particularly hungry crowd he'll do another run to the cash and carry for burgers and hot dogs. I ask him what a good crowd is and he tells me a recent Cyprus Hill crowd ate everything he had to sell. 'Stoners,' he says. 'They all eat.' What's a bad crowd? 'The students.' They've saved up what money they have for a ticket and have little else to spend. I see him joking with the merchandise sellers one night. He tells them his new sales pitch: 'For every burger you buy you get a free T-shirt.' He asks me if I want to try one of his burgers. They do smell good.

Pammy and her friends leave Tam and walk across the crush towards the bar. In the crush area a concert goer will find the cloakroom and the toilets. Not so many years ago a male punter would have peed to the sound of the toilet attendant's Scottish country dancing music but he's gone now and Oliver has taken over. The former rehearsal rooms are off this crush area too as are the production offices, the support band's dressing room and storerooms containing brushes and buckets and cartons of bleach and signed guitars and shelves of memorabilia that nobody will throw away. The crush is where the stewards have their post-gig debrief. It's where you'll come to if you turn left off the main staircase. You'll smell Tam's burgers before you even see his kiosk.

Pammy and her friends walk into the jangling noise of Barrowland 2 or the Revue Bar, formerly Geordie's Byre. It's a black box of a room with neon quaver notes on the walls, a turning glitter ball and its own bar behind which John works – we'll meet him later – booth seats and a small dance floor. On the slightly raised stage a DJ plays sixties R&B and men and women dance. Sharon puts down her can of Irn Bru and dances as if she's forgotten the world around her exists.

## Barrowland absolutely and definitively altered their lives and influenced who they are and what they do today.



Back upstairs Dave, a tall man with a neat quiff and black-rimmed glasses, is in the main band room, the VIP area where the DJs gather between sets. He's searching for someone in charge. He finds Angela, the promoter's sister, a fixer, a smoother-over who knows who is who and what's what. He shows her a CD, in a soft plastic wallet with a slip of paper as its cover. She calls some DJs over and the tall man with the neat hairdo takes a record from his bag. He says it's a test press of a sixties Liverpool band. They played with the Beatles in the Cavern Club. It's a faster version of a Wilson Pickett song, produced in 1965 and it's never been played before. There are other unplayed songs on an EP too.

Can he get a play tonight?

The DJs take pictures of the record.

Pammy and Sharon tell me later from their booth seat in the Revue Bar that devoted DJs or record collectors crave never-before-played music, original pressings and undiscovered bands. Dave is hopeful. The vinyl is laid on the wooden dressing table that runs the length of the room, lit by the light bulbs that surround the mirrors, and DJs' cameras click. Some make promises.

If the record gets played Dave will make more pressings. He could sell it. You can play the B side too he says to the DJs who are pondering their sets, knowing that a unique record will bring them kudos but also aware that their sets are finite and they want to keep people on the dance floor. No one is to turn on their swivelling heels and walk off if a misjudged tune is played.

One DJ promises to play the record during his set in the Revue Bar at 8.45 p.m. That's two hours away. Dave is happy with that. He'll wait.

'My first ever gig was Madness,' Pammy tells me. She and her friends cool themselves with the flyers scattered on the table top. 'I've got a memory of getting wrap-around sunglasses and standing with them on, thinking I was dead cool. And this big boy just came and grabbed them off my face and stole them.' She laughs and her smile is wide and red. Sharon is wearing a mini dress and flats. When she dances she looks like an eighteen-year-old and when she's reminiscing she's remembering her eighteen-year-old self. 'My mum went to the Barrowlands when it was the dancing in the sixties. And then me, coming from Paisley, it was like "Oh! I'm going up to the big city to the Barrowlands." And the getting there and the queue and the first time walking in it. I remember thinking "Oh, it's enormous!"' She takes a sip of her drink and returns to the dance floor.

Pammy is no longer finishing the last of her burger in the Revue Bar while her friend glides around the dance floor. She is seventeen and upstairs in the main hall, standing with her elbows out, pressed against the barrier, closest to the pit and the stage while the Cramps play. Lux Interior, their lead singer is wearing gold leather trousers slung low on his hips, so low she can see the dip of his pelvis, almost as low as the top of his 'booby'. And glum Poison Ivy with her

curls and her attitude is up there too along with Fur and her fur-lined bra and her Mohican hair and her glamour, and oh god, if Pammy could be anyone she'd be Fur and if she could have any boyfriend it would be Lux Interior. She sips from her can of coke topped up with vodka and then Lux is gesturing at her – at her! – and he wants her can. So she gives it to a bouncer who passes it on to the stage and Lux puts his lips to the can and sips where her own lips have sipped. His body is covered with sweat. Hers too. Looking out at the crowd, Lux Interior takes Pammy's can and rubs it across his bare stomach and lower down on to his groin, on to that rare vulnerable flesh of his pelvis, then hands the can to the bouncer who hands it back to Pammy. She takes it and sees on the top, stuck to a spot of coke or saliva, a pubic hair. One of Lux Interior's pubic hairs. It's a prize. Ecstatic, she shows it to the people around her, sweat- and beer-drenched the same as her, not quite as delighted as she is, but happy for her, all the same. Lux Interior's pube on her can.

The DJ who promised to play the never-before-played record comes into the Revue Bar and sets up his records while his colleague finishes his set. Sharon flicks her hair behind her shoulders as she dances, her flat shoes pivoting on the dance floor, her arms drifting behind her body, then in front of her body, and she turns slowly to the DJ's music, to her body's music.

A man, lean and muscular, with a full beard and a shaved head, a set of keys clipped to his belt and a gait that's purposeful powers down the corridor into the Revue Bar. He passes people coming the other way, swaying, loitering, drinks in hand. He moves swiftly past them intent on something. This is Michael. One of the beers has run dry in the main bar upstairs and he needs to change a keg. This doesn't normally happen. But it's happened and he'll deal with it quickly. On his way out, he glances at John, working in the other bar. There's a raised hand of acknowledgement. He passes Dave, the record promoter, who is standing at the entrance to the Revue Bar, listening out for his record.

Pammy cuts her hair into a blonde crop and her nickname is Rudolph the Rude Girl. Sharon wears tight jeans, loafers and a boyish shirt because she's well into the mod scene. They're preening and posing in the queue. The queue is where the chat is; talk of music and records and the girls will pull in the threads of these conversations, reel them in, and remember them. Like trawlers, they'll go to the record stores on Renfield Street or to Paddy's market, and buy the recommended records and they might get the wrong record but that doesn't matter because it will take them in another musical direction and that's the joy and thrill of being into music.

Boys: if you can keep up with Pammy and Sharon they will have you. But don't tell them who to listen to because they're making their own minds up. Sharon is in love with Paul Weller anyway. He will see her in the crowd

one day and say: Ah there she is, I've been waiting for her for years. Pammy is convinced the pop stars from *Smash Hits* whose birthdays she knows, whose favourite food and names of pets she knows, will also find her in the crowd and ask her to be their girlfriend. 'To be honest, I wasn't really all that fussed about boys unless they were a pop star. Especially Morrissey.'

They left school and got jobs or apprenticeships, told lies to their parents and 'robbed Peter to pay Paul' to get to gigs at the Barrowland. 'If there was a band you wanted to see you'd have sold your granny to get a ticket to go and see them. Especially if it was a band like the Pixies or REM. You had to get the money from somewhere. There's absolutely no way you could let that pass,' Pammy says. Or for Sharon hanging out with the scooterists and mods and walking in to the Barrowland: 'I'd hear the music coming through the sound system and that's when my adrenalin would go and I'd think "Oh my god, I'm going to be up dancing". That just did it for me.'

Pammy cools herself with her makeshift fan and says, 'There's nothing better than Sharon dancing.' Sharon joins us and says: 'It's one place in my head I can go and everything just shuts out and all I can hear is the music. It's like floating.' The friends have formed a facebook group called Madam Mod for female followers of mod music and fashion but they're deliberately and politically not elitist. I wonder would they even care about the first play of the 1960s band that Dave is listening out for in the doorway. They care about music, yes. Their working lives are spent encouraging young people to engage with music too. For Pammy and Sharon it's about atmosphere and elation and the community that comes with a room of people listening to the same band at the same time. 'The Barrowlands sets up for me this thing where I don't necessarily care where I am or what the music is. I get more of a buzz off who's around me and the connection from them,' Pammy says.

Young Pammy and another friend stand at the very front of the hall during a Pogues gig and the crowd is so lively that people are climbing on to the barrier and diving off, stepping on to her and her friend to reach the top of the barrier. Pammy is tall but her friend is smaller so the bouncers grab her and begin to pull her into the pit to safety. But she gets stuck halfway over the barrier, with her head on one side, her legs on the other and her bum in the air. 'That was quite memorable,' Pammy says. Or somebody throws a pint in the air and it covers someone else's girlfriend. Or Pammy gets women jabbing her in the back and telling her to move because she's blocking their view. Or the psychobilly concerts when she puts her body right in the middle of the throng and batters and bashes with the best of them, getting knocked down then pulled up then knocked down then pulled up again. 'A lot of the time at the Barrowland you didn't know if it was a fight or just somebody dancing,' Pammy says, and she and Sharon try to remember all the other stand-out gigs and memorable nights they've had at the Barrowland. There are many.

If the DJ doesn't play the record soon he won't play it at all. We're well into his forty-five minute set. Sharon is still dancing, the northern soul sound getting right into her blood and bones, creating that floating feeling. Then it happens. It's not the Wilson Pickett cover, it's the other side. The beat is slower so Sharon's movements become more grounded but still fluid; there are fewer steps and taps of her feet. Dave, whose soft quiff has remained perfect throughout the night, watches the DJ and the dancers and when the record is finished returns to the main stage to await another play from a DJ upstairs. For him this day has been worth it. For Pammy and Sharon, they've had a nostalgic, heady, hot and glorious evening. 'Nothing has changed,' says Pammy. 'It's like we've come back. Come back to where it's been at,' says her dancing friend.

I stay until the end of the night with Tam, watching people going into the cloakroom and coming out with their coats, the bright lights in the crush area showing up the good night they've had – the smudges of mascara, the sweat on foreheads, satisfied eyes. A proper dapperly dressed crowd, I have to say.

Pammy and Sharon's younger selves run along the Gallowgate and keep running as the Gallowgate becomes the Trongate and they run on, exhausted, sweaty, smelling of beer and fags, to Central station. They must catch the last train home. If they've told an unthought-through lie they'll have to wait in a bus stop because they cannot go to their homes. Or if their parents ask why they're drenched in lager they'll say there were bad boys at the back of the cinema. They walk through deserted Paisley streets to their houses – 'I would never let my daughter do that,' says Sharon. But that's what everyone did. It was a formative part of their lives – that of gigs and bands and records and musical threads to follow and friendship through music, a stamp on the rest of their lives. 'Nothing tops the Barrowland,' Sharon says. 'Nothing.'

Tam insists I have a burger. 'You can't write about the burgers and not taste one,' he says. I accept. The burger is good. Really good.

He nods at the mods still fine looking but tired looking, putting coats on in the crush area. 'They're just firing them out. I'm usually tidied up and away by now,' Tam says. He's looking at the stewards in yellow T-shirts guiding the punters through the crush to the doors. One woman in yellow is persuading three men to stand up and leave. Whatever she says she's made them laugh and they're up and striding towards the swing doors.

If someone did want a burger on their way out, have you got one left over to give them? I ask.

'If they want one I'll just tell them you got the last one.'

I look around me and chew.

'Worse than that, I'll tell them she didn't pay for it!'

He would as well.



Light on their feet: Dancers at Barralodasoul  
12/05/18  
18:23:11

With Style: Dancers at  
Barralodasoul  
12/05/18  
19:59:11



Keeping it moving at  
Barralodasoul  
12/05/18  
18:40:58





Pammy, Gig-goer  
and eternal Mod  
06/08/18  
20:45:21



—  
Watch my moves:  
Dancers at  
Barralodasoul  
·  
12/05/18  
15:40:08



The View on Deck:  
Barralodasoul  
12/05/18  
18:46:09



I'd hear the music coming through the sound system and that's when my adrenalin would go and I'd think "Oh my god, I'm going to be up dancing". That just did it for me.



Perhaps it's not the heart of the ballroom, this cloakroom, perhaps it's something more sensual.

# TWO

## A Wee Night Out

It is a summer's night and few people have worn jackets to the gig so zig-zagging along the red painted pens to the cloakroom counter feels unnecessary. But that's the way in to the cloakroom and more often than not, the pens are needed. Earlier, there was a sudden downpouring of Glasgow rain so a few umbrellas hang from the hooks, raffle tickets Sellotaped to them tombola-style. Sharon and John, mother and son, are working tonight and they wait for punters, both of them standing up when someone begins the walk along the pens to the counter. Behind them are rows of ornate cast iron coat racks set out like book shelves in a library or those deep filing cabinets you get in office basements. There's a hard red floor, easy to slish a mop over.

Mitch is here to sketch Sharon because she will not stand for one of Chris's portraits. This is Mitch's second attempt. He wants another go and this time of night, nine thirty, when anyone who's in for the gig is already in and standing feet planted on the dance floor watching the band, is a good time to catch her when she's not busy. I'm making Sharon sound difficult. She is the opposite. Friendly. Quick to laugh. Willing to talk. She is the daughter of Rena Duffy McMillan so that's her pedigree right there. She just doesn't like having her picture taken.

I think, of all the places where people gather, the cloakroom could be the heart of the Barrowland Ballroom. Or if you want to insist that the main hall upstairs is the heart, the cloakroom is the ribcage holding the heart. On wild nights you can hear the rhythmic stomping of the audience's feet. The ceiling pulses. Meaty strains of well known songs resonate.

It feels like the heart of the Barrowland because when a concert is on, in that lull between nine and ten thirty you can hear yourself speak and conversations happen. Punters linger to chat. Staff gather to pass the time. Or recuperate. Linda, who works in the offices during the day and who has just finished helping her husband Stewart in the tuck shop upstairs comes into the cloakroom, slumps on a chair and says, 'I'm not here.'

What's it like working here? I ask.

'It's a shame you can't interview Rena,' Sharon says of her mother.

'She was the epitome of the Barrowland,' John says.

They tell me she worked as a toilet attendant for over two decades, taking care of the toilet rolls and the basins, doing a little cleaning and a lot of talking.

I sense they feel the Barrowland's best days are gone. Or its best people are gone, anyway. The staff there now are fine, don't get them wrong, but the Barrowland has lost a few pearls recently and Rena was one of them.

The Barrowland staff take on legend status after they've gone. Changes of role within the Barrowland are prompted by the death of the previous member of staff. It's mostly death, not retirement, although Big Tam retired recently. Josie who kept the burger bar died so her brother-in-law Tam (we met him in the previous chapter) took over. Des of the tartan paint, who used to replenish the stars nicked from the dressing room walls, also died. And yes, Rena, toilet attendant and friend to everyone, fruit and veg stallholder at the Barras, died.

A man winds his way along the pens.

'Hiya pal, I'll take that for you,' John says.

The man hands over a pound and takes his raffle ticket. Sharon attaches a number to his coat and puts it with the others. They start at the far left corner if you're looking at the cloakroom from where I stand, on the punter's side. On busy nights John or Sharon will tell a punter to take a picture on their phone of their ticket, just in case they lose it. Because that happens.

John points to a fluorescent tube above one of the red rails.

'Guess how many times that bulb has needed replaced?' he asks.

I can't guess. I've no idea.

'Loads,' he says. 'People, when they're drunk, they try and leap the rail and they misjudge the jump and end up cracking their heads against the tube. I've seen it countless times.'

I can see it. An athletic leap, skewed by drink, and the ceiling too low, the ceiling's fault.

Tell me about Rena, I say.

John shows me a photograph with Sharon in the background.

'If you're using this, you have to crop my mum out,' he says. Sharon is taking a coat from a punter and half hears. The photo is of Rena and Pete Doherty with Sharon leaning in over the side of the burger bar. Pete Doherty is dipping his head so that it touches the top of Rena's head and her arms are wide as if to say, 'He may be a rock star but to me he's just a wee lad who takes too many sweeties.'

That's what she used to say to him. 'Keep off those sweeties, Pete.'

There's a sheltered accommodation for ex addicts across the road from

the Barrowland. Her best pal Josie worked during weekdays at a drugs and alcohol centre. Rena will have known what she meant by sweeties.

She got on with Pete Doherty. He called her his wee Scottish granny. He signed John, her grandson's, guitar after Rena phoned the house and told John and his dad to run to the Barrowland with it.

Where was she born, Rena?

'Dennistoun. Born and bred,' says John. Until she moved to the same block just outside the Merchant City as John and his mum and dad, taking a flat downstairs from them.

**'You've got to keep your eye on him,' Linda says. 'Because he gives you funny noses.'**

Mitch continues to sketch Sharon. She's coping with his scrutiny for someone who doesn't like her picture taken; the quick darts of his head from page to subject. 'You've got to keep your eye on him,' Linda says. 'Because he gives you funny noses.' Linda has recovered enough to join in the conversation. She's still sitting on her chair and I can't see her but she's got the energy to heckle.

'He gave me a funny everything last time!' Sharon says.

'Willie thinks he's ninety,' Linda says, of the sketch Mitch did of her colleague. Willie is seventy-one.

They're a tough crowd.

How many hours do you work? I ask.

'You're in about quarter to seven, and you leave maybe eleven, half eleven,' John says.

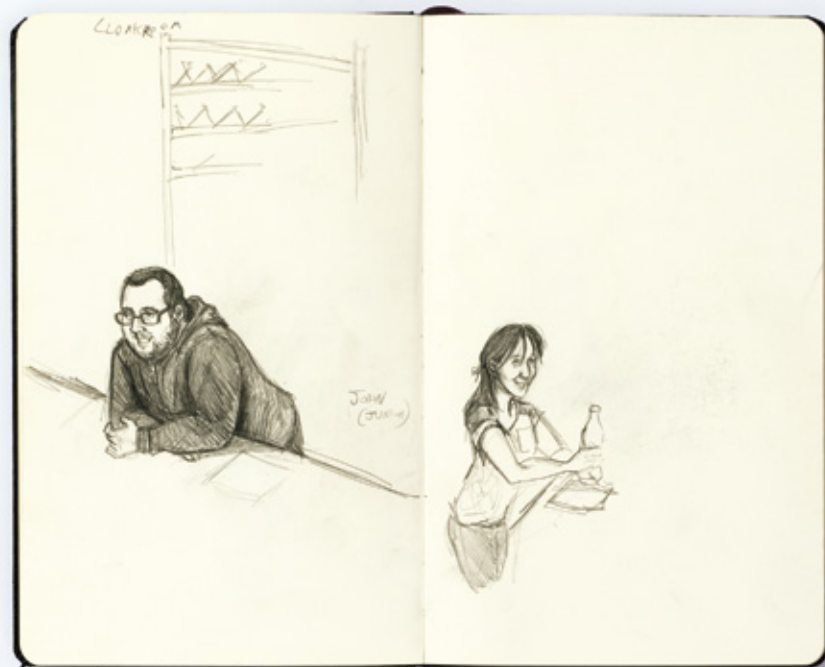
That's not bad, I venture.

'It depends.'

Doors open at seven and the band is usually finished by ten thirty. Sometimes it can take half an hour to an hour to clear the coats at the end of the night. Sometimes there's chanting and singing in the queue. Sometimes there's aggression. We'll come to that.

Does anything get left behind? I ask.

Soaking wet T-shirts, a shoe, coats, bags, mobile phones, bank cards, train tickets, a pair of leather trousers unclaimed for three years and dispatched to



—  
 'Well, I can tell you  
 some of the names  
 I've been called.'

a charity shop. Claimed too late by a woman who phoned saying they were her son's. Some of these items are left in the cloakroom, others are scattered around the building. The nightwatchman gathers up anything left behind and gives it to Linda in the morning. She has to log each item. If someone comes in to collect something, they have to sign against the item to say it has been claimed.

Do you have a pile of unclaimed stuff?

'Well, I've got five bags lying there the now,' Linda says. At a given point she will phone the police station around the corner by the old mortuary and inform them that she is coming down. Before, they used to take left-behind items to a charity shop. Now, they go to the police who deal with them.

What happens if someone loses their ticket? I ask.

'Well, I can tell you some of the names I've been called. Stupid bastard. Specky bastard. Glaitik bastard. Nazi. Jobsworth. Fat prick. Just because they've lost their ticket, do you know what I mean?' says John.

I can't imagine John, kind-hearted John, being insulted like this. He tells me they see their jacket hanging up and want him to just walk a few paces and get it for them even though they have no ticket and John has no way of knowing that the coat is actually theirs. It's Barrowland rules. He asks them to wait until the end of the night, when everyone else has got their coat. Then, if that jacket still remains, of course they can take it and go home. But some don't want to wait, they've got a drink inside them, they've got trains or taxis to get, they're fed up of the Barrowland now, want to go home and don't have the patience to sit and wait. So they call him a specky bastard.



'Cloakroom to control': It's a last resort but sometimes the security stewards in their yellow T-shirts and body cameras are summoned to take the complainer away if they're aggressive, too difficult, too obstructive and slowing down the safe return of coats to the queue of people waiting patiently in the pens. The women are the worst, apparently.

'I must point out that the vast majority of people are lovely,' John says. Like the man who walks along the pen and says, 'Can you do me a favour? A blue bomber jacket, number 141, can you put this in the pocket?' It's a set of keys.

Or the people who choose to chat. 'You just go in expecting to get a jacket handed to you and you hang it up, but every now and again you'll get somebody that will be so thankful that you're taking care of their stuff or wanting to know more about you and asking how long you've worked here. They treat you well. And all of a sudden you're telling each other your life story. It's always the people that come to the Barrowlands all the time, the regulars. It's the people that have been coming here for twenty-five year that are like that. They share that in common. They're down to earth and they just want to know more about you and they'll talk to anybody.'

They tell me that Rena would talk to anybody: promoters, musicians, punters. I want to know more about her and I want to know more about John and Sharon too. Rena Duffy McMillan. I know she was born in Dennistoun. She married in 1967 and had her daughter, Sharon, when she was twenty-eight, in the same year. Six weeks after Sharon was born, Rena's husband died. So Sharon never knew her dad, and Rena lost her husband to an ulcer in the liver. Nine months later Rena's mother died. The only family Rena had left was two alcoholic siblings. Essentially, she was on her own and she stayed that way for the whole of her life. She never went with another man again, never wore make-up again, had no intention of meeting anyone else, ever. 'It was her and Sharon and that was it, you know,' John says of his gran.

Rena's first stall at the Barras sold biscuits, cakes and jams obtained as a job lot from a confectionary factory every couple of weeks. Sharon worked on the stall with her and when she got a job in a fruit and veg shop, it transpired that Rena would sell fruit and veg on her stall too. It spiralled. She was forever the fruit and veg woman.

When John was a month old Rena took him to her stall and he came to the Barras probably every weekend for the whole of his childhood and on into adulthood until his studies took him to France and Spain. She gave away apples and oranges to children. She ran the stall like a charity. 'She never made any money,' Sharon says. How did she survive then? She made a little from her stall selling fruit and veg to the public and to stallholders and the cafes dotted around the Barras. Aged four or five John was loading the trolley with boxes of fruit and veg. Aged seven he was criss-crossing the market taking orders then making up and delivering the orders then returning on the Sunday to collect the money. When the market signs were renovated Rena requested hers be painted 'John's Fruit and Veg' after John, her grandson.

She took John to work with her on weekday mornings before school. She cleaned the offices in the Barras, the ones behind the green door that says Knock before Entering. Tom Joyes, the general manager, would let John sit at a desk and watch cartoons while Rena cleaned.

Then of course she had the job of toilet attendant on gig nights. There she would see her friend Josie who kept the burger bar. Her other friends were instant friends that she met on the night, or musicians she had a soft spot for – like Pete Doherty – or the promoters she got to know so well, who put names on their guest lists for her friends or friends of friends.

Did she go on holidays? Never. She got by. 'Hand to mouth,' says John. There was nothing saved in the bank, only the hope that next year she might – not be a millionaire – have a hundred pounds put away. Her housing rent will have been low, presumably. But her life was the Barras, says Sharon. Everything she required – friendship, community, fun, gossip – was provided by the Barrowland and the Barras. I'm not romanticising her. I'm not meaning to. I'm repeating what Sharon and John told me.

She worked through pain in her older years. They knew her stomach hurt.

Sharon remembers her mother wincing when she drove over speed bumps. They didn't know how ill she was. Apparently, she was offered treatment but refused it. She worked her fruit and veg stall on the Saturday and Sunday and on the Monday she was dead from her cancer. She had told neither Sharon nor John, only her doctor, and she told him that she didn't want to be opened up, she didn't want to be a guinea pig trying out new drugs, and he had respected that and told nobody.

Rena died on a Monday and the following weekend John took over her fruit and veg stall. He ran it for a year and a half, going to school then university during the week and coming back to the Barras on Saturdays and Sundays.

She would have been seventy-eight this year.

That's Rena. My sketch of her life will never replicate the warmth or the spirit of the woman she clearly was, who passed away six years ago and who is missed and spoken fondly about by family and friends.

'She would do anything for anybody,' John says. 'She was your best pal. Even if you'd just met her. But if you crossed her or did anything she didn't like, that was you. Blacklisted. It was the kind of person she was.'

'She would give you a laugh, wouldn't she?' Sharon says, and I hope Mitch catches something of Rena in Sharon as he sketches her. 'But so would you.' She turns to Linda who has come to join the chat at the counter. 'She's looking after me an all, aren't you, hen?'

Perhaps, as the longest-serving female staff member – she is a McIver after all – Linda has taken on Barrowland matriarch status. I don't think she'd thank me for saying that.

'I mind picking up hats and sticks and dancing up and down,' Linda says and she tucks one elbow into her body, raises her hand into a jazz hand, and kicks a leg.

'Oh, I'm glad I didn't work here at that time!' John says in despair.

Anything else? I ask. Meaning memories, stories.

'She's a nutcase.'

'Aye, Linda's a nutcase,' says Sharon.

Linda doesn't disagree.

With immaculate timing, a door I've never noticed before opens and a man calls out – 'Don't believe a word they say!'

'And so's he!' says John. It's his father, this man who has heckled them.

Sharon, his wife, shouts, 'It's all lies about you! All the crap you've told Alison!'

The door shuts and John Senior is away. He manages the Revue Bar so this must be his lull time too. He loves gig nights, he tells me later.

Any characters? I ask. Apart from yourselves, I think. Do you get anyone come in here and you think, Oh here we go! John tells me about the woman with a dripping wet umbrella who complained about having to pay a pound to leave it in the cloakroom.

Linda says, 'We didn't have a camera in here at the time.'

She's still thinking about her dancing days with hats and sticks, parading up and down the cloakroom with her friend Sadie.

Who gets to see the pictures? I ask.

'Security.' There are several cameras high on the ceiling, aimed at us, our wee group, talking across the counter. CCTV pictures are sent to television screens in both the security office and the nightwatchman's office.

'They've seen some sights in here,' John says.

'Not that, but see if you're pulling your drawers up, you get caught!

Don't laugh you!' Linda turns to Mitch.

'I wasn't. I was thinking of something else,' Mitch says, eyes down, sketching.

'Excuse me, you know if you don't wear any drawers you don't need to worry.'

That's Sharon, to Linda.

They've hit that heady mix of delirium, out-anecdoting each other, teasing, taunting (and Mitch and I haven't escaped, oh no). They're rested and ready for the rush at the end of the gig. So I ask a final question: If you wanted a husband or a wife or a lover could you get one, working here?

Linda asks me to turn my recorder off and tells us a funny story.

'A man wanted my number, didn't he?' Sharon says. 'A customer who was in here.'

Sharon tells me that she began to write a false number for the man who wanted to take her home and Linda, thinking she was serious, said 'Hold on!' and put a stop to any exchange.

'I don't protect myself but I protect her. We all watch each other,' she says.

Sharon nods. 'Aye. Uhuh.' Then, 'I suppose you could, couldn't you,' referring to my earlier question.

With the timing I'm getting used to a man comes into the cloakroom with a coat. 'Hiya pal, I'll get that for you,' says John and there's a beat where I'm sure we all imagine how it could happen, the over the counter flirting that comes with a simple transaction like putting a coat into a cloakroom and exchanging a pound for a raffle ticket.

'Most of the time, you don't know where they've been, god forgive me,' says Linda.

'Judging by the state of their jackets as well. Some of them are manky.'

They're off again until their laughter subsides and they sigh. There's quiet.

'Anyway,' says Sharon.

That was a good question, I say, critiquing my interview technique favourably.

And one poor man walks in at the end of this titillation and oh poor man, he wants to put something in his coat pocket and his raffle ticket is the number

## 'Excuse me, you know if you don't wear any drawers you don't need to worry.'

ninety-six. Or is it sixty-nine? Or ninety-six, or sixty-nine? Sharon tries both coat hooks. 'There you go, pal, it's ninety-six. It's not sixty-nine, OK?'

Not tonight, I say.

'Maybe the next night, you never know!'

I apologise to the man. They led me on.

'But that was the whole thing about coming to the Barrowlands, wasn't it? Way back. So many people's grans and grandads met at the Barrowland Ballroom.'

John's right. And he brings our hilarity to a good point. I've been told stories about men and women (only heterosexual romances thus far) who met their future husband or wife at the Barrowland, started courting, and then that was that. Mate acquired. Marriage, sex, children, or whatever order it actually happened, but after they met their mate, they never went back. No need. Job done. Perhaps it's not the heart of the ballroom, this cloakroom, perhaps it's something more sensual. Perhaps it's the libidinous loins of the Barrowland. Who of the readers fortunate enough to have been to the Barrowland, hasn't enjoyed the sensual press of a partner's body while watching a gig, hasn't kissed or winched or more somewhere – oh stop. Enough. I'm taking this too far. No I'm not.

It's well past ten o'clock and we're coming to the end of the night. Mitch has nearly finished sketching Sharon.

But going back to the loins, if you'll allow me, there are so many blood ties within this building. There are Stan's wife and daughter who worked in the bar, Linda's son who sometimes works the cloakroom, Sharon, daughter of Rena, mother of John, wife of John Senior. They're a family and they're like a family. 'One dysfunctional happy family,' according to John Junior.

It's hard to believe them when they say the building's best days are behind them, because they seem so happy to be here. Sharon says working here is like a wee night out. She loves her work. But the characters that made the

## Doors open at seven and the band is usually finished by ten thirty.

Barrowland what it is in her mind – her own mother included – are not here any more. So it's changed.

Rena. The strongest of women. She lived with bereavement and isolation while raising her daughter, she grafted all her life and survived on next to nothing. Too much, surely? She must have had down days? I say to John. 'Never to me,' he says. 'Obviously, I mean who disnae? But she would never let you see them.'

To me, she's Rena of the photographs. Pete Doherty's head touching her own head, her pinny over her white T-shirt. She's the young woman in her wedding dress in another photo John shows me. She's thinner and older in a picture of her in the market. The picture is taken when she had her eyes closed because the sun is shining and her hair is glinting gold. She's vivid in my head now along with all the other legends of the Barrowland Ballroom who are given their rightful place in the building's memories. She's cleaning the toilets, she's fetching pound coins for promoters who need the change, she's resting with a cup of tea by Josie's burger bar. She's cleaning the market offices, polishing the boardroom table, dusting the portraits of the McIver family that hang on the walls while her grandson sits patiently in his school uniform, watching cartoons.

I forgot this fact about Rena. When asked her name she used to say she was called Maggie. It wasn't her middle name. It wasn't her name in the Barras market where she kept her stall. She was Rena there and everywhere else. Maggie was her Barrowland name and as you know the woman who set up the Barrowland Ballroom was called Maggie. Maggie McIver. I like that link.

Mitch shows Sharon his sketch of her. In the sketch she's leaning on the cloakroom counter, smiling, attentive, just as she's been with us and is with all the Barrowland customers. She glances at it critically, unwilling to scrutinise it too much, but she pays Mitch a compliment on his artistic ability. We tell them we'll be back at the end of our night for our coats and try our best to keep a hold of our tickets.

—  
Waiting on the bands  
•  
02/11/08  
20:11:08





It's well past ten o'clock and we're coming to the end of the night. Mitch has nearly finished sketching Sharon.





The Specials give their encore  
02/05/19  
22:41:34

A pint before The  
Specials  
·  
02/05/19  
19:27:56



The Specials.  
·  
02/05/19  
21:27:19





Colonel John Thomas Mustard about to go take the stage.

22/12/18  
21:41:11

The stuff of legend:  
Colonel Mustard and  
the Dijon 5 wrangle  
their unicorn  
·  
22/12/18  
21:04:58



Dazzling Headgear:  
Backstage with Colonel  
Mustard and the Dijon 5  
·  
22/12/18  
21:10:26





The encore at  
Stiff Little Fingers  
17/03/19  
22:47:55

The stuff of legend:  
Barrowland perennials  
Stiff Little Fingers  
celebrate St Patrick's at  
their favourite venue.  
17/03/19  
22:34:02



Digitally Challenged:  
Stiff Little Fingers  
fans respond.  
17/03/19  
21:35:27





Garbage onstage  
05/09/18  
21:17:55



—  
Garbage's Shirley  
Manson in the  
spotlight  
·  
05/09/18  
21:17:48



—  
Red haze at the  
Garbage gig  
·  
05/09/18  
21:11:33





A star(s) is born: These moulds are used to replace the Barrowland dressing room stars when they disappear.

05/09/18  
21:17:55



**They disappear, the stars.**

# THREE

## At First I Was Afraid

Remember the man who strides into the Revue Bar on his way to change a keg, keys clipped to his belt, shoulders squared? That's Michael. Remember he raises a hand to wave at a man working in the bar, the same man who appears through a hidden door in the cloakroom, points at his wife, son and Linda and tells me not to believe a word they say? That's John. You need to know John and Michael. They work together during the day and run the bars at night and if ever there were two mismatched colleagues it is them.

John was once a dead ringer for the actor Tom Selleck. He had thick brown hair and a black moustache. Now he shaves his head. 'I seen the dreaded grey hair,' he tells me. 'I went, "No, you're getting off me, mate,"' and that was that, out came the clippers and it's been a number zero for seven years since. His face is hairless too, immaculately shaven, and he is now a dead ringer for Celtic's captain, Scott Brown. By day, he wears a T-shirt and jeans and stock-checks the Barrowland bars, fixes broken toilet seats, replaces flickering light bulbs, patches up peeling paintwork and supervises deliveries of beer, loading kegs on to a swinging hoist and rolling them into the pump room. By night he wears a freshly ironed shirt and smells of soap and shaving cream and runs the Revue Bar, formerly known as Geordie's Byre, where women used to come to avoid men they no longer wanted to dance with and Calton Tong gang members hung about.

Michael is thirty-three. He too shaves his head and has a luxuriously full and long brown beard, brown eyes and a sincere and serious stare. He likes to make mental notes of maintenance jobs that need doing, assessing how long they will take – minutes, hours, days – and planning when he will be able to do them. His first priority is work for Tom, the general manager on the marketing side, then it's John and then he chooses his own work, organising tasks for days when the building is empty and not bustling with people preparing for a gig.

Music is the issue. For men who work in one of the most famous venues in the world, neither is particularly interested in music. For John it has to be Hank

Williams every time. For Michael, it's heavy metal blasted at high volume or sometimes not even music – a Joe Rogan podcast in his ears instead. Michael can't stand Hank Williams and John can't stand heavy metal so they have a ban on listening to any music when they are working together. John is emotional, quick to panic, but with a fevered determination to see things through. Michael is slow to panic: 'It takes a lot for me to get excited,' he says, and is unabashedly confident of his abilities. He was employed part time at first, having had bar experience and labouring experience elsewhere in Glasgow and Poland where he's from, and when he proved good at the job, invaluable even, Tom asked him to stay on full time and he's been on the McIver payroll for eighteen months at least, maintenance man by day and barman by night. John's Barrowland journey is more complex: he began at the Barras market, had a promotion here, extra responsibilities there and now he's in charge of the bars. He and Michael share a keenness for an after-work pint in the Chrystal Bell on the Gallowgate. They play darts which John is good at. Pool? 'He's too good. And competitive. I don't play pool,' says Michael. They both have an effective ability to give and take a joke which seems an essential quality for working at the Barrowland.

**'He'd put rubber gloves on two of the chair legs and a mop head. And it was sitting there. So I walked through that door there. And I just opened the doors and I went "Oh my god!"'**

Before I ask John my questions, he tells me to take a selfie of us so he can show me how he poses when people ask if he's Scott Brown and request a photo: he dips his chin and looks straight into the camera-phone I hold above his shaven head. He actually does look very similar to the team up the road's captain.

'I've not been one for great confidence, you know. My own confidence,' he says, which at this point I find hard to believe, but John is referring to his

work at the Barrowland and how he started out and what he's doing now, and all the responsibilities he has acquired as the months and years have passed.

After a twenty-five year stint in one company and a subsequent job that didn't suit him, John found himself looking for work. Tom Joyes got to know about it and offered him a stall in the market selling pallets of electrical goods from John Lewis. John worked at the Barras on Saturdays and Sundays, getting to know Tom and also Willie, the market manager. Then: 'Would you fancy doing a wee shift as the nightwatchman?' Tom said to him when the regular nightwatchman took ill suddenly. John had hardly ever been upstairs in the ballroom. That was the world of gigs. Yes, some of his family worked there, but John only took to do with the market.

'It was a Saturday and they were all trying to get away home, they'd had a long day in the market. And Willie says, "Right John, this is what you do." And he told me a couple of things and gave me all these keys. And once I had the shutter down I was sitting there, and every wee noise, I was like: "I don't like this! This is hairy!"' The building was deserted. The area he had to patrol was vast. There was the indoor market with all its shuttered exits. And there was the Barrowland Ballroom upstairs – two whole floors of it with its band rooms and offices and ante chambers and of course the dimmed and dormant dance hall itself. From his seat in the nightwatchman's office John could see images on his TV screen of all he was to guard. His job was to patrol the building every hour which he did, never quite getting used to the solitude or the noises that the building gave off. For a while John covered for the nightwatchman while retaining his stall at weekends, but when Len the permanent nightwatchman died John took over his job completely and let go of the stall. He worked from 8 p.m. until 8 a.m.

That was seven years ago. John turns the lights off in the Revue Bar where we're sitting and the overheads and neon notes that hang on the walls snap to black. It's eerily dark. 'See this,' he says. He takes a chair and places it on the floor next to the booth closest to the bar. He takes another chair and places it upturned on top of the first chair. 'Des had put the chairs like that,' he says. He's talking about one of his first shifts as nightwatchman. Des was the maintenance man who looked after the bars and worked in the ballroom for over thirty years. He was the one who touched up the tartan on the merchandise counter. 'He'd put rubber gloves on two of the chair legs and a mop head. And it was sitting there. So I walked through that door there. And I just opened the doors and I went "Oh my god!" And it was the white gloves. I seen the two hands. And I thought somebody was sitting there staring at me. I went "Arggh!"' John turns the lights on and shakes his head as he rights the chairs and sits back in the booth. 'And the next day I seen Des and he was killing himself laughing and I says, god rest him, "Don't ever do that again."'

John tried to get used to the dark and the shadows, stepping through swinging doors to check band rooms and offices, sweeping his torch across the ballroom's golden floor, pulling aside black drapes by the stage. He insists that the building changes at night when there's not a soul else there. 'Some people wouldn't even do the nightwatchman job just because of that. Because it's such an old building,' he says. People do talk of ghosts. His brother, now the nightwatchman, takes his dog with him on his rounds.

Occasionally Tom would ask John if he wanted to do a shift on gig nights in the cans bar. The cans bar is at the back of the ballroom, adjacent to the main doors through which punters come. It's a cash bar – all the bars are cash bars – with fridges of beer and soft drinks and plastic cups to pour them in. Punters wait in a queue that's supervised by stewards at each end. Open the can, pour the beer into a plastic cup, take the money. Job done. Everything costs the same amount so the maths is easy. John was quite happy to work in the cans bar from time to time while continuing his job as nightwatchman. He moved in and moved up from the shadowy solitude of the nightwatchman's job into the barmy, balmy atmosphere of gig nights. I don't suppose he could tell you much of the bands he saw, having ears only for Hank Williams, but that's beside the point.

The building is quiet. There isn't a gig on this evening.

'For the last three months of the year which is ninety days we've got about seventy-five concerts. This is probably my last interview,' John says and laughs. 'You can always say I interviewed him before he went . . .' He trails off and doesn't finish his sentence.

Before you cracked, I say, and he doesn't answer.

We know it's a busy time. The second fire in the Art School earlier in the year that irreparably damaged the ABC on Sauchiehall Street resulted in many of the gigs booked into that venue being transferred to the Barrowland. Tom has told the bar staff that there is to be no Christmas party this year until the New Year when the gig frenzy has subsided. Keep going until Christmas John and his colleagues are telling each other – and then we can check ourselves into the Priory.

I ask John how he went from nightwatchman with occasional shifts in the cans bar to bar manager with responsibility for seventy-five gigs in ninety days. But John has remembered a story from his nightwatchman days. 'It's come back to me,' he says, and he prefers to tell this story while it is in his mind. Still new to the job, he was constantly looking at the images from the CCTV cameras, constantly jittery, listening for noises, looking for changes. 'I happened to look at the stairs. The main stairwell. There's two fire doors. And I looked and the doors were lying opened. But you've got the shutter which takes you into the street . . .'



The shutter to the street was closed but the doors were clearly lying open.

'So I got the tape and I played the tape back and I just seen the two doors doing that.' John makes an opening gesture with his hands. 'And the hairs on the back of my neck were standing up and I went "Oh no, I don't believe in ghosts! This isnae happening."'

Be aware that this was two o'clock in the morning. John phoned his brother also working nights in a guest house in Oban. The two of them could find no explanation for the doors that opened by themselves. John videoed the CCTV shots on his phone and stayed in the nightwatchman's office until morning. 'I didn't go up the stair that night.' John looks directly at me, his eyes fierce. 'You can write that up. I'm not caring, I'm not the nightwatchman any more.'

It turns out that the Glasgow weather was blowing a gale that night and because the bolts in the doors hadn't been securely lowered into their holes, the wind had rushed under the shutters and then gently nudged the doors open. 'See at night, it's different, it's totally different,' John says again.

I hear the story, eventually, of how after some time doing the cans and the nightwatchman's job, Tom asked John if he would like a shift doing the bars. Not the cans bar but the actual bars. 'No, no, no!' John said. 'This is easy. Three pound a can. Four cans, twelve pounds, that's it, no hassle.' But Tom has a persuasive way with his staff and an eye for loyalty and talent and convinced John that it would be a good idea for him to shadow Des who managed the bars at the time. If the manager believes in you . . . It lasted a week. Des took ill: 'a slight but a strong wee guy. He done this job great.' When Des died, John found himself in charge of the bars and at the age of forty-nine he was sent to Tennent's to get his personal bar licence and do his keg cellar management course. Some change of life. How did he feel?

'Petrified! That's how I was. Petrified. Sometimes I felt like bursting into tears and running away. "Oh what have I done?"'

The Revue Bar has a queuing system which makes it easy for bar staff. A steward, Ellen, looks after the queue and points each punter to an available member of the bar staff. It's busy until nine and then quietens down when



the main act comes on. The upstairs bar is a different story. No queuing system, busy all night and a rammy throughout the gig. And it wasn't just pouring pints that John was now responsible for. It was checking that the beers were properly pulled through and all the fridges were working, re-stocking the bars according to what gig was up next and what drink that crowd liked – were they a gin crowd or a whisky or a beer or a venom crowd – getting the till ready, tidying up, cleaning nozzles, supervising staff, and handing over money at the end of the night. It was 'harum scarum' John says. With Des gone, he learned much of what he now knows on the job.

So at first you were petrified, I say.

'That sounds like a song,' John says. 'Thinking I could never work in that bar.' I tell him that would make a good chapter title: I Will Survive.

'You better not finish the chapter. I'm still drowning,' John says but from the comfort of his booth seat in the dimmed lights of the Revue Bar with the glitter ball twinkling, switched on so we can see its effect on the black walls and floor, he seems quietly confident.

'The thing which I'm proud to say is Tom trusts me,' John says. 'I'd never foreseen it but I'm happy I've done it because I really enjoy it here.' He takes a deep breath and his shoulders relax.

And then he remembers something else from his nightwatchman days. 'Aye there was one time I was doing the patrol. There's two doors into the main band dressing room. And the main band dressing room is full of mirrors. And I walked in and I just happened to look up and I seen somebody looking at me. And I'm not kidding, I'm not going to swear, but I went "Oh my god!" It was me! It was my own reflection! I went "Oh!" away again down the stair like that. Thumper.' John puts his hand on his chest by his heart and laughs at himself.

\*

One day I find Michael hauling planks and left-behind junk from under the stage. Another day he's standing in the doorway of a huge storage lock-up in the alley at the side of the building. Today he is calculating how he can level off the floor by the stage, behind the pit and the black drapes that shield backstage from the ballroom. The ballroom floor is oval-shaped but the stage is rectangular and at the very back of the hall, backstage, the oval of the dance floor is wider than the stage thus there is a small drop in floor level which is signposted and gaffer-taped and rarely a bother. But one time a technician slipped and perhaps someone might do so again so Michael is going to level it off. The intricate boards of the ballroom floor will remain intact underneath, as will the carpet next to it, unchanged for decades. 'I have a list of fifty or more jobs,' Michael says. 'Holes in the floor. Clearing under the stage. Painting shutters. Little improvements.' Timing is key for this list of fifty jobs. There can be no drilling or detritus when a soundcheck is happening.

'If I'm told by Tom that he wants me to do something then I've got to drop what I'm doing. And keep in mind that I probably won't be able to come back. Not even leaving the tools.' There's that serious look of Michael's again. He has big boots to fill. Big Tam, the handyman (not to be confused with Tam of the burger bar) retired recently after thirty-five years of looking after the Barrowland. 'I like working with my hands, fixing stuff,' Michael says. 'Not much has changed in here for the past forty, fifty years.'

Most of what John does, Michael does too, including working extra hours if he chooses in the bars in the evening. His contracted hours are 8 a.m. until 4.30 p.m but with the number of concerts until Christmas Michael will be spending much of his life at the Barrowland Ballroom. John lives close by in Merchant City. Michael lives in Dennistoun now but for a long while he stayed in Knightswood on the other side of the city. When John goes home for a shower and a rest on gig days, Michael retires to a wee unused office off the crush area and tries to sleep. If the soundcheck is too loud and the walls and ceiling are vibrating Michael will get peace but no sleep.

We're in the main band room. It has low leather sofas, mirrors, coffee tables, a small fridge and stars glued to its high blue walls. We're using the space to display our work in progress and to talk to gig-goers after Gareth Fraser has taken them on a tour of the building. John has told us to help ourselves to tea and coffee and cups and stirrers from a room that's normally padlocked. This is where Robbie Williams used to do yoga, John tells us. As well as the packets of sugar and jars of coffee there is a cardboard box with some latex moulds and a couple of spray-painted stars. They disappear, the stars. Bands take them as souvenirs from these dressing room walls. It's become a thing. Legend has it that David Bowie took one from the ballroom ceiling but crew boss Billy Coyle insists it wasn't pinched, it was given, and it was Billy who gave it to him.

Des the maintenance man used to make new stars to replace the stolen ones but he is gone now and Michael tells me that they need more moulds before they can produce more stars. I'm keen to watch the making of the stars. He's been making me vague promises for some time: 'We just have to get down to it,' Michael says.

Get down to it please! I urge.

'I've given him two verbal warnings, one written warning and he's still not made the moulds,' John says.

I tell Michael it would make for a good picture in the book and I could write about the process.

'Just put a pair of rubber gloves on and take a picture of yourself,' John says to me.

Michael says, 'And then when the stars are getting painted we can get

John spraying himself instead of the stars. And sprinkling glitter.'

'Everyone goes through that phase in life, don't they?' John says.

This is all very amusing but I am no closer to getting a star. Michael explains that an art school student came to the ballroom to make some stars for a project so they have enough for now. 'She borrowed some of the forms and she actually made like fifty stars. We managed to paint those, put them up.' Now they have decided to wait until the stars have decreased to a certain number before they put any new ones up. Each time I come into the main band room there are fewer and fewer stars so maybe they will make some when their seventy-five concerts are finished, when they've had their holidays or their stints in the Priory or whatever they will need after the surge of gigs at the end of the year is completed. For now there's just that cardboard box in Robbie Williams' yoga room and the negative spray-painted shapes of them on the floor.

They've told me about what they do when the building is empty, but what about on the day of a gig? John loves those days. 'You're rushing about, you're on the go, you're meeting people.' They come in at 8 a.m. as usual. 'First thing I would do is a pre-concert check list,' John says. 'Which is checking all the fire exits, making sure all the house lighting is in order.'

'Restock and clean the bars,' says Michael.

'Making sure the promoter gets anything he needs from the office.'

What might the promoter need?

'Ironing board, kettle, towels.'

The band has towels for the dressing room and towels for the stage.

'The promoters prefer the bands having dark towels, especially stage towels,' Michael says. 'So they're not visible from the stage. And then depending on how big the entourage is, how many people are touring, bath towels. You can get up to sixty bath towels, twenty to forty stage towels.'

'In the winter we make sure the heating's on. In the summer we make sure it's off,' John says. 'You've got to cater for them so they're comfortable and enjoy their stay.'

This extends to us. He plugs in his iPad so we can listen to Hank Williams.

'No wonder you're depressed listening to that,' Michael says to him.

John and Michael will do their checks meticulously. It's for the insurance as well as the comfort of the band and its entourage. They'll check all the lights and all the fridges and all the beers and all the fire exits, they'll cover up any cracks or holes in the wall, even using Blu Tack and a poster if necessary to make the place as neat and tidy as they can. Then at ten to seven when John is about to open up the bar to the paying public he'll look up and notice a light out when it was working perfectly before. 'That's that Des!' He'll think.

'I don't mean it in a bad way,' he says, 'I'd say it to myself, panicking. You've done it during the day, you open up the bar and you look up. "Oh! There's a light flickering. That's Des!"'



We're back in the Revue Bar, sipping our cokes, the glitter ball still turning, and John is reflective. It's not so easy for him to adapt to a quiet day. 'All of a sudden it gets to the day with a build up to a concert. It's a bit of a buzz, right. You're on the go. It's almost as if the place is alive. And you see it coming alive. The concert, the gig and all the rest of it. And then you come in the next day and, bam, dead. It's eerie. It's hard to explain but there's a sadness comes over you, believe it or not. I feel sad. That's it. It's all away. All the cheering. I've seen myself sometimes just working away up in the bar and you just feel a big depression coming over you. It's a wee bit like *The Shining*.' I fear John might be about to wind me up as he's wont to do, as they're all wont to do, but as he continues I realise he's deeply sincere. 'It's hard to explain. It's magical to a certain extent. Because the place transforms. It's the nearest thing to a ballroom actually being alive. There's something in there. There's an energy.' John finishes speaking and we sit in the quiet and dim bar, sipping the last of our drinks. This is how Tom finds us. He's with an Australian couple who have passed by the building and aware of its reputation have knocked on the door of the market offices and asked to see inside. Tom has obliged and has come to find John who he asks to take over the tour. We move with John and the Australian guests through the deserted building, listening to John point out features and points of interest.

Later, I ask Michael if he feels the same after a gig. If for him the building comes alive during the build up to and during a concert and then leaves him flat afterwards. 'I like the difference between doing a concert and between the concerts,' he says. 'You get the contrast of the gig, the rush, the excitement, and then when there is nobody literally in the building. For me it's a machine. I don't feel any emptiness or sadness. When it's downtime I'll start seeing things that need to be fixed. There is no time to slow down. You've got to keep going to make sure the machine is well oiled and ready to go.'

It's a different answer to John's but it contains the same love of the job and respect for this very old and precious building. Perhaps John and Michael are not so mismatched after all.

## 'Not much has changed in here for the past forty, fifty years'





The Entrance Hallway  
and main staircase  
04/04/17  
13:38:19



The Main Hall waits  
for the next one...  
18/05/18  
14:32:32



The Crush Area  
16/04/2017  
14:38:05

The Ballroom Ceiling,  
crucial to the acoustics  
of the venue.  
16/04/17  
18:28:33



This Way: Improvised  
arrows guide musicians  
from the dressing room  
to the stage.  
16/04/17  
18:08:56



Paying Their Way:  
Stan, General Manager,  
Finance

05/09/18  
12:15:04

**'The days of markets are over now  
because people don't do the kind  
of shopping that they used to.'**

# FOUR

## Green Shoots

The Market Office. To get to it on weekdays you'll need to walk beneath one open shutter into the dark of the Barras covered market, turn right at the nightwatchman's office and pass by the idle stalls. Maybe there'll be a stallholder cleaning his fridge freezers, maybe Michael will be emptying a unit to make way for a new trader's stock, but you won't see much other than some parked cars, and your footsteps will echo. On weekends it's different, busier, yes, but you'll still see stalls lying empty or with their shutters down, and there will be far fewer people browsing and buying than there were twenty years ago.

I mention the market because the Barrowland and the Barras are historically and financially linked, like the heart's left and right atrium, if you like, and the staff that run the Barrowland Ballroom take care of the market too. So if you're talking about the future of one you're talking about the future of the other and there's been a lot of talk recently about futures. First, however, we need to meet the people in whose working hands these futures lie. Tom, Stan, Willie and Linda.

The sign on the Market Office door tells you to knock before entering. It's an inauspicious entryway, tidily painted in yellow and deep green and revealing nothing of the business that takes place beyond it: the business of promoters and bands and hardbacked booking diaries, market stalls and accounts. It's in here that Tom, Stan, Willie and Linda attend to the business and therefore the future of Margaret McIver Limited. Between them they have worked in the company for one hundred and forty-three years. They have colleagues who work in the Market Office too but they were less keen to be interviewed and less receptive to persuasion.

You've met Linda already. She's the woman who recuperates in the cloakroom when the punters are through the doors, when her husband's tuck shop is closed, and the ballroom reverberates with base lines and foot stomps. Once you've knocked on the door and Linda has told you to come in you'll step into an open-plan office bisected by a wooden counter. That's the counter on which

Willie puts the boxes of lanyards for the bar staff when they come in at six thirty on gig nights. It's the counter prospective traders lean their elbows on and enquire about a stall. From there Linda will look up from her desk and ask if she can help you. The aforementioned Willie sits behind her, as does Maureen of the finances. On the other side of the wooden counter, the side you or I or the prospective trader will stand, is a bench seat upholstered in black leather on which today there are five black sacks of lost property – hoodies, leotards and dancing paraphernalia left behind at the Dancelines competition on the weekend. On the wall above the seat there are two rows of framed photographs of the ballroom and the market. The room is brightly lit, with photographs and cards around the desks and it's warm, always warm. If you're wanting Tom or Stan, Linda will point over your head to a door just behind you. Here is their office with its large desks and filing cabinets, electric heater and recently added TV screen high on one wall showing images in small rectangles of the market and ballroom's rooms and doorways, corridors and corners.

Across from Linda's desk there is a recess off which you'll find a couple of toilets and a kitchen and an opulent boardroom. In here there are tables that Rena – remember Rena? – polished when she cleaned the offices on weekday mornings, bringing her grandson John with her. On the wood-panelled boardroom walls hang portraits of the McIver family. In the centre is Maggie McIver: her hand to her chin, a slight smile on her face. She has living relatives and shareholders; two company directors live in Canada, one lives in Scotland. Now that you've seen the portrait of Maggie McIver, return to the office and study Linda. Watch her when she picks up the phone to say 'Hello Barrowland'. Listen as she calls 'Come in!' after someone knocks on the market office door. Compare Linda's nose with Maggie McIver's nose. For Linda, remember, is the great grandchild of Maggie McIver. She's the only one in the building with a direct link to Maggie herself. Her daughter swears she's more loyal to the Barras than she is to her own children because as well as working weekdays in the office she runs her crocheted children's outfits stall – Zip it or Button it – from the Barras market on weekends.

The phone rings. 'Hello Barrowland,' she says. 'Ah, hello darling, how are you?' It's a promoter. 'The 11th of September?' If a promoter wants to book a band into the venue it's Linda who will find the diary and put the date in and send them the rental agreement and all the other admin required for a gig. Are they nice to you? I ask. 'Brilliant,' she says. 'We've got a rapport with all the promoters.' She writes the name of the band – Garbage – in pencil in the big hardback diary, a provisional date, one of many she is holding for the promoter, and says, 'Right, speak to you later. Right, darling, bye.'

The phone rings again. 'Hello Barrowland.' It's a caller wanting to buy tickets. 'You need to do it through the internet, dear.' Linda explains how to find the Barrowland website and tells the caller that there'll be a link to click on to buy tickets. 'Another Rum and Reggae one,' she tells us. 'I'm going to the

gin festival. I think it's lovely,' she says, of gin, before the phone rings again. 'Hello Barrowland.'

The office is busy all day. The phone calls and emails could be about lost property or gig or ticket enquiries. 'Could I bring my mum up?' one woman once emailed. 'I'm awful sorry, we're too busy,' Linda said at the time but months later she organised a date and the woman took her mother into the ballroom where she used to dance half a century ago and Linda got a box of chocolates in thanks. 'It's a great place to work in,' Linda says. Just as well. She's been here since 1970.

As we talk, people are arriving into the office for a meeting with Willie. First, it's Alan, who manages the security. Then it's his boss, Fred, owner of the security company, Rock Steady. 'Come here, dear!' Linda says, and introduces us to Fred, because we're interested in meeting his staff who steward the Barrowland gigs. Fred gives our request the OK; I haven't heard many people say no to Linda. Next, two police officers knock at the door. They are here for a meeting in the boardroom to discuss the upcoming concerts, to discuss the kinds of crowds each gig will attract, so Fred and Alan can provide an appropriate number of stewards for the night and so the police can predict and plan for potential trouble outside the building. Willie Florence is the Barrowland man who deals with this. He's also the licensee for the premises and hosts the community Pub Watch meetings too.

Willie is a slight man, trim, active. I see him around the building and he's always on the move. Is it a worried look he has on his face, or is it just the look of someone with much to do? His hair is fine and grey. During the day he's planning for gig nights and on weekends he's managing the market, collecting rent and dealing with whatever comes up – he'll never know. He and Tom take it in turns to work on gig nights.

Imagine this: two teenagers from Motherwell have been spotted by the security stewards on the door. They're under eighteen. One of the kids' parents dropped them into Glasgow in the car and is picking them up at 10.30 p.m. when the gig is over. But the kids aren't allowed into the gig because it's over eighteens and they're only sixteen. It's Willie who the stewards call. Instead of turning the kids away he'll take them into the foyer where the ticket checks and body and bag searches take place. He'll sit them in a corner and tell them to call their parents to collect them early. Or imagine this: there's an eighteen-year-old and a seventeen-year-old and they're at an over fourteens gig. The eighteen-year-old goes to the bar and buys two pints – one for himself, one for his mate. Willie, on one of his walks around the ballroom, asks the boys for ID, discovers the trick, takes the rogue pint away and delivers a stern warning: 'If you're caught with any more drink tonight you'll be put out the hall, you'll be barred.' Willie is master of the 'What's your date of birth?' line of questioning and some





**‘If you’re caught with any more drink tonight you’ll be put out the hall, you’ll be barred.’**

teenagers still hesitate and fluff their lines and it’s them he has to turn away – or banish to a corner of the foyer to make the phone call of shame to their parents. Willie tells me he has to be strict. ‘If licensing standards officers come in, we could be penalised. You eventually lose your licence.’

Willie has a granddaughter who envies him his job. ‘Granda, you’ve got the best job in the world,’ she says, and he admits he takes it for granted now. ‘People that love gigs and love bands, they’re coming in to see their favourite band and here I am in here getting paid to listen to them.’ He says Amy Winehouse was special. She was very ill; it was one of her last gigs. ‘But see that night, when she played, it was absolutely fantastic.’ His colleague, Tom, has a photo of Amy Winehouse on his wall at home. She’s coming out of a side entrance of the Barrowland and there are paparazzi surrounding her. She’s holding something that looks like a book – something to sign – but it’s not. It’s a polystyrene takeaway container. She must have been hungry.

When Willie’s granddaughter was finally old enough to go to a gig he let her come. ‘Turned out she was a goth. It must have been a gothic band. So I wasn’t too happy.’ He remembers the days he took her for long walks in the hills, allowing her to get muddy, to roam and splash and enjoy the wildness. ‘It’s a reckless age,’ he says, of being fourteen and a goth.

In his own teenage years he was one of the kids at Renfrew Airport shouting and screaming for the Beatles. Then he was a young man in tight trousers and winkle pickers and a two-inch collar who took the bus into Glasgow, walked up the Gallowgate, had a drink in Bairds and tried his luck in the Barrowland Ballroom. This was the big time, he says; boys from Renfrew coming to the bright lights of the Barrowland. He caught six months of Billy McGregor and his big band’s ballroom dancing before the bands began to play pop music. Not much of a dancer he would ask girls to dance and hope for the best. He remembers his one sober pal getting kicked out of the hall and the rest of them – full of whisky and maybe a wee half pint of beer – being allowed to stay in. ‘It was very strict, aye. If you were drunk they just chucked you out, the bouncers in those days.’

The area where the stage is now used to have seats and dim lights and it was there that Willie and his friends would sit and if they were lucky they would

## **When Willie's granddaughter was finally old enough to go to a gig he let her come. 'Turned out she was a goth. It must have been a gothic band. So I wasn't too happy.'**

find a girl to walk home. One girl caught his eye. A lassie from Easterhouse who he asked to dance each week and each week she would ask him to walk her home. He went from the Gallowgate to Easterhouse to Renfrew, unaware of crossing boundaries and borders that might make a young man with an Easterhouse girl vulnerable in those days. She didn't become his wife. He doesn't even remember her name. What did she look like? I ask. He tells me she had a big hairdo, a beehive: 'Probably like Amy Winehouse,' he says.

When his birthday comes each year he asks himself if it is time to retire: 'Am I fit to go on? Can I go for another year?' He's seventy-one. This is a man who has worked two jobs at a time when things have been tight and he's a man who likes his work and he likes this job, so he works on.

The phone rings again. 'Hello Barrowland,' Linda says. 'Eleven o'clock, sir. OK then, right, bye.' The conversation is brief. Perhaps it's a parent enquiring when that night's gig will finish so they can make arrangements to pick up their child; I forget to ask. I do ask Linda about her own children. Do either of them want to work for Margaret McIver Limited, like you, they're McIvers after all? 'No.' What do they think of your job? Linda laughs. 'I should have been retired years ago!' The idea seems ludicrous to Linda. She will clearly ignore her children, anyway, and good for her. 'I love my work, I do.' She says. 'I don't know what I would do with myself if I retired. That's the god's honest truth.' She's serious now; perhaps she's thinking of her first day of work in 1970 when she did the market books and all the intervening years until now, when her husband drives her to work in the mornings and sits sometimes on an orange chair in the alley beside the building to have a cigar, and she wouldn't want to change a thing. The phone rings again. It's for Tom. She puts the caller through.

One of Tom's first memories of the Barrowland Ballroom is of being in his grandfather's house on a Sunday morning in 1958 and seeing his aunty, his mum's sister, crying because the Barrowland Ballroom had burned down. 'That was my first insight into what Barrowland was and what it meant to people,' he says. However, it was as market manager that he was first employed by Margaret McIver Limited. His grandfather had been a fruit seller in a market in Kent, England, and his father too before moving to Glasgow after the war. When Tom grew up he went into retail – fashion in particular (he cuts a dash in tailored suits). The job of market manager at the Barras came up and it seemed obvious for Tom to apply; he knew markets and he knew retail. Eighteen months previously, Simple Minds had filmed their Waterfront video in the ballroom and performed their concerts. There were only about fifteen gigs a year at the time, the ballroom being managed by a separate company. So Tom was all about the market which was a popular and thriving place. Now, it is subsidised by the Barrowland. 'You never have the two of them pulling at the one time,' he says. 'If they did we'd be living in the Bahamas.'

Tom has brown hair, sharp brown eyes that suffer no fools and enjoys the telling of a story or the listening to one. In his youth he was a big Bowie fan. 'I did have the Bowie suit. I did have the hair cut. I did dye my hair blue. Or was it green, I can't remember.' He sang in a band called Cold Fire, doing gigs in pubs. The band folded soon after they stood in for the regular house band in a pub in the Gallowgate whose lead singer was injured and couldn't perform. 'He had his leg in a stookie. And for some reason every time we were playing, the power kept going off. Someone would have to run and switch a breaker in the switch room to put the power back on.'

He had an affinity then, if not a talent, for music, so when the company that ran the Barrowland concerts finished up, Tom suggested to the McIver board that they manage the ballroom themselves. 'Running a hall was just as easy as running a market. It was buying and selling and being nice to people. And basically that's all we do. We just be nice to people as best we can. And it works.'

It's repeated so often it could become a cliché but it's true: bands love coming to the Barrowland and so do their managers and promoters because of the welcome they get from Barrowland staff. Here's two examples right here: 'They're such nice people, Tom, Stan, Willie. So, so helpful. They will do anything to help you,' and, 'It's relaxed. You know you're going to get a decent welcome.' That was Dave from DF Events and Quinner, Del Amitri's tour manager.

They do seem relaxed, Tom and his staff, except perhaps at six forty-five when Willie is handing out the lanyards and telling John to stop kidding about or Linda is doing the year end admin. There's a time to work and a time to have a laugh and they take their work seriously.

Tom's best time is early morning. If he rises at five he'll stay up and head to the market office. There, he will pick his way through emails – dealing, deleting. He answers the phone and wishes he hadn't, he'll make a list and start scoring things off but something will come up: or someone will turn up. He has a soft spot for a story – the Australian couple who turn up at the door and ask to look inside, so he takes them in and shows them round. Or the woman and her daughter who come to listen to George Ezra through the Barrowland windows, standing outside on the street hoping to hear him sing. Tom's intention was to invite them in and to give them a guest pass, but something came up, he became suddenly extremely busy and he forgot, actually plain forgot, until it was too late. And that's unusual because he has a good memory, or, if he does forget, he'll remember with a start days or weeks later and phone you. Nothing goes by him. He'll get to you eventually. He promised to arrange access for Chris and me to document the Fatherson gig and, on the night, hand-wrote me a note to the door staff in small capital letters granting us access old-school style.

Don't ask him what it is about the Barrowland that makes it so special for bands and punters because he'll tell you to read the papers. But then he'll say: 'It's the sound of the place, the shape of the place, the style of the ceiling, for the sound. Sprung floor obviously, everybody loves the sprung floor. And memories. The place is steeped in history.'

**'Running a hall was just as easy as running a market. It was buying and selling and being nice to people. And basically that's all we do. We just be nice to people as best we can. And it works.'**

He puts challenges out on the staff Facebook chat group asking them to add up the price of a round of drinks – a gin, a vodka, a mixer etc coming to £42 – and gives a bottle of whisky to the woman who overcharges by two pounds. Many, to his dismay, undercharge by an average of eighty pence. If he wants to speak to you he'll most likely phone you or text you rather than email you back. Emails are tedious. He has enough to wade through already.

On gig days he will check the cleanliness of the hall because there is nothing worse than a promoter in trainers hitting a sticky patch on the dance floor. Once it's on his trainers he will spread it around the hall. All day there are enquiries and knocks on the door. Before seven he will hand the Barrowland guest list to the promoter and will check in with the security stewards. When the gig's on there could be additional floats needed, there could be a situation at the door, there could be environmental health with a complaint. He might put his dinner in the oven and forget it's there. There is much to manage. 'I suppose,' he says, after all this: 'If I had the night off the place would just run anyway.'

What about after a gig, I ask him. Do you feel the same anticlimax as John? Tom is straight in with his reply: 'I love it!' He laughs. 'There's time to shut your eyes!' Then he says: 'I know what he means by anticlimax. But that wee lull is the time where you go "Phew, let's try and revive ourselves." John might think it's an anticlimax. To me I think it's rest time. Because there's very little of it. That's what I think.'

Stan arrived at Margaret McIver Limited six months after Tom in 1985 and at age eighty is the oldest staff member on the payroll. He is a tall man whose hair is white and his smile broad yet shy. Another natty dresser, he and Tom sit at their large desks with their piles of papers and oversee the day-to-day management of the company. His late wife used to work in the Barrowland's bars. 'My wife had a big personality and got on very well with the punters.' He has two daughters, one of whom is getting married in the Barrowland Ballroom in the summer. Carol used to work in the bars too and always declared her wish to be married in the ballroom. Her mother was having none of it and Stan has taken up her petition. 'I'm not too sure about that, but she just loves it.' Is she going to have the ceremony in the main band room? I ask. 'Dear knows what will happen, where it will be.' Carol must have inherited her mum's big personality and determination. The wedding will go ahead in the ballroom and her dad, of course, will be there. Stan began work as accountant and company secretary. Now he does three and a half days a week and is in charge of the 'bookkeeping work and all the financial side of things'. He collects money from the promoters, he pays Rock Steady the security firm, he deals with the cash that comes in from the market and the bars. He sorts out any post-gig complaints.

I ask him if he ever went to the Barrowland Ballroom as a young man and he answers, 'No.' Did you come for gigs or dancing or roller skating? 'No, no and no!' There were plenty of jazz venues to keep him occupied in the south side of Glasgow. Were you ever awestruck? Who did you enjoy most in the building? 'Blondie,' he says. What did you say to her? 'I said, "I'm so glad you're here."' There's that shy smile again.

He's like Tom, who gives the impression that the organisation just happens, that his hand isn't steadying the tiller and guiding them through whatever run of gigs or challenging time is upon them. But Stan knows what's what. He has an eye on the figures and the shareholders and the future. That word again. He can remember the past too, a time when the market thrived. 'The days of markets are over now because people don't do the kind of shopping that they used to. There was a tremendous number of characters. Comedians they all were. But of course, once they die, they don't get replaced.'

But the Barrowland is OK isn't it? I ask. It's doing so well this year. You're all telling me it's a hundred miles an hour till Christmas! He answers plainly. 'It's hard. You can't take anything for granted. Because all you need is a bad season for concerts and you can turn the keys. We're surviving rather than thriving at the moment. You're living on a knife edge for a long part of the time because there's not any input from the market.'

Stan's words could put fear into anyone who loves the Barrowland Ballroom. If it's any consolation, the time to sell the business – not that the McIver shareholders have any intention of doing so and there is a feeling that they would sell to an independent company not a conglomerate anyway – would have been decades ago when the market and the ballroom were both doing well.

So, the future. The Barrowland first. If, Tom says, the 'big boys' treat the venue well, 'if they give it its fair share it will be there forever. But if they don't, if they want to play the big boy game and starve us out then we're at their mercy.' There. That's sobering.

This year Tom's staff have been particularly good. There is the almost relentless flow of gigs; no Christmas party or holidays until January, remember. He talks of years where perhaps the cleaners haven't been so good or the bar staff haven't turned up. 'But this particular year, in my experience, I can honestly put my hand on my heart and say throughout the whole building and that's from administration, stewards, crew, bar staff, cloakroom staff, toilet attendants, cleaners, everyone seems to have gelled for some reason, I don't know what it is. Maybe they've all married each other. But they've all seemed to gel and it's all pulling at one time.' That's good. That's the Barrowland Ballroom working well. 'It's a must-see destination. It's a bucket list,' he says. I'm rightly cheered up. Forget the last paragraph.

And the market? Of the two McIver institutions, the market is probably dearest to Tom and it's now his life's work to 'try and bring that back.' He tells me that at the age of sixty-seven he needs to learn how to use Facebook in order to publicise the market and encourage new stallholders to come to the Barras. 'Green shoots,' he calls them. 'I hate to use the word gentrification,' he says, but he knows, Willie knows, Stan knows, if the market is to stay alive they need the arty crowd, the crowd the traditional traders would call the 'bowler hats', they need the crafts and the Barras Art and Design people. They need the couple with their stall of hardback high quality art magazines. Tom shows us three magazines he bought from them in support of their business. We open them up and discover a selection of arty nudes.

'I see that part of the East End becoming more of a music centre,' Tom says and I'm taken back to his musician days when he played in pubs along the Gallowgate. The market could become synonymous with music, whereby a young musician could come to a pop-up stall selling instruments – 'the future Billy Connollys buying their first banjo, that type of thing' – or a hard-up musician could flog their guitars for a good price. 'So I see the market and the ballroom becoming an entertainers' area and a destination.'

You have to feel something for the traditional traders who have turned up week after week, year after year, and seen the number of customers decline. Many have packed up and moved on, others are hanging on, others are trying to adapt too.

It would do something dreadful to the city's psyche if the Barrowland and the Barras were to shut down. A lot of pressure then for Tom and Stan in their windowless office putting on smiles for the promoters and the drinks company reps and the stallholders and the staff. But they have a national institution to protect. Let the phones keep ringing. Let the knocks keep coming on the door.

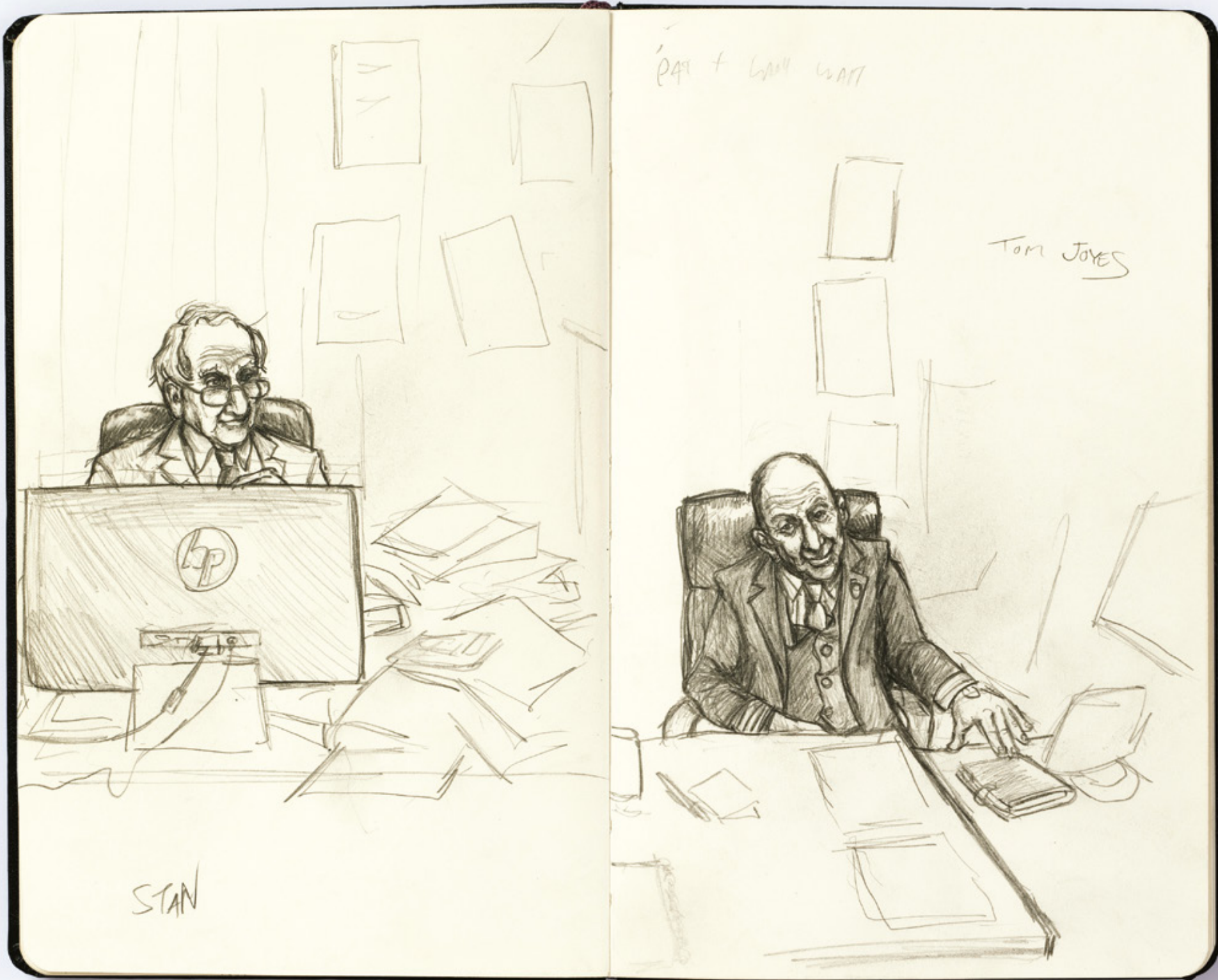
In the main office Linda sips her coffee. Willie's meeting has just finished and the attendees are coming out of the boardroom.

One man heckles her as he passes. 'Have you not been sacked yet?' he says.

She looks up and quick as a flash hurls her retort: 'Och, I've been sacked twelve times, disnae matter! I just keep bouncing back, I'm awful sorry!'

I'll leave you with Linda's words in the hope that the market will bounce back soon and no one will be awful sorry.

Tom has brown hair, sharp brown eyes that suffer no fools and enjoys the telling of a story or listening to one.



# WORLD



The Barras Market, the literal foundation of the Ballroom.

12/03/17  
13:45:01

—  
Taking the Calls:  
Linda, Administrator  
·  
08/08/18  
15:58:10



—  
Lifesblood: Loading the  
beer in on the service  
stairs  
·  
24/08/18  
14:15:35





Dormant: The complex latticework of neon tubes that make the Barrowland shine.

12/04/18  
19:45:46





**'I've never had a dissy in my life.'**

# FIVE

## Ghosts Of My Youth

I want to tell you more about Linda and introduce you to Ann and June whose lives, like Linda's, were shaped by the Barrowland Ballroom. Ann grew up in Barrowfield in Glasgow's East End and danced at the Barrowland Ballroom four or five times a week from the age of fifteen when she started work at the Viyella mill. She lives in Govan now with her husband Robert whose first employer, Templeton Carpets, fitted the Barrowland carpets in the original ballroom, the one that burned down in the fire in 1958. We drink tea and they reminisce in their living room with photographs of their two boys and three grandchildren on the shelves and a framed print of the sea hanging above the fireplace.

June is from Barrowfield too but now lives in Dumbarton, west of Glasgow. When she told her mum as a teenager that she was going to the Barrowland Ballroom her mum announced: 'You'll meet your husband. That's where I met mine.' June sits in St Luke's bar in the Barras with her sister and niece and leans across the table. 'I says: "I'm not getting married!"' She leans back and smiles. 'Famous last words.' She did indeed meet her husband at the Barrowland Ballroom. As did Linda. As did Ann – almost. Robert went to the Barrowland Ballroom at the same time as Ann but she didn't meet him there. They started out on different lives until they met one another in a pub called the Phoenix years after their Barrowland days.

Although Ann will have been the first to dance on the ballroom floor – her spell of dancing at the Barrowland was over by 1965 when her first child was born – Linda will have been the first of the women to stand on the Barrowland's Canadian Maplewood floor, being a McIver, having aunts and uncles who managed the market and the ballroom and who employed her mother and eventually employed her. In fact, she remembers bringing cups of tea as a child to the men who laid the new ballroom floor when the building was rebuilt after the fire. She saw the exposed springs underneath those thin Maple planks. She saw the men transform it into the octagonal gemstone it remains today.

Once, she was chastised for dancing on that floor. Her mum was teaching her to dance. John, the manager, was spraying the carpet with perfume and had brushed a slippery polish on to the ballroom floor before the dancers



The Revue Bar waits  
for customers  
15/08/18  
14:45:58

wearing big ball gowns came in for the Wednesday night sequence dancing. 'You just glided along the floor. It was like glass on top. It was lovely,' Linda says. Her mum took her on to the floor and quietly, slowly, taught her some steps, a waltz perhaps – one-two-three, one two three – and there they were, mother and daughter, in each other's arms, alone on the glassy floor, when the manager came by with his perfume scoosher and caught them. He told Linda's mother to get back to work and to Linda he shouted: 'Get down the stairs! You should be getting yourself sorted.' Her mum went to the canteen where she did the catering and Linda returned downstairs to the pay box (where she was already 'sorted' she points out with indignation).

Remember that little has changed about the ballroom. The catering kiosk is now the main bar (although smaller in size) and the stage has changed ends but Linda and her mother will have been dancing on the same Canadian Maplewood floor that we stand on today, underneath the very same domed ceiling with its famous acoustic tiles demanded by Billy McGregor.

Ann came with friends to dance, accompanied by Billy and his band, on Saturdays and on weeknights. Even if she was on a 6 a.m. shift at the mill the next day she would come wearing her dirndl skirt with net underskirt and pointed-toe shoes. The dancing was never on until late and it was a matter of minutes to walk in the morning to the mill from where she lived so with the twelve and six her mother gave her from the three pounds and six pay packet Ann gave her mother she went to the Barrowland as often as she could. Nobody had a car. Nobody took a taxi. The girls walked to the Barrowland and they walked each other home in the dark evenings. She adored the Barrowland Ballroom, she adored the atmosphere. She adored Billy McGregor shouting at them to get on to the floor and join in the dancing. She adored the powder rooms. 'They were absolutely stunning. They had candelabra things, wall lights but they were shaped like candles.' When the fashion changed to the pleated skirts and the Ivy League blazers and then to the shift dresses, she would stand in front of the mirrors and finesse her bouffant hair, check that her black flick of eyeliner remained in place, or the dress made from Black Watch tartan from the mill that very afternoon on her sister's sewing machine was looking good. Then she'd return to the hall which was thick with bodies, the churning, whirling dance floor with the couples going round and round and the jivers in Jiver's Corner flicking their plimsolled feet and Billy McGregor and his band loud and jovial, cigarette smoke in the air, their Coca-Colas placed on high tables.

Stewart was one of the favoured bouncers. He collected the glasses and walked around the hall. He was well liked by Kitty, one of the McIvers who ran the business. He started in the cloakroom, a youth of seventeen with sideburns and dark hair and flecks of ginger in his young beard, but he didn't stay in the cloakroom for long, just a matter of weeks. 'Would you like to put on a suit?' the gaffer of the bouncers said to him one night because they were short staffed. The suits were dirty, never washed in all the time Stewart worked there. We're talking 1966 until about 1973. Stewart found a grey suit for summer and a maroon suit for winter and put them on a peg that was his, and every time he did a shift he put the trousers over his own trousers. All the bouncers did that.

I don't know the exact day or date that Linda was introduced to Stewart but when she first saw him she thought: 'Oh, he's gorgeous!' Bouncers weren't allowed to dance with patrons. On busier, livelier nights where men asked women to dance, and the jivers kicked and twisted in the corner, women liked to talk to him and flirt with him but men kept away. No interaction. They fell silent in the queue outside on the Gallowgate along which Stewart's colleagues patrolled, looking for drunken behaviour, ready to send a man on his way home. Ann's future husband Robert remembers checking his behaviour in that same queue whenever a bouncer approached: 'Shh, wait a minute, he's coming!' He remembers the authority the bouncers had, especially the big one who would shout: 'You! Out! You! Out!' Or if a bouncer recognised someone

they'd previously barred: 'They'd just walk up. You! Away you go! And the guy would just walk away. There was no chance of him getting in.'

The bouncers broke up fights outside in the street, they checked women's handbags for wee half bottles smuggled in for their boyfriends. No alcohol was allowed in the Barrowland but it got in anyway. Sometimes people would add an aspirin to their coke to make it fizz. Others would buy a Cally, a Carlsberg, which was non alcoholic but was popular with the punters.

Stewart will tell you that the women had the worst fights inside the ballroom. If women were fighting he would have to separate them because there were no female bouncers at the time. He recalls helping drunken women from toilet seats, lifting them up while their friend pulled up their drawers.

'There was never any trouble inside the hall that I saw,' says Ann. She insists on this. 'They weren't gentle but they didn't go and pick on somebody for nothing.'

—  
June, who danced,  
laughed and  
loved during the  
Ballroom days.  
·  
28/08/18  
15:17:22

Back to the queue. If you were allowed in and not turned away at the door for being drunk or appearing drunk, you would pay your ten pence to Linda in the pay box. That was her job of an evening when she turned eighteen and Mrs Brown retired. 'I used to get in trouble from Mrs Brown but I didn't bother my shirt,' Linda says. 'You took a ticket out one at a time and you had to cut it. And you had to mark your numbers in a book.' She decorated the pay box with Christmas decorations and cotton wool at Christmas and eggs and bunnies at Easter. She still works in the pay box but it's the one adjacent to the one we're talking about here. Look out for her if you're collecting tickets or lucky enough to be on a guest list. You'll put your hand through the half moon in the glass that separates her from you and she'll give you a stamp with her stamping pen.

She has clear memories of those days. 'Oh aye, they were all done up in their suits and the ladies with their dresses and that. Some of them would come in with their rollers and their head scarves on and sort themselves when they were up the stairs. Right the way at the back used to be a bit you walked in and it was all mirrors and wee stools. And all the women used to take their rollers out and put their stuff in the cloakroom.' That would be Ann and, later, June.

The cloakroom then had the same rules as the cloakroom now. Ann says, 'I think it was about thruppence if I remember right. And you held on to your ticket. If you lost it too bad. You had to wait till the end for your coat. If your coat was still there they gave you it.' Ann remembers taking her coat to the cloakroom, but Robert, wearing his made-to-measure suit from Jackson's in Argyle Street with his tie and tie pin never wore a coat. His trouser legs had to have turn-ups, an inch from the bottom. The hanky in his pocket was false. 'You didn't make the girls cry because you didn't have a hanky to give them,' he says and laughs at his joke.

June passed the Barras and the Barrowland every day when she walked to and from her school in Charlotte Street. They lived in a railway house because her father was a boiler maker in Cowlairst. 'We were the posh ones; we had an inside toilet. Just a room and kitchen with an inside toilet,' she says. Every Sunday her family went to the Barras after chapel. Her grandad and his sister were hawkers and worked together on their stalls in the Barras and the Briggait. (Now, June loves a car boot sale and wonders if she gets her buying and selling instinct from them.) At the Barras they would buy hot chestnuts from the chestnut man. They'd see the Strong Man and the Medicine Man. 'Oh it was a thriving place.'

Don't forget June's parents met at the Barrowland. June's mum went with her sister Mary and June's dad was there with a friend who knew Mary. 'This is my sister and this is Tommy. And that was them, you know.' They married in 1947. Less than twenty years later, June was in the Barrowland herself.

June had a friend who was obsessed with a band called Herman's Hermits. The band members were only young, seventeen or eighteen, but they were top of the pops and June's friend's crush on Peter Noone the singer was big.



The band was playing at the Barrowland Ballroom but the girls were only fourteen and didn't have tickets. So June suggested they go to the Barrowland during their lunch hour. She imagined they would stand outside the building and catch them arriving. 'So we were outside with our brown uniform on and the long pleated skirt and the tie.' They saw no sign of the band. 'I was pretty bold,' says June and tells of how the girls crept around the side of the building, pushed at an open door and went inside. 'We went up the stairs and we heard music and we got dead excited. And then we opened the door.' Nobody was in the hall other than June and her friend and – on the other side of the hall – Herman's Hermits 'They were all sitting on the stage with their guitars and practising for the gig that night.' The girls felt suddenly shy, unsure of what to say, or even whether or not to move. But the boys said, 'All right girls, come on over.' June and her friend were brave, knowing as they walked towards the boys on the stage that this was a good thing, an exciting thing. 'They were so nice. They asked us about ourselves. They let us listen to them for a couple of minutes. And then they signed the back of our dinner tickets. That was brilliant. That was a great memory.' Although June was strictly a Paul McCartney girl, she knew how important that meeting was for her friend. She and Elizabeth would frequent the Barrowland many a time together. That thrilling visit was only the start.

June's first night of dancing at the Barrowland was in the late 1960s when she was nineteen. 'It was the best feeling in the world walking into the dancing. I just loved it,' June says. 'You transcend. And it was all about the fashion at the time as well. The style and your hair. And brushing it and drying it and the make-up and then by the time you get out you're buzzing.' She had long blonde hair, her legs were long in hot pants or Twiggy dresses and she used to hide her hairbrush behind a toilet cistern.

For June, the Barrowland had a different atmosphere to the Locarno where she went mainly to dance and pose. At the Barrowland she went to have a laugh, to enjoy a more down-to-earth atmosphere and to play. 'The music was good. I remember Ride a White Swan, T Rex, that was great. It was a mix of folk, some older, and there were some young trendy ones as well. It was fun.'

'The stairs were all lovely, weren't they?' Picture Ann in her pointed shoes placing an elegant hand on the banister and walking up beside the tiled walls, past the landing with the seat that runs along the back wall and the mirrored tiles engraved with saxophones and music notes. Picture her walking past the teal tiles, on upwards to the sound of footsteps clicking on the stairs, everyone heading to the same place, the smell of perfume and hair oil and smoke, and through the swinging doors to the ballroom where the blast of the band and movement of all those bodies would make you glad to be alive. 'It was beautiful. And it was spotless. Brilliant. There were never bottles and cigarettes,' says Ann. That would be Stewart's colleagues' job; to collect the glasses, to empty

the ashtrays and return them to the catering bar on the far side of the hall where Linda's mother worked.

'They had a big ball and all the colours came off it. I remember that,' says Ann. 'Brightly lit. No dark corners anywhere. Everything was light,' Robert recalls.

At Christmas time there was a tree at the top of the stairs. Mistletoe hung from the dance floor ceiling. 'And the band leader came on and said when they stop playing, whoever you're with, look up, and if there's mistletoe you've got to kiss them.' Robert does an impression of men trying to manoeuvre their partners underneath the nearest piece of hanging mistletoe.

They remember special midnight parties at Christmas and at New Year after which flush-cheeked patrons would pour from the ballroom into the street at two or three in the morning, excited for Christmas day or January first. Robert and Ann hadn't met during those days of mistletoe and dancing but feel sure they were there at the same time, attending so frequently, loving the place as they did. As the couples passed by one another on that polished floor, they may well have been within a hot breath or a jiver's outstretched arm away from each other. We'll never know.

Stewart, being a bouncer, wasn't allowed to dance and he rarely went to other dance halls. Linda wasn't allowed to dance because she was at work in the pay box downstairs, tearing tickets and marking numbers in the book. But Ann danced, Robert danced and June and her friend danced, when they so chose. There was an unspoken rule that a woman tended not to decline a man at the Barrowlands. 'In the Barrowlands if somebody asked you to dance you would dance with them,' says Ann. But it was different at the Locarno or the Palais. There was a different attitude there. A swipe of the hand or a turn of the head would indicate a knock-back. 'There was a class difference,' says Ann. 'It was a wee bit upper class, a bit more proper.' And whereas at the Barrowland you might dance with anyone of any age with any way of speaking, 'If you wanted a lumber with a car you went to the Locarno,' she says. Mind, Ann wasn't bothered about cars because nobody she knew had one or needed one. So, unless he was drunk, she would accept a dance from any boy at the Barrowland.

Which is why what June and her pal did for fun at the Barrowland – seeing how many men they could knock back – has a glint of wickedness about it, but what a laugh, what fun for those blonde-haired beauties. 'Standing there. "Do you want to dance?" "No thanks."' June does an impression of nonchalantly declining some eager man. 'And I ended up with this man. He says: "I've been watching you all night. Youse are just doing that!" And we're like: "What are you going to do? It passes the time, you know!"' June shakes her head at her younger self and laughs. The Barrowland men gave as good as they got from June and her pal. When the fashion changed to flower power they wore flowers in their hair and when dungarees came in she and Elizabeth wore them to the Barrowland. 'Are you on the night shift, hen? Are you going to your work?' the men would say to them.

How would you ask someone to dance and how would you accept? I ask Robert and Ann. Robert explains that he would: 'Just go up to them and say. "Would you like to dance?"' He adds, after a tantalising pause, 'Honey'.

'The chap just turned and you just followed him. If you didn't fancy him you'd juke away,' Ann says. 'And then you could dance with them a couple of times and then say "Thank you" and walk off. And if you fancied the look of them you could stay on dancing for a bit.' Simple.

June danced at the Barrowland at a slightly later time than Ann and Robert. Sometimes she would dance a slow dance – a moonie – with a boy if he was good looking, but mostly: 'If they seemed kind of nice you turned round and started doing your thing.'

Being the Barrowland, you declined a guy at your own risk. Men there weren't as used to being turned down, so they would come back at a girl with a quip or a jibe or they'd play their own joke on you.

'Are you dancing?'

'Yes.'

'Ah, that's good, because I want your seat.'

Or, after being declined they would say, 'I didn't know your leg was broken,' or to Ann's female friend who fortunately found the funny side and told the story over and over: 'Och well, I didn't know you had bandy legs.'

'You'd hurt their feelings,' says Ann, mindful of the male ego.

What of the boys who were too shy to ask a girl to dance? There were plenty of them. Groups of boys would approach a group of girls together or boys would push their friend towards a girl he fancied and watch as he asked the question. That walk back to his friends if he was turned down was not to be envied.

We're jumping around in time here with all these memories but the gist is the same. You'd stay up dancing with a boy if you liked him. 'If you were still dancing at the end of the night you more or less had a lumber – if you wanted a lumber,' Ann says. A lumber is a walk home. Ann accepted a lumber from time to time. June accepted a walk to the bus stop. She remembers one sweet boy she danced with who walked her home and on the way told her about his dad who worked in a grocer's shop and could get June's mother tea and sugar. 'It was as if, "Oh, I'll treat you well." A wee soul.' But June wasn't interested in settling down, preferring the dancing, and said, 'Here's my bus, bye!' and away she went.

When a boy escorted Ann to her home, her mother stood in the bathroom which was by their back close and she would flush the toilet over and over. 'Or she'd open the door and say, "Has that boy got no home to go to?"' Sometimes she and the boy would make a date to see each other again. But beware the boy who said he would meet you the next week inside the dancing instead of walking you there. It meant he didn't want to pay you in.

'The good ones,' says Robert, meaning him, of course, surely, 'they'd take you to the cinema during the week, say on the Wednesday.' And couples would

meet at the Olympia or Boots' Corner which was known as Dissy Corner. Disappointment Corner. 'You'd get a dissy if somebody didn't turn up.' Have Robert and Ann ever had a dissy?

'I've never had a dissy in my life,' says Ann.

'Sometimes you'd stand there and think I hope she doesn't turn up!' says Robert.

Ann relays with a little embarrassment the times she hid as she went by in a tramcar after seeing 'some poor soul waiting for me and I'm going to Boots to meet somebody else. I wasn't very nice. But you're only sixteen, you're not caring about getting involved. You just want a good laugh and a good time.'

As Stewart was in Auntie Kitty's good books he was introduced to the family and the family included Linda. She liked the look of him, as we know, he liked the look of her, and they began to talk. Theirs wasn't a courtship on the Barrowland dance floor. It took place outside their work, at Orange Lodge dances or venues where it was acceptable for Stewart to go, being a bouncer. There was a bit of risk attached to being a bouncer. Once, he was saved by some youngsters on the street who'd been in the Barrowland and shouted: 'No, it's not him, you've got the wrong man!' to the men who were looking for a bouncer to settle a score with and mistook Stewart for him.

Bouncers weren't allowed to search men for knives but knives got into the Barrowland, brought in by Calton Tong gang members who congregated in Geordie's Byre or the Revue Bar as it is known today. These men kept themselves to themselves in a corner of the bar, occasionally hurling abuse if some man approached one of their girlfriends or their sisters.

Stewart, now a soft-cheeked baby-faced man of sixty-seven recalls he and a bouncer colleague following a man who was behaving oddly into the gents' toilets. 'He turned around and was talking to his pal and had a big knife in his belt. I'm talking about a big bowie knife.' Stewart took the man to the policeman who always stood on the Barrowland door and the man got two years in prison.

Stewart was a bouncer at the Barrowland when Bible John murdered three women. He is haunted by the face of the man he saw kicking a cigarette machine as he's sure this was Bible John. He worked with a partner and they were about to throw him out for kicking the cigarette machine but a colleague said, 'Leave it, it's the end of the night, I'll deal with him.' Stewart remains troubled by the description he gave to the police which he says wasn't taken into account. The height of the man is at the nub of it. Stewart insists the police got the height wrong. The man kicking the cigarette machine wasn't six-foot, he was shorter, and Stewart knows this because his six-foot colleague who pointed a finger and gave him a telling-off was pointing downwards to a shorter man. It's some burden. He wonders if things would have turned out differently

## **‘If you were still dancing at the end of the night you more or less had a lumber – if you wanted a lumber.’**

if they had kicked that man out. ‘It wasn’t a good time for here,’ he says. Linda warned me that Stewart wouldn’t want to speak of Bible John so when we begin our interview we say nothing, but Stewart talks about him very quickly, as if those thoughts aren’t buried at all, but very present, very close, even after all these years.

June was working as a dental nurse in Parkhead at the time of the murders. The police came to her dentist surgery and asked for the records of all their male clients. Apparently, Bible John had uncommon teeth. A unique ‘bite’. They found no match. Gallows-humoured men at the Barrowland Ballroom even responded ‘Bible John’ when June asked them their name as they danced. And June would say, ‘Oh right, well I’ll let you walk me home.’ More than one man too. ‘A lot of them said it. They made a joke of it,’ she says. The police set up tables inside the Barrowland Ballroom. Eventually people stopped coming. Three murders between 1968 and 1969 shut the Barrowland down.

Linda and Stewart married in 1984. They had twins, Chris and Gemma, who are now in their thirties. Chris builds the frames for houses and works in the cloakroom from time to time. Gemma works as a nurse in a care home. She walked through the heavy snow to get to her work when the Beast from the East came to Scotland. Linda, as you know, has never left the Barras and the Barrowland. Stewart had a stroke several years ago and regained his movement but lost a little of his memory. He helps her in her Button it or Zip it stall at the Barras every weekend. They are never away from the place.

June was approached one night at the Barrowland by a good-looking man. He asked her to dance and because she liked the look of him she agreed. He said his name was Brian and she told him that Brian was her brother’s name. While they were dancing Brian told her he would like to marry her so June left him on the dance floor. Months later she saw him at the Barrowland again. When she remembered his name he was delighted (but her brother was called Brian!) and asked her for a date. She accepted. They married and lived first in Partick then Dumbarton. She was good with numbers and worked at the

*Daily Post* and the *Dumbarton Herald* as a bookkeeper. When she was asked to work nights to do proofreading – usually a man’s job – she was offered the same money as the men. She accepted. They have a daughter.

Ann met Robert, finally, when she was working as a barmaid in the Phoenix. He was on holiday from Australia as he had emigrated there. As she poured his drink, Robert asked Ann if she was single. She said she was and he told her he was going to marry her. Her friend warned her off him – ‘He’ll go back to Australia and break your heart!’ But he came back, they married within weeks, he raised her son as his own and they had another son together. They live near Ibrox, his team’s ground – and they have three grandchildren. ‘Our generation had a good time. We had loads of employment, we had money, we didn’t get called up for wars because we were between. And even now we’re pension age everything’s fell into our lap. We are that lucky generation, you know?’ Ann says. She has published a children’s book written for her granddaughter Kaitlyn, and she has written other stories too. She and Robert often dance together at their local bowling club.

After our coffee in St Luke’s we take June and her sister and niece to the Barrowland. We tell June we could get to the ballroom by the back stairs or the main stairs – the fancy route – and decide ourselves before she can answer that we should go the fancy way. ‘Yes, let’s go up the stairs. See the ghosts of my youth,’ she says. And after her quick tour of the main band room with its stars and mirrors and leather seats we walk on to the Maplewood dance floor, looking up and around, our voices soft. June’s sister says: ‘If somebody had made a different decision, none of us could be here.’ She’s talking about their parents who met in this very hall. ‘That instant attraction,’ she says. ‘If you were to say, “Och, I won’t bother”, that person disappears.’ I sense that they’re sensing the magic of their existence because of a chance collision here in the ballroom.

That’s why I wanted to write about these three women: Linda, Ann and June, and their Barrowland stories and their ensuing long lives, with all the joy and sadness and fortune and misfortune that a life holds. I wanted to write about them in honour of the three women who didn’t get their lives, who disappeared too soon because they accepted an escort home from the Barrowland Ballroom from the wrong man. This chapter is for them. Their names are Patricia, Jemima and Helen.



DO

SAD. KEEP SMILING

I'M COLLECTED BY A HUMMINGBIRD

TIME SPACE MOVED SO SLOWLY

LOOK AT SLOW MOTION

KILL YOUR BIZARRE MINDSET FUCK





Honeyblood, seen from "The Pit"  
05/09/18  
20:10:45

# FATHERSON

**I can feel the drumbeats in  
my cheekbones, my ears  
and my stomach.**

# SIX

## Hold On

It's 9 am on a freakishly cold April day; we've had hail, rain, wind and a touch of snow. Fourteen men aged from twenty-three to sixty-four are standing at the Barrowland's side doors greeting the arrival of a white artic lorry expertly loaded with kit for The Hunna's gig that evening. These men will lift every silver storage box, every lighting truss, every amp, every instrument, up the Barrowland stairs – six sets, seventy-two steps – to the ballroom. They are the Glasgow crew. Billy Coyle will tell you that the Glasgow crew is the best in the UK. Billy is the crew boss and he's been with the firm since the Simple Minds Waterfront days in the 1980s so perhaps he would say that. But touring crew will tell you the same as well as managers and promoters and bands whose gear these men hump up the stairs. 'We're classed as one of the hardest working crews in the world. The most stable crew going,' says Billy. He has a face full of wrinkles and the brightest of blue eyes. His hair is shaven, his arms are tattooed and he wears a Barrowland Hall of Fame T-shirt with Richard Ashcroft's name on it.

A Barrowland load in is easier now than it used to be because there is a hoist which can take the heaviest loads. Before the hoist, everything went up the front stairs, and in those pre digital days there was more kit, there being more cable, and the amps were bigger too. Still, the men in the Glasgow crew are strong and hardworking, there is no doubt – some lean, some with portly bellies, some extravagantly bearded, some shaven or behatted, bareheaded, pierced, tattooed and one in possession of a melodious singing voice that echoes brightly up the stairwell. 'That's Jaz. He's the true talent here,' one of the men says and introduces him to me as the 'Singing Soprano'.

This is how it goes: two men and the lorry driver – Arthur, who cannot believe the cold morning – unload the gear from the back of the lorry, its doors thrown wide to the Glasgow weather. They carry it down a ramp and into the bottom of the stairwell. Then teams of two men take it up to the next landing and another team of two pick it up from there and lift it into the ballroom. They are careful with the way they lift, almost always working as a pair, standing either side of a silver box, grabbing the handles and walking it up the left-hand side of the



stairs, putting it down for the next two men to pick up and returning down the right-hand side of the stairs, a little puffed out at the start of the shift and then actually puffing or sweating by the end. 'There's no such thing as heavy,' one man says, 'only some are lighter than others.' His partner quips: 'But that was fucking heavy.' Their feet are quick, the load is balanced, they speak little except to answer my questions: 'What's that you're carrying?' 'A lighting truss'. (One man has it up on his shoulders and the other man holds the bottom end like a ladder.) 'What's that?' 'A base plate.' It's a flat sheet of metal on wheels with weights attached. 'To weigh down the lights,' someone tells me. 'What's that?' 'A pile of shite. Just write that down for everything,' Ally says and smiles. He's on his way down, droplets of sweat on his forehead. Later, I see him carrying several loads with an unlit cigarette in his mouth.

The equipment keeps coming. The way it is packed in the lorry belies the kits' sheer volume – and there's another artic on its way. 'John, there's 500K coming up!' someone shouts from below. JP is licensed to work the hoist. He wears a black T-shirt, black jeans and trainers and waits at the top of the stairwell, holding one hand on the banister and leaning out over the drop to watch the progress. I'm worried about him falling. 'I've been doing this since I was fourteen,' he tells me. He's now forty-five. Lean as a bean. He wouldn't go to school so his dad, who was also working as Glasgow crew, made him do the load ins with him and he's been there ever since. JP looks over the drop again then presses the Up button on his controls. When the load reaches the top level, he stops the mechanism and hauls hard on a rope. He puts his whole body into it, crouching with the effort. The load hovers above the floor (there's a catch on the pulley to balance the load), JP presses the Down button on his controls and the amp is lowered on to the floor. Quickly, he removes the green hoist straps. If other Glasgow crew are passing, or touring crew or technicians, they'll help him move the kit into the ballroom. I can see the grit and effort and sweat but it looks effortless this choreography of stooping, stepping, lifting and setting down, of climbing one way and turning to descend the other way, all to the accompaniment of Jaz's singing or a shout from below or a cough or a poke of banter.

Do people have a set job? I ask Billy. 'No, no, no. Everybody helps get the stuff up and loaded in and everybody helps set it up. Because you cannae really turn round and say, I don't do that. It would ruin the reputation of the crew.' It's clear the crew work well together. The men are paid not by the hour but by the job so the quicker they can get the load in done, the sooner they can go home (remembering to return in the evening for the load-out of course, unless it is a two-night gig). They take a break while they wait for the next lorry to arrive with the backline (all the equipment needed for the stage – the instruments, the amps and leads). The men smoke or vape, they sing, they chat, they sit on the stairs. The air is coldest down at the doors but aside from two men wearing hats, most men are dressed for spring in knee-length

shorts or jeans and T-shirts. One man in a cream tracksuit stands out among the roadie black. There is a sign that says No Smoking but it seems churlish to deny these guys a cigarette after they've worked so hard and they're still only halfway through.

Inside the wakening ballroom, its colours muted and sleepy under the house lights, there are neatly placed piles of silver boxes. Each box has its contents labelled in black type or fine marker capitals. Along the back wall there are canisters for pyrotechnics. It's hard to imagine that in nine hours' time all this kit will be unloaded, the soundcheck will be completed and the hall will open its doors to paying punters. I'm reminded of John's feelings of anticipation on the day of a gig and suspect he's somewhere in the building, doing his pre-concert checks and enjoying the buzz and bustle.

I meet Tom and Ritchie, sound engineer and front of house technician for The Hunna, who are waiting to begin their part in today's gig. We stand at the edge of the dance floor looking towards the stage and Ritchie tells me he is excited to be here. The tour manager, Matt, has set up his laptop in the main band room and is attending to emails. I see him shaking hands earlier with the Glasgow crew. The boys in The Hunna are still in bed, Matt tells me, but will arrive in the afternoon to start the soundcheck. Neil, the promoter, glides from ballroom to band room, a serene overseeing presence. Billy is a presence too, floating between promoter, manager, crew and Barrowland staff. He tells me a bit of background about the band, about some of the difficulties these lads have had. It's the second date of the tour. Everyone is wishing them well.

Have you insured your body? I ask Billy, wondering what would happen if he or one of the crew was unable to work. Billy tells me the company has insurance for its staff and that no one is left without a job due to an injury. There aren't many injuries. Once a crew mate dislocated a shoulder after putting down a piece of equipment in an awkward way, a couple of people have dislocated a finger and Billy has dislocated a knee. I saw a man earlier place a box on his foot then hop around for a bit – 'Oh my toe!' – but I don't know if he was acting up for me. Perhaps he wasn't because he stood still for a few seconds, his back to me, holding on to the stair rail.

'I'm mentally scarred,' Billy says. I think he's joking because he laughs afterwards yet there's truth behind his flippancy. He's referring to the tragedies he's witnessed; horrific accidents during gigs or setting up for gigs. I won't talk about them. And he's touched on something that is important to him: the mental health of his crew and all the roadies and musicians who pass through the Barrowlands. 'It's basically the timescales. You're in early in the mornings and you're there most of the day. By the time you're finished in the afternoon you're tired but you're coming back in at night. Obviously it puts a lot of stress on you.'

**'By the time you're finished in the afternoon you're tired but you're coming back in at night. Obviously it puts a lot of stress on you.'**

It is a strange lifestyle. A gig mightn't finish until ten thirty or eleven and it's only then that the men can reverse the morning's load in. It might be one or two in the morning before they're finished.

'But it's more so the touring people that suffer the mental stress,' Billy says. 'People think touring is great. Oh, you must see everything! But you don't see anything. They come into the venue at seven o'clock in the morning and they're there all day. And then they strip it out. And that's them, they're away travelling to the next venue. They're living on a bus. It causes a lot of friction, a lot of tension.' They won't see much daylight either. They'll be in dark auditoriums and cold stairwells, however full of history, however beloved.

Later, I interview Dave McGeachan from DF Events, and he agrees with Billy, remembering his own touring days when he managed a band called The Smile. 'You're away for a long time. Especially in America you're away for six, nine months. It's not a standard job being a tour manager or production manager or one of the crew. And Barrowlands is a mid-range venue. You're not at the stadium level where bands are getting pushed about on private jets and get to go home every so often.'

Crew will be away from the stability of family for months, missing birthdays and celebrations, powerless if ill health strikes someone they love, with lack of sleep or disrupted sleep and no way of getting away from people who are annoying them. Add to that drink or drugs or both: 'They can make people happy or else they can turn them really crabbit,' says Billy. 'And then you argue with crew mates. And that's when the spiral starts. They remember you, to put it bluntly, being a cunt.'

It doesn't stop when you come home from a tour either. These roadies have barely been alone for months at a time and all of a sudden they're home, between jobs, either living alone or thrown back into an unrecognisable life.

I see Craig, one of the Glasgow crew, carrying an office chair on his head, its wheeled legs pointing skywards, the padded seat balanced on his crown. The next artc must have arrived. I watch the crew carry smaller triangular-shaped amps up the stairs, observe the touring crew mixing and mingling with the Glasgow crew, affable, collegiate, see the unpacking and setting up and remember that this is the busy bit, the purpose part, and it's the aftermath, when the lights go out, that Billy is concerned with. I'm reminded of how protective the crew and the management are of The Hunna. 'There's a load of people unfortunately that took their own life in the music industry. You've seen it, even singers and people like that,' Billy says. I remember seeing a hand-drawn sign and a flower placed against the Barrowland's front facade, in memory of Frightened Rabbit's Scott Hutchison. 'You can't advocate for stress,' Billy says. 'I don't think Scott ever realised how appreciated he was.'

Billy is organising his own gig at the Barrowland. It's a charity event to raise awareness of mental health issues. He's made a lot of contacts over the years, floating between managers and promoters and crew and musicians (it's him who set up the Barrowland Hall of Fame), and people are happy to do him favours. Tickets are free. He tells me about a facebook post he wrote, advertising the event, to which he received a private message from a friend. He thought the friend was going to offer his services to help out in some way. 'Seen your post,' he wrote to Billy. 'Just phoned the doctor.'

Billy believes that local musicians should get a shot at the Barrowland so his Music Matters gig is showcasing some first timers and some youngsters. I go to the event and watch eighteen-year-old Rianne Downey. She stands alone on stage – just her, a microphone and her acoustic guitar. She wears a red tartan suit and black roll neck jumper and sings 'Sit Down and Country Roads' and some of her own songs in a voice that is true and beautiful and strong. Afterwards she is elated. 'It's surreal. It's just crazy when I think of all the people that's played here and now I can put my name on the list,' she says. Her audience wasn't huge but it was attentive and spread nicely around the dance floor.

The crowd is mixed. There are parents of performers and professionals from mental health charities. There are adults in recovery from drug or alcohol addiction, there are adults and teenagers with mental health issues. Some have brought friends, some have brought children. There's the same warm glow to the building, the usual snug wood and reds and yellows and pinks, and that same energy that you get at other gigs, although it's colder without the nearly two thousand bodies to warm it up.

Rianne's smile stays on her face as we talk, sitting on the padded bench halfway up the main stairs with people milling around us, strains of Billy's voice introducing the next band and then the songs of the band coming through the swinging doors. Rianne is studying sound production at college with the aim of recording her own songs one day.

I ask her what she did in the hours and minutes before she played. She said she went out for dinner to take her mind off her nerves. Then: 'I came here and watched the acts then I went backstage at the last minute and tuned up so I could just go on without having to think about it.' A man passes us and congratulates her on her set. 'Thank you,' she says, 'thank you.' Her granny and granda met at the Barrowland Ballroom when it was a dance hall. 'My Granda had a half bottle of vodka in his pocket and offered it to my gran and that was it.'

Rianne's boyfriend Dylan joins us. He has curly hair and a zipped-up tracky top. He's a musician too. Last Christmas he supported Gerry Cinnamon here at the Barrowlands. What was it like? I ask him. 'It was crazy!' Dylan says. 'I know that just sounds so clichéd but it was. It was one of the craziest things ever.'

Rianne agrees. 'When you sing and hear the reverb and then the echo, there's not a feeling like it. It fills you with adrenalin.' I try to imagine it. I can't imagine it. It must be a singer thing.



## **‘I don’t know if we should be telling you this,’ says Boab, ‘but we stole stars.’**

Downstairs Tam is leaning on his burger bar counter talking to Andy from Turning Point Scotland. It’s a Turning Point building that Tam works in as maintenance man. Tam speaks openly about his depression and change in personality that came on after his tumour when he was unable to work and taking strong medication. He tells me he is often amused at the embarrassment of the non drinkers or designated drivers who ask for a cup of tea at his kiosk. He always gives them a Tunnock’s Teacake for free.

Across from Tam, women wearing flower garlands in their hair offer massages. It’s Valerie and her daughter Casey and niece Daisy. They all work as stewards at the Barrowland. Valerie offers me a skittle shot when I go over to speak to them. What’s a skittle shot? I ask. ‘The lady is in need of it!’ Valerie declares. She gives me a tiny plastic shot glass filled with multicoloured skittles and I knock it back, sweetness in my mouth, a sugar hit, a boost. Oh my days, I say. Valerie has a kind, open face and says with no drama that music has kept her alive. She speaks with gentle conviction, a woman recently turned fifty, with plans to create Listening Cafes across Glasgow and group nights at gigs for people whose mental health has left them isolated. ‘Music has been my therapy,’ she says. Her story starts with a mother with alcohol addiction and Alzheimer’s, her own diagnosis of bipolar disorder and an advert seeking stewards for a Robbie Williams concert. That was nineteen years ago. Since she got the job she’s been a steward for Rock Steady (and G4S before that) at hundreds of events. The gigs have provided a lifeline to another world. ‘That was my getaway for everything I was coping with. I could switch off. I’ve had it all going on and I could just go to work. There are times you’ll catch a bit of music. But for me the music is in the air anyway.’

Waiting in one of the production rooms are three young men. They are John, Boab and Craig and their band is Dogtooth. Like Rianne, Billy has championed these youngsters, and they’re headlining tonight’s event. It’s not the first time they’ve played the Barrowland. The first time they played, Boab slipped on the ramp coming off the stage, took John out with a side tackle and Craig jumped on the pair of them. Friends from school were in the front row ‘jumping about like dafties’, Boab’s girlfriend was in the crowd and they got back together

that night. After the gig John, Boab and Craig covered themselves in shaving foam. ‘It took a good half hour after we’d played to turn around and go, “Hold on, we’ve just played the Barrowlands.”’ John says.

They’re excited for the evening’s gig. They’re certainly not complacent about playing the Barrowland again but they’re not nervous. They’re not twenty-four either, as John tries to make me believe, they’re sixteen and seventeen. And they didn’t get paid seven million pounds to do some filming recently at the Barrowland, John isn’t a gardener during the day, he works at Tesco. It’s true that they don’t dress the same as everybody – ‘We don’t dress the same as fucking each other!’ says Boab – and it’s true that Craig’s dad saw John playing his guitar at a mod festival in Millport, tapped him on the shoulder and asked if he wanted to be in a band with his son.

‘I don’t know if we should be telling you this,’ says Boab, ‘but we stole stars.’  
You stole stars?

‘Do you want one?’ they ask me. I do. I really do. Are you OK with me putting this in the book, I ask.

‘It’s OK. Aye, put it in the book,’ John says.

‘I’ve got two,’ Craig says. ‘One for each time I’ve played here.’

‘If I get lifted for it, I’ll blame you,’ says John. He adds, ‘Billy knows.’

I remind myself to remind Michael and John to make some more stars. I’m so tempted. How did you do it? I ask.

‘You climb on a seat,’ John says, as if it’s the simplest thing in the world.

They tell me they’re planning on singing a song called “Trying to Save You”, written for their friend who has struggled with his own mental health. John says he and Craig have struggled a wee bit with their mental health from time to time. Could you speak to each other if you needed to? I ask, as I’ve got Billy’s words in my ears about long tours and isolation. Absolutely. Definitely, they say. John tells me he says to the crowd during a gig that they’re there afterwards should anyone want to talk to them without judgement. ‘We’ll sit and speak to you for as long as you want to speak for.’

‘We’ll talk a lot of shit but it will be a good laugh,’ says Boab.

It’s eight o’clock. The boys have two hours before they’re onstage. Boab tells me about a recent gig he went to at the Barrowlands. He’d had a bit to drink. ‘I wisnae myself. And I decided about halfway through the gig I want to meet DMA’S.’ He went to look for Billy Coyle to see if Billy would sort it for him, Billy as you now know can sort most things. ‘So me being bold as anything and trying to rock into the dressing room. A bouncer just grabbed me and I’m like that: “Where’s Billy Coyle? Where’s Billy Coyle?!” The guy’s like that: “Fuck off!” And just threw me out. He didn’t kick me out of the gig but he kicked me out of the dressing room.’ Billy Coyle couldn’t help him with that one. We talk about the size of some of the stewards. ‘Have you seen the guy outside the dressing room?’ John says. I know who he means. It’s Mark.

Sounding it out:  
Setting up for the  
Garbage gig  
·  
05/09/18  
16:18:45  
·  
16:45:42

He's stewarded a couple of our Barrowland tours. He has lots of stories, lots of chat. 'He could pick us up with fucking one hand,' Craig says. 'He could pick us up with chopsticks,' says Boab.

Is this it now? I ask John, Boab and Craig. This is what you're good at and want to do forever? I'm thinking about their futures, their dreams, their aspirations for their band. They say that since they've left school they've come out of their shells, particularly Craig, and, yes, this is it. When I ask to take a picture their demeanour changes and they put their scowls on, sitting low in their chairs, looking straight to camera, the schoolboy skittishness and banter and foolishness gone. They can turn it on. They can look the part. Don't change, boys, I say in a silent prayer. Don't change. And look after each other.

At ten fifteen Billy steps on stage to introduce Dogtooth to the waiting crowd. Rianne and Dylan are among the audience. Valerie, Casey and Daisy are in the crowd giving out skittle shots. The band comes on, not to rapturous applause because it's not that kind of concert; they need to put out the set lists and twang and tune their instruments before they play. I watch John put sheets of paper by Boab's drums and the two microphone stands. Boab fits a cymbal on to his drum kit. Craig picks up his bass guitar. He wears a thick chain around his neck and seems to have grown in stature and confidence since stepping on to the stage. Boab practises some drum rolls and the audience waits at the barrier below, a young crowd, ready to jump. I'm reminded of Dave the promoter from DF Events who told me that he was suddenly nervous when putting out set lists on the Barrowland stage for The Smile. The hall was packed and he felt as if everyone was watching him. 'Nothing else bothered me but just walking on the famous stage . . .' It's the closest he's got to feeling what Dogtooth are feeling.

John picks up his guitar and stands at the microphone and then they play and they're really loud. I can feel the drumbeats in my cheekbones, my ears and my stomach. The dance floor is full of people. They've got a decent crowd. I hear them play 'Trying to Save You' and I check the disappointment in their faces when they're told to shorten their set because the night has overrun. I feel disappointed for them too because they're good up there, they've got a presence and are punching it out, but it's nearly eleven and there are limits to the noise the Barrowlands can make as there are residents nearby, and Billy and the crew need to come in, anyway, and take everything apart. Still, they've played on the Barrowland stage again.

This end point, the pinnacle of the final crash of the drums, the final strum of electric guitar, feels far, far away on the morning we watch The Hunna's set being loaded into the ballroom. The crew are still carrying chairs on their heads and unloading all the rest of the kit that's tightly packed into the second artic. The crew have still to unpack the silver boxes of lights and cables and monitors and set up the backline.







Looking down from  
the Barrowland attic  
24/04/18  
13:24:55

Already, the lighting rigs are lowered and men are standing on the stage affixing lights.

I watch all this from the raised area in front of the Barrowland mural, downstage right, just before the step down on to the dance floor. One of the touring crew has already missed the step and stumbled. 'Read that big white sign up there!' one of the Glasgow crew shouts at him.

'What sign?'

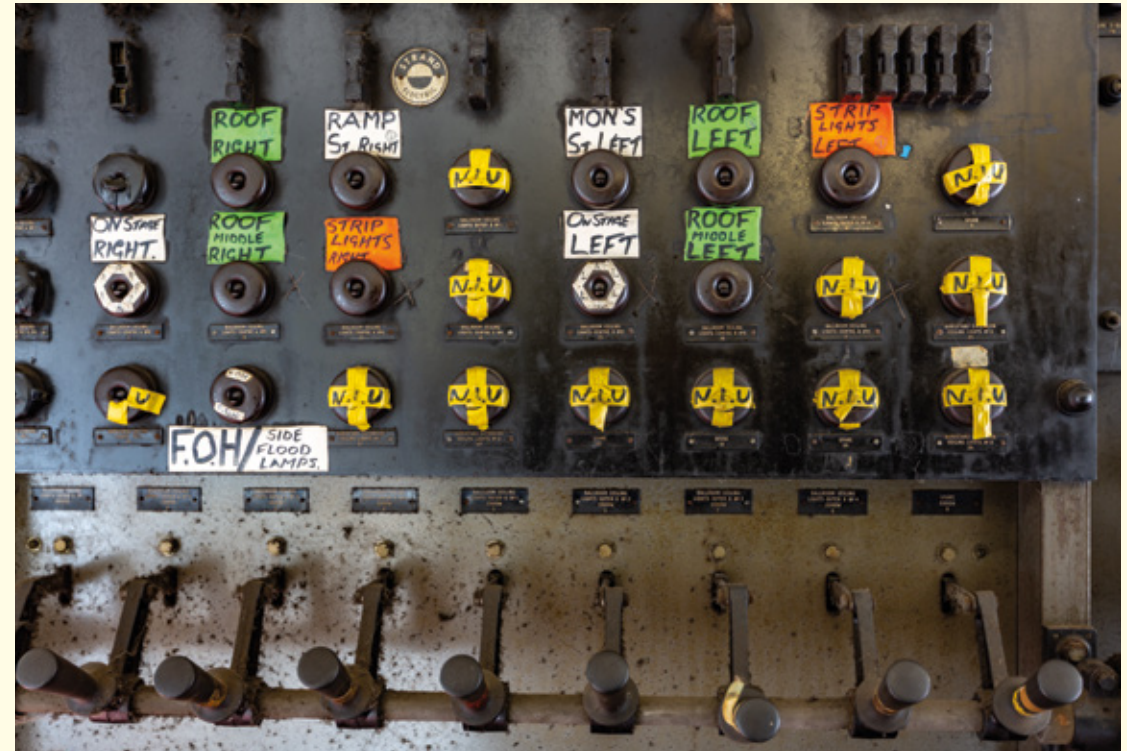
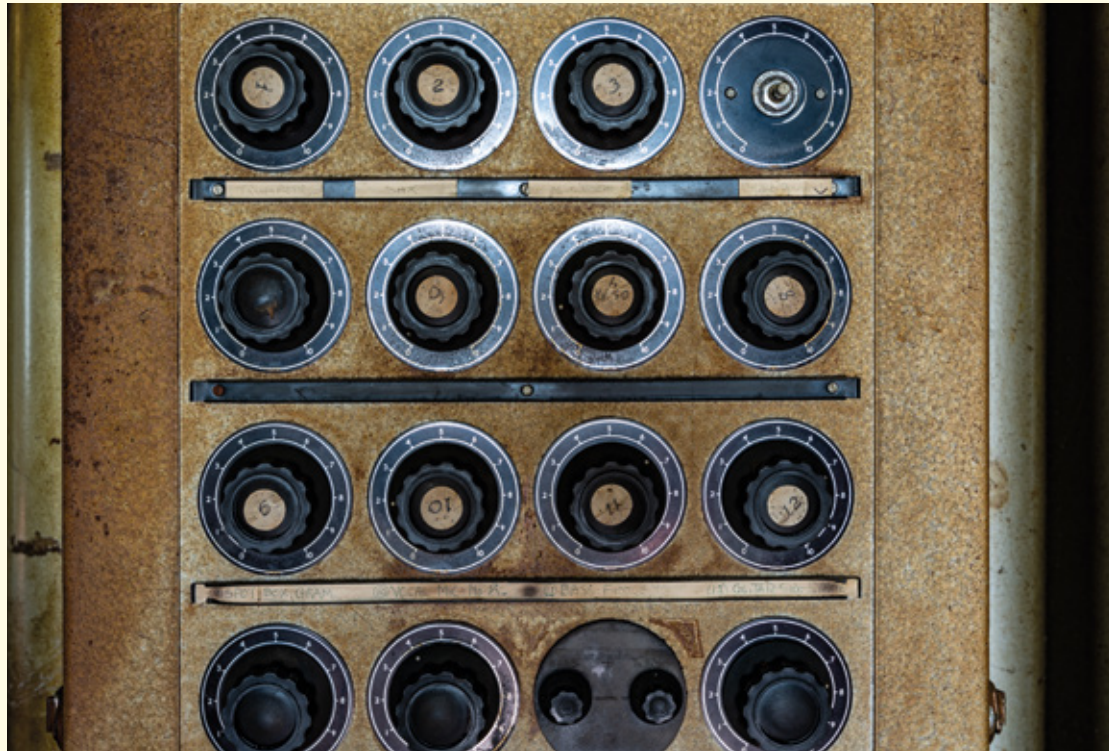
'The one that says, Please Mind the Step!' His voice carries well around the hall. The acoustics are indeed good.

I see Billy crossing the dance floor. The load in is going well, the tour manager is pleased, the promoter is pleased. They're all hoping it will be a good show for The Hunna boys who need a good show. There's goodwill in the Barrowland this morning and a lot of people grafting towards that moment of black before the lights crack on.





The crowd at  
Stiff Little Fingers  
17/03/18  
21:09:45





Loading in at the  
Garbage gig

05/09/18  
11:22:19

The Attic. You can see the curve of the ceiling off to the left.  
24/04/18  
13:19:51



The Fire Exit  
22/12/18  
18:57:11



Lined up for  
The Specials  
02/05/19  
19:09:33

244

Shall we let them in? Shall we  
find out how their nights go?

# SEVEN

## Are We Good For Doors?

When Colonel Mustard and the Dijon 5 do their soundcheck there is the feel of an afternoon party; a hint of the gig to come. There is the gentle chaos of plucks and riffs and musical phrases from guitars, drums, saxophone, trumpet, trombone and keyboard on the Barrowland stage. Many in the band are wearing yellow, including John the lead singer whose jacket sparkles with golden sequins. He stands centre stage chewing a fingernail and his band mates chat in twos or threes upstage. Some take selfies. The bassist thumbs a note over and over. A row of unattended microphones angled like elbows is lit from above and glints silver.

Then: 'The number you are calling has not been recognised, the number you are calling has not been recognised.' The front of house sound engineer is asking the musicians to test their microphones and this is the first offering. It's greeted with laughter. 'I know a lassie, a bonny, bonny lassie!' someone sings when it's his turn and he's joined by the click of the drummer's drum sticks and more laughter.

The soundcheck is not sacrosanct. People walk across the hall with purpose. There's a teenager in a yellow hoodie kicking about. Someone takes photographs. Michael is in the main bar working comfortably and fluidly. I can see him behind the shutters. He's wearing ear phones. 'One-two, two-one, hello,' says Fathom, the other singer, and her voice fills the hall for a few brief seconds.

At the Del Amitri soundcheck they're midway through a song when I arrive; the microphones are already checked and there's no kidding about with numbers not being recognised or bonnie lassies. Five musicians play to the empty hall and another teenage boy sits on the seats at the back, his knees drawn to his chest. The band stops playing. A few spoken instructions: 'Put the bass slightly higher up. That sounds better.' They start again. There's a man on the stage behind them on his hands and knees. He looks like he's fixing something.

Laurie is somewhere in the hall and she has a big night ahead of her. Her usual role on the Del Amitri tour is as audio technician; she sets up the PA and assists the front of house technicians. Tonight, she'll be on stage on the monitor, mixing the sound that the band can hear through their ear pieces. The band's usual monitor man is on holiday. His wife booked a trip unaware

—  
Final adjustments:  
Backstage with  
Del Amitri  
·  
29/07/18  
20:42:03

—  
Onstage with  
Del Amitri  
·  
29/07/18  
21:17:33

of his tour dates, so he's missing out on working at his favourite venue. And Laurie is getting a shot. She's nervous. It's a massive deal. 'The toughest job in the house,' says tour manager Quinner. 'If the band starts shouting at him it's usually a good indication of something's not right.' Except tonight it's not 'him', it's Laurie.

'It always ends in tears with a ginger girl!' The Mustard's lead singer's voice rings through the hall, a slow high melodic complaint. I look for John in his gold sequin jacket but can't see him on the stage. He's on the dance floor holding a wireless microphone and his voice is loud and plaintive through the speakers. He walks the length of the dance floor, passes the main bar with its shutters down, walks right inside the bar as if he's going to pour himself a pint, straight past Michael who has his back to him and is tidying, pottering, working away with his headphones on, then walks back on to the dance floor, still singing. When he returns to the stage the guitarist starts up a playful twang, the drummer adds a beat, another guitar joins in and out of this melee a song kicks in. I get a sense of the noise in the room, the power of the sound of this band. There's the refrain on the keyboard. There's the brass. Now the vocal and now the chorus: 'International sex hero is coming to the rescue!' A man stands alone on the dance floor, and holds a phone above his head, recording the song. 'He's gonna save the day,' sings John. 'He's gonna save the day!'

What about the punters in these perfect hours before the gig? Is anyone in the queue? Have the performance times and the support bands been announced on the official Barrowland Twitter feed? Has anyone arranged to meet outside the building to buy tickets or give them away for free? Go back thirty years and

**The band's usual monitor man is on holiday. His wife booked a trip unaware of his tour dates, so he's missing out on working at his favourite venue.**







—  
Onstage with  
Del Amitri  
·  
29/07/18  
22:13:06

—  
Sweat, and other  
Chemistry: Onstage  
with Del Amitri  
·  
29/07/18  
21:12:45



Johnny McBrier has the sound of Spear of Destiny in his ears from the record he put on the turntable before he left for work. 'And on the way home you'd be stopping at phone boxes phoning folk, making sure that everybody was going to be at the certain place at the certain time. We always used to meet down at the shops and get the bus into Glasgow Buchanan Street.' He's now in the queue listening 'for the right whisper' which might lead him and his friends to an after-show party.

It's November 1984 and Lesley has a ticket for U2 with the Waterboys supporting. She's sixteen and it's an over 18s gig and she's in the queue wondering how she's going to get in. She spots the tallest man she can find and asks him a question.

Alan is holding his ticket for Echo and The Bunnymen. His parents told him he wasn't allowed to go to a gig at the Glasgow Barrowland because of its rough reputation but he bought the ticket anyway. Now his parents are on side and have driven him and his mates from Strathaven to the gig.

Five friends from Castlemilk get off the bus at the Lidl in Victoria Road because that's where the number 5 unexpectedly terminates. They're in heels or trainers and skirts or leggings. Too eager to get to the Barrowland they don't wait for the next bus, they jump in a taxi and speed towards the Wolfe Tones.

Hannah and Ian are on their way to see Fatherson. They're coming from Dundee and it's their first night out after the birth of their second child. Their three-year-old is with one granny, their twelve-week-old baby with the other. Hannah has expressed as much milk as she can and left it in plastic packets in her mum's fridge. She's got her breast pump in her suitcase and Ian has the details of the hotel in central Glasgow. They'll have some sushi for dinner and then walk through Merchant City to the Barrowland.

Shall we let them in? Shall we find out how their nights go? Johnny, Alan, Lesley, Hannah, Ian and the girls from Castlemilk? Wait! They're not quite ready in the Barrowland! We need to meet Quinner. We need to speak to John and Michael in the bars. We need to check on Laurie's nerves. And I want to show you the power switches high above the stage at the back of the ballroom, up the steps and past the window that looks out on to the Barras market. There's a mound of pigeon droppings by the window, blocked off by a black curtain. On quiet days you can hear pigeons cooing, but not today. From here, if you wanted, you could climb on top of the ballroom's ceiling and look down through the gaps where the lights go. You could set confetti canons and pop them at the end of gigs. You could change the 300 watt light bulbs. You have to walk carefully, duck your head if you're tall. There are thick cobwebs on the girders. I'm telling you this because it's exciting from up here. You can see people striding across the floor, you can see Del Amitri lit up in white lights and Iain the guitarist's son, sitting at the back of the hall watching his dad on stage.

Michael is nearly finished. He has a strange view of the ballroom from behind his shuttered bar; the gold sparkly jacket of the lead singer, the yellow T-shirts, the stage crowded with musicians. His bar is tidy; the black bar mats are neatly rolled, the counters are clear, the dustbins are empty. 'He made me jump,' Michael says of John the singer coming into the bar earlier in the soundcheck. 'I'm with my back to him lining up the bottles. He just walked by me. I actually smiled because, fair enough, he's the singer with the sparkly shirt, he can do whatever he wants!'

He removes some beer-splattered plastic cups from a stack and throws them into the bin.

'You can sneak up on John when it's quiet,' he says, referring to John, his colleague. 'You can sneak up from across the hall to here, stand, and he'll be oblivious. And he'll get proper scared every time. Sometimes I think it's fake. It's like he turns and looks at you and – one, two, three – he jumps.' I think of John, frightened of his own reflection in the dressing room mirror and can imagine the telling off he would give Michael. 'I'm like, Come on John! This is not real. You're faking. But it works every time.'

Where is John? It's nearly Christmas. He's worked seventy gigs since we interviewed him. He told us it was 'harum scarum' being in charge of the bars and he was going to stop drinking to help him cope with the workload. We will find him later, in the Revue Bar, re-jigging the set-up of the Southern Comforts and the vodkas on the gantry to make it easier for his staff to make venoms.

Quinner first. He's doing Del Amitri's set list and the guest list which currently stands at seventy-three. That's nothing compared to the guest lists of ten or twenty years ago when numbers weren't strictly capped at 1900. You seem relaxed, I tell him, and he is, sitting in the production office with its shiny painted walls, and new lino floor. The walls are bare and Quinner keeps things neatly – just his laptop and some papers. 'It's not the prettiest venue backstage,' he says, 'but you tend to forgive all the little bits because it's one that you enjoy coming into.' His production office is indeed sparse, but it's clean, and Quinner likes the Glasgow crew and the Barrowland staff. He's laid back like them. As a youth he was a professional footballer in the USA then he was butler to the earl of Derby, then he set up the backline for Paul Young and that's how he got into music. A Glaswegian. Quinner's dad moved to Liverpool after the war and raised his family there and of all the bands and acts Quinner has looked after his dad would have been most proud of Quinner's work with Billy Connolly.

At nine o'clock Quinner will go upstairs to the hall, 'put the band on stage then go out front, have a listen, make sure the sound's OK which it always is, but just have a listen for my own peace of mind.' How can you tell if it's going well? I ask. 'You just feel it. You feel the hairs come up.' He speaks of Laurie's big night on the monitor and says she'll be 'first in the firing line' if the sound's not right. It'll be Justin the singer who will tell her: 'He's got the ear. He hears.' Once the band's on he'll come downstairs, 'go through the numbers and the

expenses with the promoter and check emails.' He's not worried about tonight's gig. The Barrowland crowd will take care of things.

The internet is good throughout the building, I remember Dave from DF Events telling me. Dave is a promoter, but he was a Barrowland punter first, coming in 1987 to see Stiff Little Fingers; a boy from Gourrock starting out at the front by the stage and getting bounced all the way to the back of the hall by the crazy crowd. Dave remembers seeing steam coming off people's clothes when they stood in the December night after the gig. He came back. He saw The Fall, the Cramps, the Buzzcocks, The Damned, Cortinas and Oasis. The same as Quinner, he likes to put the bands on stage but prefers to stand in the wings when a gig is on because from there he can see both the band and the audience.

A steward stands in the doorway and asks Quinner if he can open the front door and let the punters in. It's 7 p.m. and there is a queue of people outside. The building is ready. 'Are we good for doors?' Quinner turns his affable head towards the young man in the doorway.

No! Not yet! I want to shout. I'm not ready. We need to go back to earlier in the day. I haven't finished with Michael. I need to know how John is. We need to see the musicians in the band room before they go on stage.

In the Revue Bar John has given his staff a Christmas present of several calculators. They're to use them to add up the drinks orders instead of their phones, unless they use paper or add the orders up in their heads, like he does. Most use calculators. Alberto says the orders are never too big that you can't remember them. But at a Vatersay Boys gig Julie served a customer whose round came to £102. Another time an order came to £71 and the man gave her £75 and told her to keep the change. The staff keep their own tips down here in the Revue Bar – but tips are communal upstairs. You could get twenty pounds or twenty pence extra they say, it depends on the crowd. Lisa says her biggest tip was from Peter Crouch when he was in to see Ed Sheeran or was it Paolo Nutini? He tipped her £17.20. John says his biggest tip was in the cans bar. The round came to nine or twelve pounds and the man told him to keep the change from a twenty-pound note. 'But I need to say I was wearing a vest,' he says, and then tells a joke about Peter Crouch: 'I served him but I didn't know who he was and I said, "What's that sir, you'll need to crouch down,"' and then he remembers – 'Oh, guess what the security boy Ben told me? He says that Scott Brown might be coming tonight. Brown! I don't know what I'll do if I see him!' He's frisky tonight. He's excitable. It's December 23<sup>rd</sup> and it's a Gerry Cinnamon gig, the penultimate gig before this relentless crashing wave of gigs that began in September is over. He's still off the drink and is eating chocolate to compensate. He shows me his Kit-Kat and coffee – tonight's dinner. Three of his staff are wearing Santa hats that say *Gerry*

*Christmas*, bought from a guy outside selling three for nine pounds. Julie, Angela, Lisa, Alberto and John are lined up at the bar waiting for the doors and the customers that will follow. 'She's the funny elf, she's the happy elf, she's the naughty elf, Berty's the good looking elf,' John says of his staff. What elf are you? we ask, but Linda comes to the bar and asks for an orange juice, a water and two sassies and he begins to serve her. She spots Mitch with his sketchbook open. 'I hope you've changed my nose,' she says to him. 'Your nose is perfect,' Mitch replies.

'Silent Night' is playing behind the bar. Before that it was 'Santa Claus is Coming to Town'. Some days they'll play classical music, other days they'll stick on some dance tunes from *GB Experience*: 'It does make you move faster when the music's fast,' says John. I don't sense that they'll need much motivation to work fast tonight. There's a crackle in the air and the banter is flying. 'It'll be chaos and madness and busy but I think it'll be a good crowd,' Angela says. They tease John over the coffee he made for himself and no one else, they tease Berty for being the good-looking one, for getting chatted up by the punters. 'I get more handsome as the night goes on,' Berty says, and smiles handsomely.

As John's getting Linda's drinks I ask him how he is. How have the last few months been? 'Well, let's just say my wings are fully grown in,' he says. 'I'm feeling a lot more confident than I was the last time you spoke to me.' He puts some ice in a glass then fills it with blackcurrant cordial and lemonade. 'I've got a lot more responsibility. I'm doing the buying now. I'm ordering the stock.' That's a job he's taken on from Willie. Tom is pleased with him. He's doing well.

Linda takes her drinks and Ellen, the steward who manages the queue, comes to stand in her position. Then a security steward strides into the room and tells John and the staff that the doors are open.

'Run for your lives!' shouts John.

No! I want to shout. I'm not ready yet!

Iain will soon ask Lisa, Del Amitri's caterer, to plait his hair; a proper neat French plait that will hang long down his back. Now he's eating Lisa's fruit salad in the band room while his fellow musicians rest on the sofas or cut about the room looking for places to put their energy. His son Louis sits on one of the sofas and is updating the band's Instagram feed. Louis raves about Lisa's food. She makes delicious steak and kidney pies and Teriyaki salmon and banoffee pie and there is water and cans of drink that you can help yourself to. Louis has been to Del Amitri gigs before but never in the Barrowland Ballroom. Where will you watch the gig? I ask and he mentions the spot where I saw him earlier in the soundcheck, at the back on the accessible platform. He'll see everything from there. 'There's no mosh pits or anything,' he says of the audience. 'But it's good fun and they're all enjoying it.' The crowd will be made up of people his

—  
Three of his staff are wearing hats that say Gerry Christmas

dad's age who remember the band from decades ago. Iain tells me that this is the twenty-fifth or twenty-sixth time they've played the Barrowland. He came as a teenager to see Iggy Pop, Madness and Black Crows. 'It never crossed my mind that we would play here,' he says. 'It was people like Iggy Pop and Echo and the Bunnymen who played here, not people like me.' Were you nervous? I ask. 'I remember standing at the side of the stage waiting to go on and the noise was deafening. As soon as we started up they all just went mental. So in a sense, what was there to be nervous about?' He says he can see everything from the stage including the Barrowland bar. He can see the enjoyment on people's faces and insists that the Barrowland audience knows it can make a gig special. They have some kind of power in there which infects the band and then the magic happens. 'There's a sense of community in there when people play because everybody's in the same room,' he says.



It could be easy for him to lose concentration, taking on too much of the crowd's reverie, getting carried away, because 'a lot of it is muscle memory. You've played it a thousand times then suddenly you're like that: "Oh! What happens next?"' He has to retain some kind of focus without getting distracted if something goes wrong. An altered state, he calls it. I ask him what might go wrong and he tells me that he recently misread the set list, counted in the song and began to play the wrong one – 'Oh Bollocks!' A quick double check of the set list, a listen to the drummer's beat, and he was back on track, but: 'You've got to not get freaked out' because you're playing live and you can't stop. All this going on in front of a packed out Barrowland and his band mates playing on and then he has to get back into his altered state and remember the notes and enjoy it, just enjoy it.

When it's right, it's obvious. 'Sometimes it just feels right, you know, between musicians. You just know that it's all fitting together.' He talks about the crowd again and the passion and energy they can push towards the band. 'Justin loves being here,' he says of Del Amitri's singer. 'He'll probably be more relaxed up there than he's been at any of the shows we've done so far. I hope I'm not tempting fate there . . .' We look around for some wood to touch and find it all over the band room; on the dressing table tops and the wood panelling around the mirrors of this glamorous and snug and sultry room.

Michael, are you tired? I ask, in the bar with the bowl of Celebrations chocolates on the counter; snacks for the bar staff who are no longer allowed to bring in takeaway Chinese food during their shift. Are you exhausted after all these gigs? 'No,' he says. Have you got plans to go on holiday? He says: 'No. I just need to cut myself off. A long weekend will be enough.' How have you found the rush of gigs? Are you exhilarated? 'I'm the type of person I'm hard to get excited,' he says. 'I'll be tired mentally before I get tired physically.' Relentless interaction with other people makes him tired but this job has a good balance of solitude and company, he says.

He tells me of a song he heard at The Staves' soundcheck which made him stop work to listen because he liked it so much. 'Tired as Fuck'. Something in the lyrics touched him. 'There's a line: "There's nothing no one ever can do to get me back up".' He tells me he holds himself back, it's just who he is. 'I wouldn't let anybody close enough to influence me. I'm a personable person. I can be sociable. But I like my personal space.'

I take a chance, perhaps because Colonel Mustard and the Dijon 5 have just been soundchecking 'International Sex Hero'. What if love came along? Would you let the right person in? He thinks for a while then tells me he sees girls who look nice. A German girl told him he was beautiful once. He says it was like a hammer knocking on his forehead. And he said, 'thanks,' and she went away. Another girl asked about his accent; he can sense they're reaching out to him. 'It's something missing,' he says. 'You know – quick wit. I don't have it.' He's calm and reflective. 'I'm slow pace. For me it cannot happen.' It must! I think.

You're working in the Barrowland Ballroom, for god's sake. It was the Tinder of its day, to quote his colleague John.

Michael tells me about two girls he met outside his flat who invited him to party with them, who told him where they lived. He wrote them a note and is meeting them for a drink in a week's time. That's better, I tell him. And because we're talking about his new flat in Dennistoun – he rents a room from a woman he has only spoken to a handful of times – he tells me with pride of his DIY.

'The cabinet in the hallway is wobbly. I'm worried. Can I please fix it?' he asked on his second day. His flatmate agreed and after that he replaced some light bulbs and fixed the bathroom cupboard. He fixed the hall cabinet with magnets so that it cushion-closes with a delicate click. He delights in the sweetness of the door's closing and if he's angry or upset – although he is rarely either of those things – he goes to the cabinet door, gives it a hard push and watches it not slam shut. 'I have so much pleasure out of it,' he says. I leave him to his work and tell him to remember to meet up with those women.

Lisa has plaited Iain's hair now. He has fixed his moustache. His band mates have put on their stage outfits; jackets and shirts and cowboy boots. Colonel Mustard and the Dijon 5 are soundchecked and ready too. They're dressed in their uniform yellow and David, the 'Dijancer in charge of vibes', has his props and inflatables ready to go.

Back in the production office, Quinner's guest list is compiled. He's happy. The security steward stands in the doorway and asks him again: 'Are we good for doors?'

**A German girl told him he was beautiful once. He says it was like a hammer knocking on his forehead. And he said, 'thanks,' and she went away.**

Lesley, are you brave enough for doors? Will you ask the tallest man in the queue to accompany you, as if his tallness will make you seem that bit older? Will he agree? Will you get in to see U2, the first of a lifetime of Barrowland gigs? Will you 'run up the stairs like mad' so you can get your spot at the front 'never to move'? Will that first Barrowland gig 'blow your mind'?

Alan, are you ready for doors? Will you rush to the merchandise stall and buy an Echo and the Bunnymen T-shirt to replace the one you're wearing that says Winnie the Pooh – (you're fifteen, you don't care about clothes yet!)? Are you ready to meet your lifelong friend in the crowd while waiting for Echo and the Bunnymen to come on? Will Echo and the Bunnymen play their huge set and will the hall heat up and drip sweat from the ceiling? Will you see your new friend at future gigs and, on an overnight bus from London after a Cure gig, will you exchange parents' phone numbers? Will almost everyone dear to you in your life right now, including your wife, be as a result of saying hello to a complete stranger who happened to be standing next to you at your first ever Barrowland concert? And will it be your mum or your dad's car that the drunk woman squats to pee against at the end of the night, when you are fifteen and they've parked right outside the Barrowland doors? Or will nobody remember but it's gone down in family folklore regardless of whose story it is to tell? Will you get the Barrowland sign tattooed across your chest? Go on, Alan, go on!

Johnny, will you get any whispers in the Spear of Destiny queue? Will you find your after-show party? Will it be 'jump about rough fun' in the Barrowland? Will you lie in bed afterwards with your ears ringing?

Wolfe Tones ladies, will you get to the Barrowland in time for the party that starts long before the band comes on? Will you tie tricolour bandanas around your heads, mouth the words of the support band's songs and become exhilarated in the animated crowd?

Hannah, will you express some milk one last time before you leave the hotel and walk to the Barrowland? Ian, will you stand at the top of the Biffy Clyro stairs and pose for your picture like you do every time you come to the Barrowland? Will the two of you take your selfie in the mirrored tiles on the way up? Will you go to the bar and get your Guinness and your Tennent's and will you stand stage right and watch Fatherson who you've followed since they were just starting out? Ian, will you push into the crowd for a song or two and jump about at the front then come back to find Hannah, and will the two of you stroll back through Glasgow to your hotel at the end of the night? Hannah, will you use the breast pump for a final time and fall asleep on the bed with the pump still attached to your breast and sleep the unbroken sleep of a sleep-deprived parent granted sleep?

Laurie, are you good for doors? This is your big night. Are you still nervous? Will you peek at the stage from your spot behind the speaker and see the front row dancing and singing? Will you smell beer and sweat, the same as every venue you work in? Will Justin ask you to adjust the sound when the noise from

the crowd gets louder and louder and will the band thank you at the end of the night because you've done a great job on this most important of evenings? Will it be relief you feel, when it's over, and the band is pleased, and the crowd is happy and you've done the goddamn toughest job in the house and you've done it well?

'Are we good for doors?' says the security steward.  
Are we good for doors?  
'Aye,' says Quinner. 'Fire away.'

## Will you lie in bed afterwards with your ears ringing?



—  
Less than a stone's  
throw: Onstage  
with Del Amitri  
·  
29/07/18  
21:34:23



—  
Final Bow: Del Amitri  
wrap up their sell-  
out gig  
·  
22/12/18  
18:57:11



BACKSTAGE

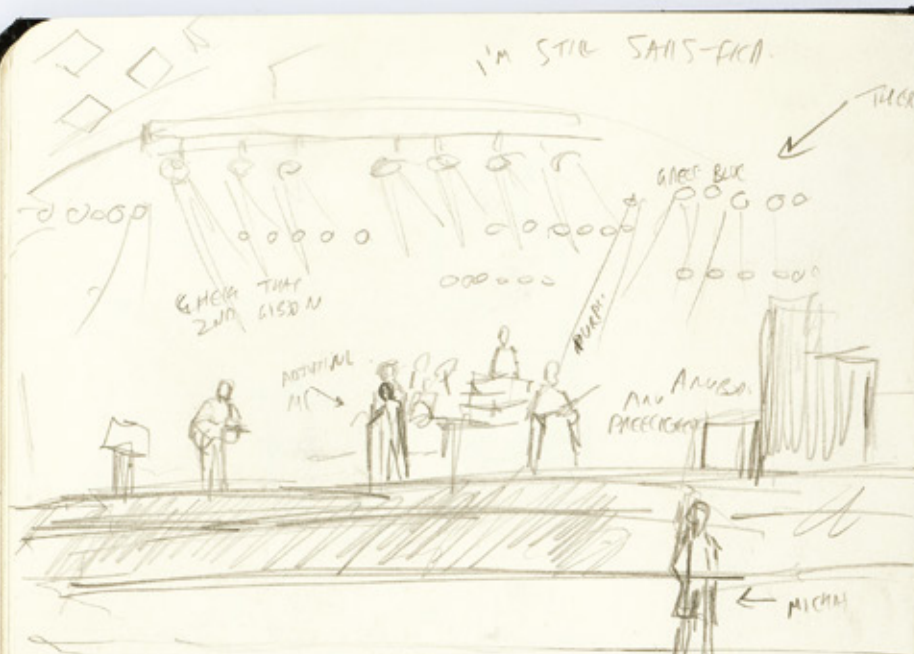


Louis Hanée

PRODUCTION OFFICES

QUINNER





I'M STILL SAYS-FKA.  
 TURN THE LIGHTS  
 FEED ON IT  
 DI, JUST FOR  
 THIS SONG  
 THE SONG  
 GAB ON  
 FOR HERE + NOW  
 PAA-AM-  
 DON'T OPTIC IN  
 JUST RAISE THE  
 CURTAINS AM  
 YOU TAKE  
 THE FIRST SONG,  
 ABOUT 7. IN  
 THE MIDDLE  
 SOUND  
 DEC.

TURN  
 THE LIGHTS  
 DOWN JUST  
 SLIGHTLY

SOUND CHECK. - DEC AM TAL  
 28th JULY  
 LIGHTS  
 AND  
 LOW  
 NOISE





THESE POINTS ARE  
A GIFT FROM SIMPLE MINDS, TO BIG COUNTRY! HAPPY NEW YEAR!



ATTIC  
LIGHTS  
PANEL

Stairway to the  
Main Hall  
23/03/17  
16:04:34



The Engine: Backstage  
Electrical Controls  
19/04/18  
12:14:03



Hannah and Ian at the  
Fatherson gig  
02/11/18  
20:05:52

# Barrowland



I've seen what people talk about:  
that connection; that love;  
that intimacy.

# EIGHT

## The Whole Shooting Match

Tonight Bear's Den will play the Barrowland Ballroom for the first time. The band want to do some acoustic songs midway through the set and have asked if the main bar can be shut temporarily and the security stewards' radios turned low. During the gig's encore they want to walk on to the dance floor and play in the middle of the crowd before returning to the stage for one final song.

Ben and Alan discuss this request in the Rock Steady control rooms. Alan is Operations Manager. Ben is Senior Supervisor. Ben looks more like a policeman than a yellow-clad steward. He has a body camera, a radio and a bunch of keys. His T-shirt is sky-blue. Alan sits behind his desk wearing a navy-blue T-shirt with the Rock Steady logo embroidered on it. He's recently moved offices. Previously, the Dalai Lama used to look down at him from the wall (Rock Steady looks after him when he comes to the UK). Now there's a television screen showing twenty-two CCTV images of the building.

The band's final request is that there is only a small security presence when they walk from the stage to the middle of the dance floor; only their tour manager and one security steward. Alan and Ben have agreed to this. Ben will send a colleague out with the band and he'll keep a watch from close by. He's relaxed. Alan's relaxed. I'm not. A band walking into the middle of a crowd at the end of a gig? Really? A crowd becoming still and quiet enough to listen to a voice with no microphone and some guitars without amps? 'That's something I'd like to see,' says Alan. Me too, I say.

They tell me they are used to such requests. The guitarist from Twenty One Pilots asked to stand on a wooden board and play his guitar while the crowd passed it above their heads, out into the middle of the dance floor. Christy Moore asks for the main bar to close before he comes on. Some bands request that no food is sold. Some bands insist on there being no meat in the building. Alan shrugs. 'We just say "no problem". We'll deal with it.'

How will they deal with the Bear's Den request? Alan tells me how: they'll put a steward in the pit with a copy of the set list and the acoustic section clearly marked. The steward's job will be to tick off each song Bear's Den plays. Two or three songs before the acoustic section is due to start the steward will send a warning over the radio which will give enough time to close down the

# What's a polite crowd?

## Any heavy metal band.

bar and ready the radios for their low volume. Likewise, they'll give a two-song warning for the encore and the dance-floor walk-out. It's nothing that Alan or Ben are fretting about. Their team will make it happen.

Ben meets with all the stewards by the doors at six thirty for a briefing. He shows his colleagues a copy of that night's ticket so they can be on the lookout for forgeries and he names the support band and the timings of the gig, in case any punters ask. He tells them about the band's intended walk into the crowd and the section midway through the gig when the bar and the radios will go quiet.

There could be twenty-eight stewards at a briefing or there could be forty. It depends on the band and the crowd that the band attracts. What type of crowd will this gig attract? I ask. It will be quiet, I'm told. They're not expecting any trouble for Bear's Den.

What's a lively crowd? Charlie and The Bhoys or the Wolfe Tones, says anyone without hesitation. What's a crowd-surfing gig? Enter Shikari. What's a big drinking crowd? Gerry Cinnamon. What's a polite crowd? Any heavy metal band.

Ben wishes his staff a good night and sends them on their way to stand at specific points in the building: at the top of the stairs or in the pit or at the accessible platform, at the cans bar, the Revue Bar, at the entrances and exits or the queue outside or 'the cage', the fenced off area by the main band room that guards the door through which nobody is allowed to enter or exit. This is Alan's favourite spot. From here he can see over the heads of the crowd to the stage. It's a good clear view.

And so it begins. Colin and Donnie, senior supervisors, let the first gig-goers in. There's excitement in their eyes and an eagerness to get inside and already there is a buzz because they're walking into a blaze of activity. They pass through the metal detector and the women go to the right to be searched and the men to the left. Firstly, bags are checked, then bodies. 'Hold your

arms at your sides please,' says Lee. Some men hold their tickets between their teeth while they're searched. It's thorough. 'Can you open your jacket please?' says Lee. He checks a man's collar, feels sleeves and cuffs, pats bodies underneath jackets. Then he checks belts and the tops of legs and all the way down the legs to the socks and ankles. It's a physical job; a lot of repetitive bending. 'I'll just take a look inside your wallet, buddy,' says Lee and opens it up. 'Show your ticket to the lady,' Lee says when he's done and points towards the bottom of the stairs where a steward stands tearing the perforated strips off tickets. He's straight on to the next man: 'Can you open your jacket please, buddy . . .'

Sometimes a joker will say: 'Oh, I don't want him to search me, I want her,' says Donnie, his eyes surveying the foyer even while he's talking to me. Practical jokers. Characters. 'But it's all in a day's work.'

Fiona shouts: 'Move along up the stairs please!' Her voice is rich and loud, the loudest of anyone at the doors. She wears a beanie hat and there are piercings in her ears, her nose and her lips. 'Guys, keep moving up the stairs!' The cold air rushes in through the doors and hits my thighs. One steward tells me she's too busy to feel the cold.

Colin and Donnie check the queue for people who seem shifty, for those who are looking around and keeping an eye on the stewards. If they have to switch to random searches they'll point these people out with subtle signals to their colleagues. One man is pulled over to the side in order for Lee to search him. His girlfriend waits patiently. 'She picked you out,' Lee jokes with the man, referring to his colleague who sent him over. 'It's the skinhead,' says the man. 'And the tache as well.'

It could be cannabis or 'white powder' or it could be ecstasy that the stewards find. Where do you find it? I ask Colin and Donnie. At the top of the jeans in the 'johnny pocket', in a wallet, in a belt, down socks, in shoes, they tell me. They find nothing on anyone at the Bear's Den gig. And there are no ejections.

The Fatherson crowd has some hip-looking punters. One young man comes in wearing a suit and a steward finds a small transparent bag in his pocket containing a spare button. That sets the stewards off and the bag is held aloft and the button examined and the young man teased for potentially bringing in some kind of drug in his wee see-through button bag. 'We didn't know what it was!' Fiona heckles. The stewards confiscate the bag; the man keeps his button and is sent up the stairs.

Sometimes a punter will come in with an EpiPen or some other medication and if it's in its blister pack, fine, but if it isn't, like the American couple who had a tin of orange tablets which they said were for anxiety, Colin or Donnie will call a first aider to come and have a look. One of the first aiders is Gary, who works during the day as team manager for the Glasgow Rocks basketball

club and would probably be playing too if he hadn't snapped his anterior cruciate ligament twice. He's twenty-three and says he had a troubled past but stumbled on the St Andrew's Ambulance at the end of a Prince's Trust course. He now works voluntarily as team leader at the Barrowland. He'll inspect a tablet and ask the person what it's for. In one recent case where the tablet actually said *Ecstasy* he'll confiscate it and the stewards will turn away the punter. If it's for 'constipation' or some spurious complaint, he'll confiscate it. If he's unsure, he'll hang on to it and put it somewhere secure for the gig-goer to collect if needed during the night. As for the orange anxiety tablets, Donnie tells me that after a quick check on the pair were let in and hung on to their pills.

The foyer is busy and bustling at the Fatherson gig. Fiona is shouting: 'Guys, up the stairs please!' in her loud strong voice. People are coming through the doors non-stop. It's past eight o'clock and the punters are out of the pubs and taxis and ready to start their Barrowland nights. There's noise and movement; swift searching arms, quick footsteps and rich percussive chat.

If you're slow on your feet or in a wheelchair you can enter through a side entrance that Donnie or Colin will take you to. Donnie shows me the stair climber, a chair that holds most wheelchairs, and ascends the stairs with a person sitting in it. 'Just hold it until it reaches its balancing point,' Donnie says, and gets in while his colleague demonstrates. No strength required, just concentration. The chair makes the Barrowland accessible. It's far slower than a lift (four minutes to get to the top) and far slower than the former method whereby two stewards would carry a chair up the stairs themselves, but less backbreaking for the stewards and providing perhaps more dignity to the person in the chair. Once the punter is in, they'll be escorted into the hall – a burst of heat and noise as the door opens – and introduced to the steward who looks after the accessibility platform. It's normally Mr O, a man who has worked at the Barrowland for years. The accessibility platform has a view over the crowd's heads to the stage and is where general manager Tom likes to stand. It's where a man called Alan took his mum on many occasions after she had a stroke and lost her speech and strength in her right side. Going to gigs became a thing he and his mum did together and the Barrowland Ballroom was one of her favourite venues. Linda put their names on the guest list and the Barrowland staff took care of them. 'Please pass my thanks on to all the staff,' Alan wrote in an email to Linda. 'I have always thought the Barras was the greatest venue in the world and now I love it even more.' His mum passed away before they got to see Mott the Hoople together and Alan emailed Linda to tell her they wouldn't need their space on the accessible platform after all.

I need to tell you here about Mark, one of the stewards we met during our many visits to the ballroom. He stewarded our tours of the ballroom when we were

doing our research. His spot during gigs was backstage in the corridor that links the main band room to the stage; a big guy with a big smile. He is the steward who the Dogtooth boys said could pick them up with one hand or with chopsticks, who had no truck for 'I'm looking for Billy Coyle!' in the middle of a gig from a pup of a boy, up and coming band member or not, and he's the steward who died without warning and is sadly missed by his fellow stewards. Someone else protects the band room now.

If you want the cloakroom or the toilets or a drink in the Revue Bar you'll pass through the crush area and smell Tam's burgers. You'll find Valerie, remember her from Billy Coyle's Music Matters event? She'll be standing in the meet and greet area, by the doors to the production offices and the support band's room, checking passes. If you've got AAA around your neck she'll let you through. Valerie has a feeling for an atmosphere. She says there's a certain kind of energy that comes in off the street with the Barrowland punters. 'It's a really nice vibe. The anticipation, the excitement, the energy.' She too has been a punter at the Barrowland. For her sixteenth birthday she was given tickets to see UB40, her favourite band. She went with her sister-in-law and they drank some cider beforehand and she was a bit tipsy but she was upright and fine. The Barrowlands was mobbed. 'Electric,' she says. They stood near the front, stage left, quite close to the side so she could get out of the crowd if she needed to. That year 'Red Red Wine' was number one and Valerie was desperate to hear the band play it. 'So I'm there and I'm loving it and "Kingston Town" and everything was going on.' Valerie reminds me that in those days people could smoke in the Barrowland. 'And the next minute a big joint gets passed to me. I took a drag of the joint. Two minutes later I took a whitey and had to run down the stairs.' She raced to a toilet and ended up on her knees with her head over the toilet bowl being sick. 'I'm spewing and all I can hear up the stairs was "Red Red Wine!" Valerie sings the chorus and there's laughter in her voice but she learned some lesson that day. 'I've never missed a gig through alcohol. You wish you could tell that wee story to all the kids that come in.'

The first ones through the door don't even bother with the crush or cloakroom or toilets. They'll race up the stairs to the ballroom and run to the barrier by the stage. The pit stewards will greet them there. Eireann loves working in the pit. She might be asked shy questions about the band. Have you met them? Can you take this backstage to give them? (She's not allowed to take anything but promises to check with her manager.) Sometimes she sees people crying, moved by a favourite song. Other people sing along to every word with their eyes closed. Others laugh. She can work at gigs when she knows nothing about the band and its music and it's often at those gigs she feels the most humble because she's simply there to work yet these people have played the band's music over and over and saved money for the ticket or queued outside for hours and now the real thing is in front of them, so close.

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'Fiona is in the pit for the Bear's Den gig. She has swapped her cries of 'Move on up the stairs!' with ear protectors and radio...'

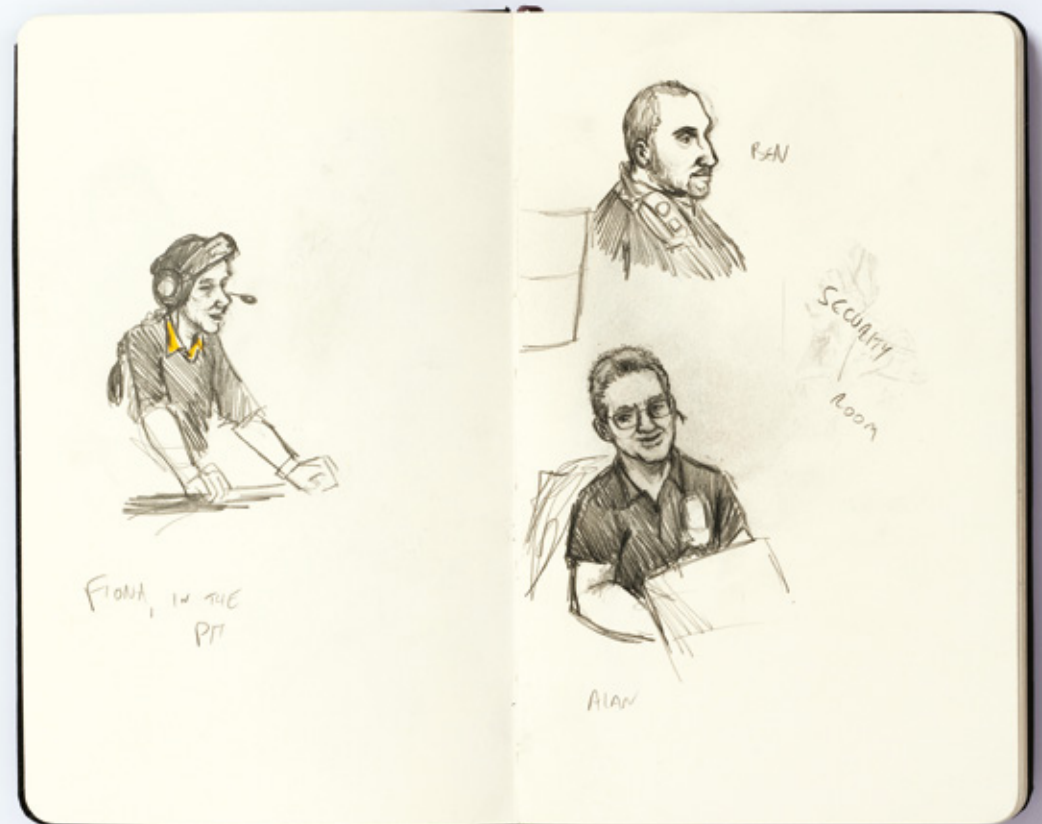
Eireann's first time in the Barrowland was when she came to see her school friends in Battle of the Bands. The band was called The Relevants and the school put on a coach to take the kids from Kirkcaldy to the Calton. She can't tell you how The Relevants did in the competition but she can tell you that it was one of the most wonderful, exciting days of her youth. She had a crush on the keyboard player who was also her friend. 'He was the smartest boy in the school,' and 'I was actually in love with him,' she says. She told him one day that she liked him and he said he didn't feel the same way. But they stayed friends. Why was he so special? I ask. 'He was very shy. He had dark hair. I think I was attracted to him for how smart he was.' Was he a sensitive type? I ask. 'To be fair he was quite sensitive when he told me he didn't like me!' She laughs and marvels at the fact that she now works in the place where she had one of her most formative, life-affirming times.

Fiona is in the pit for the Bear's Den gig. She has swapped her cries of 'Move on up the stairs!' with ear protectors and radio, and is giving out sweeties to the front row or dunking plastic cups into a bucket of water and passing them to the waiting crowd. Not more than a couple of inches in the cups though, 'because then they start to throw it over each other and then it becomes a mess.' Make friends with the front row is her advice to any steward. 'If you look after them, they'll look after you.' I ask why she might need help from the crowd and she tells me about crowd surfers and punters at the front who will help catch the bodies and send them over the pit. Or if someone needs to come out, if someone needs a bit of space – Step back please! – if she's made friends with the crowd, they'll do what she asks.

The pit is Fiona's favourite place to work and it's Eireann's favourite place too. She loves the thrust and the heat and the physicality. The trouble is everyone likes to work in the pit with the crowd surfers. 'Can you please let me do it?' she'll say, and her male colleagues will tell her to watch a couple first and then she'll get a go. She might touch a foot if she's lucky. Yet she's trained in how to handle the crowd surfers. She and her partner stand on the step on the inside of the barrier, they encourage the crowd surfer to come towards them, they reach for a belt or something easy to grab hold of and they turn them around so they're not feet first otherwise she and her partner will get a foot in the face. There'll be another steward behind them for support and the three stewards step back and lower the crowd surfer into the pit between the audience and the stage. She will hold him by the arm and escort him out with her body between him and the stage. 'Because sometimes people will be like: "Oh I'm in the pit! I can get up on the stage now!"' The crowd surfers are mostly men, mostly in their early twenties, Eireann says.

That's the buzz for her. Pulling the crowd surfers over, handing out the water, watching the crowd in awe of the musicians on stage. It's rare they'll need to pull someone out in an emergency but she knows how to do that too: 'You ask people to take two steps back. You turn the person around so they're facing

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And it's hot, it's sweaty, but  
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teamwork coming out in people.'  
Public service with added sweat  
and beer. The stewards love it.**



the crowd. Then you put your arm under so you're holding on to a belt or something on their side. And on the count of three with your partner you lift them and sit them on the barrier. If for any reason you and the other person think you can't lift a person you just ask the people around: "Can you help us lift them?" Obviously the person knows that they're getting that space so people are very helpful. You do another One Two Three and you'll lift them over. You step back and you're in the pit.' She's serious when she talks. Precise. Knowledgeable. 'It can be very, very hot,' she says.

Mostly, it's smiles and tears of joy and chat and banter and the sheer noise of being so close to the speakers on the stage. That's why Ben, the senior supervisor, would choose the pit to work in too. 'It's the vibrations you get from the bass speakers. It's like nothing on earth. And it's hot, it's sweaty, but it's good fun. And you see the teamwork coming out in people.' Public service with added sweat and beer. The stewards love it.

Our steward in the pit with the Bear's Den set list ticks off the songs one by one and gives a warning over the radio that they are two songs away from the band's acoustic section. Alan gets the message, so does Ben, and so the shut down begins. It's seamless. With Ben in the hall and the shut down going smoothly, Alan doesn't need to leave the office. He points to the TV screen. 'I can sit here and do the whole shooting match by watching the cameras.' We can see the band swapping guitars. We can't hear anything but I can see the stilled crowd and picture Michael in his bar, leaning against the back counter, having time to stop and listen.

From the office you'd barely know that there was a sell-out gig taking place because of the soundproofing. The stamping on the ceiling can be a giveaway, yes, but not now during the acoustic section. Alan tells us that at the recent Hunna gig, the whole room shook, the very walls vibrated. The Hunna crowd was a young, bouncy crowd. I'm glad to hear that. We were there for the load in, remember? The crew and management were protective of this band and I'm glad they had a good gig.

When would you leave the building? I ask Alan. If they're short staffed, he'll help out, he says. Or if there's an emergency. He tells me they practise simulated evacuations. If it's a quiet night and the crowd has cleared early he will put the staff back in their positions: 'And then we call the situation. We do the whole thing.' It's videoed and assessed afterwards. 'My main responsibility is to make sure that everybody in the building is safe,' Alan says, and it's reassuring to hear him say that because I trust him, this friendly, talkative guy and I believe him entirely when he says if they were evacuating the Barrowland: 'I'd be up there making sure the staff are doing what they're supposed to be doing and at the end of the night I'm probably the last person along with the supervisors that leave this building.' It's reassuring but it's also chilling when I think of events in Manchester and how incongruous that horror is with smiling

Valerie in the meet and greet area, with Fiona dishing out her sweeties and water to the crowd near the pit or to Colin and Donnie and the staff on the door teasing the fellow in the sharp suit. All this charming Barrowland banter belies a sharp and efficient edge.

The stewards aren't taxed very much at the Bear's Den gig although both Ben and Alan are loath to say the night is quiet until it's over. Other gigs can be 'livelier'. A look at some of the control logs will show ejections for drug use, for 'intoxication' or for 'abusive behaviour'. Despite this, the stewards insist they love their jobs and that each shift is different. Even on a particularly rowdy night there are few evictions considering the nineteen-hundred-strong crowds.

In Alan's office our attention is caught by a CCTV image of Bear's Den putting down their instruments and leaving the stage. There's a rhythmic stomping from above. I feel as if the room is shaking. Ben takes me to the hall via the stairs that the Glasgow crew use during a load in. We arrive at the side of the stage, behind the barrier. The band is back on stage playing the first of its encore songs and I can see the crowd in the hall, mesmerised. We walk past people dressed in black towards the barrier and the crowd beyond. I recognise a face. It's Billy Coyle. He's waiting with his fellow crew men for the gig to end. They're literally waiting for the final note of the final song before they'll begin dismantling everything that has made this audience sing tonight. Ben takes me through the barrier, past a Rock Steady steward, and I leave him to do his work and I take in the crowd, arms in the air, singing to the lyrics of the first encore song. The lights alternate between lighting up the crowd to illuminating the band. I glance at the Barrowland ceiling and it's a colour I've never seen under the usually dim house lights. It's the most beautiful aquamarine blue.

'We'd like to do something now,' says the singer. The band members walk stage left. I see a steward open the barrier and another steward hold a torch high above her head which she directs to the floor. The band follows her, one, two, three guys with instruments. They're followed by two more people – perhaps one is their tour manager and another is a steward. The crowd parts and they walk to the centre of the dance floor. I see Ben standing by the barrier, watching the scene in the centre of the floor intently. There's a shout of banter from someone in the crowd which I don't catch but it's followed by laughter. And then the band plays its acoustic song and, except for the smallest patter of chat over at the far end of the floor by the bar, the crowd is utterly silent. They clap and they cheer when the song is sung and make way for the steward with the torch and the band members to leave. The band walks back on the stage for the final song. Not a hitch. Not a problem.

As they play their final song the crowd sings loud the lyrics and they're lit up in warm lights and you can see bare arms raised above heads and the band will be hearing their lyrics sung back at them, tunefully, euphorically. The lights

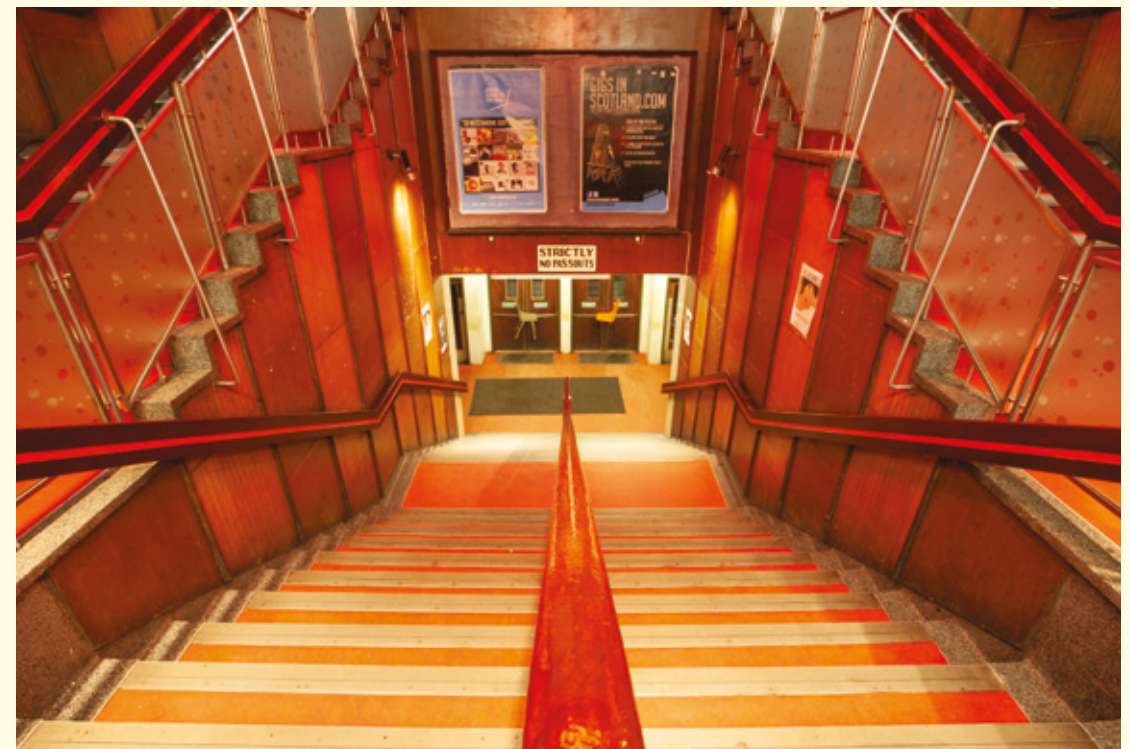


Lights on: The last  
song is over, the  
crowd keep clapping  
29/07/18  
10:40:54

are warm over the stage as well and there's that connection right there between audience and band – I've caught it. It's the same light all around. I've seen what people talk about: that connection; that love; that intimacy. It lingers long and bright against a retina, a scene like that. I can see delight on the Bear's Den musician's faces and I can see the audience's delight. The band plays the last notes of the last song and it's clear they don't want to leave the stage so they look around at each other and they know they can't play on yet they don't want to go so they stand in a line on stage and almost feel for each other, delicately, wearily, come here, come here, get near to me, and they put their hands around each other's waists and bow for the first time on this tour, because it feels right – let's just capture this glorious moment. They crumple a bow and when they leave the stage the audience is left dazzled.

The lights snap on and over the PA comes the soundtrack from *Curb Your Enthusiasm*. There's Fiona, still in the pit, eyes shining, exhilarated. There's the crowd, left almost vulnerable and naked now that it's all over. The stewards step in for the egress. Billy Coyle and his crew take over for the load out. The Barrowland crowd makes its way to the ground.

**There's the crowd, left almost vulnerable and naked now that it's all over.**





The Back Stairs  
12/02/18  
12:18:45



Past in the Present: Fans by the Barrowland Mural in the Main Hall


22/12/18  
22:05:22



Please Mind The Step

Please Mind The Step





A bird's eye view of the crowd at Colonel Mustard and the Dijon 5

22/12/18  
21:56:09

**There could be so much beer on the floor that they need to sweep it into the middle and vacuum it up.**

# NINE

## Before And After

The tips of Monika's hair are purple-pink and they escape from a bun she wears high on her head. She has brown eyes, calls you honey and gives you hugs. You have to meet her; you probably will if you're a woman and use the toilets during a gig. She's the toilet attendant and cleaning supervisor and if I tell you that she takes before and after pictures of her work and shows them with pride to Tom the general manager you may get an idea of her. If I tell you that well before the end of November the last of her Christmas presents are wrapped and stored in the loft – and they are the teachers' presents, yes, the teachers' presents! – you may get more of an idea. Now, if I tell you that she buys her own cleaning products including an eighteen-pound bottle of wooden floor cleaner and a nine-pound wax for the leather seats in the band room you might say, Steady on Monika, you don't get paid enough to be buying this, you've gone too far, and you'll be relieved to know that Tom reimburses her.

On gig nights she wears her Barrowland hoodie and you'll see her with a mop and bucket, wiping up spills around the building or looking after the ladies' toilets. She works with Oliver, who is the gents' toilet attendant, and the two of them have a nook in their respective toilets that is theirs. Monika's wee cupboard has a door and two chairs, buckets, brushes and toilet rolls. Here is where she keeps the biscuits she will hand out at 2 a.m. when she and her fellow cleaners are on their breaks. Here is where we talk the first time I meet her, with the door closed and the sounds of the toilets on the other side.

Normally, Monika is rarely in her cupboard because every half an hour she and Oliver tour the building. On their list is the crush area, the small corridor that leads to the Revue Bar, the main stairs and the hall itself. They pick up cups, wipe up spills and wait for calls on the radio summoning them to a mess somewhere in the building. 'It can be non stop, non stop, non stop,' she says, but actually she prefers it when it's busy. 'The clock ticking. The times fly.'

After eleven o'clock at night when the gig is over Monika comes off the McIver payroll and begins her evening work with Garcia Cleaning Services as supervisor, running a team of cleaners and finishing at six o'clock in the

**‘I just broke in tears because I was so tired. It was six nights in a row. And the girls were not well so I was worrying about them.’**

—  
Through a mirror,  
brightly: The Main Hall  
·  
15/07/18  
17:50:19



morning. That's when she takes the before and after pictures because as well as cleaning the whole building she will pick an area – the band room floor, the Revue Bar floor, the leather sofas, the chrome basins, the rugs – and do a deep clean, using a floor buffer that her husband bought her at an auction or bleach or whatever product she has purchased herself knowing it is best for the job.

Monika has two daughters aged four and six. She has a Glaswegian husband who she met when she came to Glasgow to learn English. She's half German, half Polish and her dream was to work for Lufthansa but she needed better English hence her visit to Scotland. 'After six months I phoned my mum and said "I'm not coming back."' By then she had met Kevin, eighteen years her senior, who already had children. That was fourteen years ago. They live in Paisley. When their youngest daughter started school she looked for work and found work at the Barrowland. That's when she began to get her nails done – they're orange tonight – and she realised that working was good for her. 'You just feel appreciated. It makes you happy. You know when you're in the house and full-time mum and my Kevin always working, working, work. I feel my relationship is better since I'm working. I feel much better about myself. I love to work here.'

It's a long shift. Seven in the evening until six in the morning. When do you sleep? I ask her. On a school morning she will come home, wake her children, prepare them for school and make lunches for them. Once she's taken them to school she will have a bit of breakfast herself then sleep from ten until half past one. 'Then I need to put the washing on, feed the dogs, pick up the girls at three o'clock, make the dinner, tidy up the clothes, put the washing away, put another load of washing on and do the homework with Emily.' She laughs and then becomes serious when she tells me about the time she became overwhelmed with everything for which she was responsible: 'I just broke in tears because I was so tired. It was six nights in a row. And the girls were not well so I was worrying about them.' She came into her wee cupboard in the ladies' toilets and cried until she'd cried enough – 'I think I just needed to clean the system' – and after that, in her words, she was back to normal.

It's a lot for a person, keeping these late hours and doing it again and again with a family to support and Christmas to prepare for. It helps that she's appreciated. 'I keep getting compliments from everybody,' she says and mentions her before and after pictures again. Are the punters nice to you? I ask and she assures me that they are. Women try to give her money which she doesn't accept. "Oh come on, take it, you've got a hard job!" And I'm like, "No, I'm fine, I love my job!" She laughs. I feel I'm keeping her from her job tonight, perhaps her elegant fingers are desperate to get hold of a mop, but it's a quiet night and there have been no calls over her radio to attend to spillages and the toilets are peaceful; there's an occasional blast of the hand dryer and ripple of chat but nothing that needs her.



Monika has an affection for the ladies who come into her toilets. When one woman walked out without realising that her skirt had fallen off, Monika chased after her and helped her put it back on. 'Some of them I think: "Where's your clothes! You must be freezing!"' Sometimes she thinks how lovely a woman looks, how beautifully she is dressed. 'Sometimes they're just pure fun and they want to cuddle you.' Have you ever had men coming into the toilets? I ask? 'No, never,' she says. But sometimes the women go into the men's toilets to pee when the queue is too long.

There's a hiatus when a gig ends. Monika waits for her team of seven cleaners to arrive while the stewards clear the hall. It takes time to queue and collect coats on a rainy winter's night even if the stewards have jumped in to give the cloakroom staff a hand. Outside, in order to remove any trip hazards and facilitate an easy exit the stewards have cleared away the pen, the metal barriers behind which the smokers stand. And out the gig-goers flow. Upstairs in the ballroom there are still people on the dance floor, chatting to the stewards or finishing their drinks.

Johnny, who has been coming to the Barrowland since his Spear of Destiny days in the 1980s says the stewards have changed for the better. 'It's much more polite. It's better organised,' he says. 'It used to be that they'd get you in and they'd get you out and they could be quite heavy-handed. But the last time I came here they gave you time to finish your drinks and it was a nice flow into the street. There was one point when they played records after the band had come off and my wife and I started waltzing in the Barrowland and before we knew it there was a couple of folk watching us, then someone else joined in and there was a sort of impromptu *Strictly Come Dancing* kind of thing, just genuine warmth.'

Slowly, with its house lights up, the ballroom decants its gig-goers. They step over plastic cups and puddles of beer and head for the double doors down. The touring crew and Glasgow crew dismantle the lights and set and backline and the stage begins to clear too.

As well as waltzing with his wife, Johnny remembers singing 'A Town Called Malice' in the gents' after a Paul Weller gig. First one other man joined in and then another man and as he and the crowd finished their business in the toilets and walked down the exit stairs there were forty or fifty men singing along. Sharon, who used to come to the Barrowland regularly as a student because a flatmate's friend got them free tickets, remembers someone starting up a rousing 'Flower of Scotland' on the same stairwell after a Manic Street Preachers gig. Was it a Manic Street Preachers gig? She questions herself. It doesn't actually matter. The Barrowland crowd sang 'Flower of Scotland' on its way down the stairs.

Singing and waltzing aside, if people linger too long the stewards ask them nicely but firmly to leave. If Eireann is asked 'Why?' when she's asking someone to make their way down the stairs, she'll tell them she has an exam the next

## Adam tells me it takes six hours to clean everything they need to clean which includes the main hall and the main stairs.

day: 'And if youse don't leave I don't have time to revise which means I might fail my degree which means it's all on you just because you didn't leave tonight!' She said that once when it was true and because it was so effective – 'That's fine, we're out of here, good luck darling!' – she uses it regularly. 'People like to have a reason for why you're telling them no,' she says.

It's the noise that you notice first. The building quietens rapidly. The stewards have their debrief in the crush area and that's a quiet, serious affair, where they stand in a circle and report any issues to Ben or whichever senior supervisor is in charge that night. As the debrief is coming to an end the tone lightens. 'Thank you for your help, for your work, yada yada yada,' Ben says and one of his colleagues turns to me and says, 'What does yada yada yada mean?' and that's it, they go to a room where their bags and coats are kept and come out in civvies, calling goodnight to each other.

With the stewards gone, the building is truly quiet.

I watch Monika clean the taps and sinks with the Astonish cleaning product she's bought from the pound shop and she's right, they come up sparkling. She does this once every three gigs and she'll do the mirrors with an eco cloth she has purchased because she's trying not to use too much bleach. There was one time she used so much bleach it made her cough. 'But the building was so dirty I needed to,' she says.

Then I go upstairs to Monika's team in the ballroom. They have swept the plastic cups to the side of the dance floor underneath the Please Mind the Step sign. The cleaners put the cups into transparent bin bags and carry them to the back stairwell and from there they throw them into the commercial bins. They

—  
'They have swept the plastic cups to the side of the dance floor underneath the Please Mind the Step sign.'

carry bags of cans to the bins too. The bags are underneath the table in the cans bar corner of the hall, empty cardboard Tennent's trays on top of the table, the cash till tray open and empty. The cleaners work hard. Adam tells me it takes six hours to clean everything they need to clean which includes the main hall and the main stairs. After the Wolfe Tones or Charlie and the Bhoys they stay two hours longer because 'the whole floor is covered in beer, sticky.' The floor isn't sticky tonight and Adam tells me it could be much worse. There could be confetti to sweep up which if wet becomes sticky and they have to pick it up by hand. Or there could be so much beer on the floor that they need to sweep it into the middle and vacuum it up. 'Aye, the Henry. It's easier,' he says.

Adam is eighteen and from Poland. He's studying Technical Support at college. He points out his friends Daniel, Lucas and Oliver (of the gents' toilets) who are cleaning with him. When they begin to mop the floor I realise how vast the dance floor is. Starting at the outer edges they mop a strip a couple of mop swings long and then work inwards, stepping backwards, towards the centre octagon. It's time-consuming work. And they work with no music to accompany them, just the sound of footsteps and swinging doors and efficient voices from the touring crew and the Glasgow crew. The stage, by now, is almost completely stripped. There's a bit of kit opposite the stage at the lighting and sound desk but I can't see Billy Coyle or any of the crew men. They must be downstairs loading the artics.

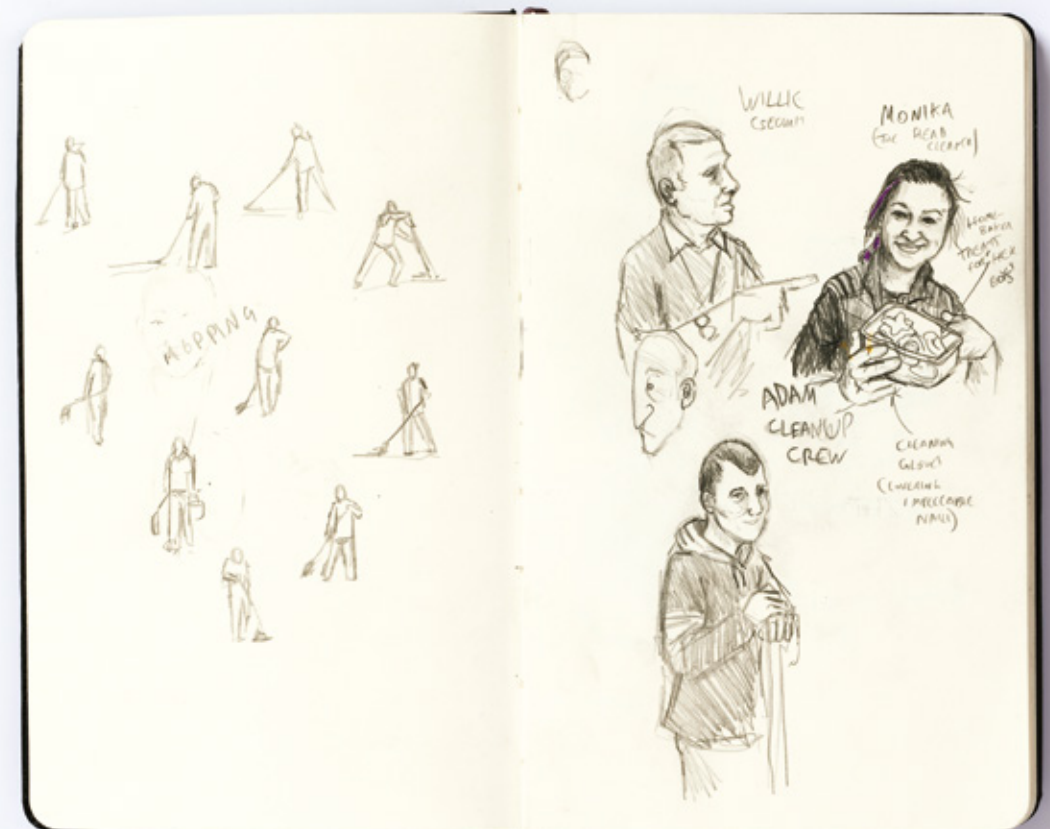
While Adam and his colleagues are mopping the floor I watch some of the members of Bear's Den pose for photographs by the Barrowland mural over at the main bar where Linda and Stewart have their tuck shop. They're lightly euphoric, serene almost. As they walk back to the band room I tell them I saw the end of their gig and ask them if they enjoyed themselves. Their names are Kev and Davie. 'It's an amazing venue,' they tell me of their first time playing here. 'It was an honour and a privilege. It was the venue we were most looking forward to playing.' Their voices are deep and smooth and content. Their tour manager leans against a pillar and listens. He must be tired. They must all be tired after a night like that. Maybe not. Maybe elation keeps you awake.

I return to Monika and she tells me that after the ladies' and gents' toilets ('which includes toilets, sinks, floor, the sides of the toilets and obviously the wee walls and mirrors') she and her colleague Aga will clean the cloakroom. 'Sweeping all the wee numbers which is annoying.' The raffle tickets. Yes, they would be annoying to sweep up, much as the beer-soaked confetti would be upstairs. Oh you lovely cloakroom staff, I think, spare a thought for Monika!

Then they will mop the cloakroom floor and vacuum the rugs in the crush area including the one depicting the musical score to 'I belong to Glasgow' They'll mop the crush floor too. While they're doing that the team of male cleaners will mop the dance floor a second time and they will move on to

the main stairs. Sometimes they will mop the stairs three or four times until they are clean.

At two o'clock in the morning they will take a break for half an hour and Monika will distribute the treats she has brought in for her staff. After the break the men will divide into two groups and clean the Revue Bar or the other sets of stairs, including the stairs Billy and his crew use. Monika and Aga will do the production rooms and the offices and lastly the main band room in which they will shine the mirrors and the brass door handles. 'You treat the place like home. You want to have a nice and clean house and you want to have nice and clean everything in here,' Monika says.





—  
Powder your nose:  
The Ladies Toilet  
•  
15/07/18  
14:50:19

—  
Zip it: The Gents Toilet  
•  
13/04/18  
21:50:19

Monika wasn't always the supervisor. She was a cleaner first of all until a new firm took over the Barrowland contract and at that point she was made supervisor. Standards weren't as high then. She asked Tom to retain the same staff as before and to: 'Give them the chance under a different supervisor. Because I know they can all work.' Within a few shifts Tom and Willie and John were asking her: 'How is it possible? It's the same team of people doing such a different job!' She's proud of her team. It's tiring work and strange work, being in the building in the silence of the night with its leftover smells of beer and urine and sweat. And the building gets so cold after it empties.

Once Monika found a man and a woman asleep in a cubicle in the gents' toilets. 'We found pants in there as well.' She laughs and describes how they had to call for the nightwatchman to help get the couple out. 'We were chapping the door, the door was locked.' She says. 'It was a disabled toilet so they had a lot of space in there.' She laughs again.

I recall John telling me a story from his nightwatchman days. He was sitting in his office in the covered market at about four o'clock in the morning and Jarek, one of the cleaners, came running to him for help. 'There's a man in the shower! Man in shower!' John waves his hands frantically. He asks if I remember Neil from *The Young Ones* because he says the disorientated man in the shower cubicle was 'the spitting image of Neil. He was all rough and raggedy and he didn't know what planet he was on.' John took him downstairs, gave him a cup of sobering coffee and persuaded a taxi driver to take him home.

We meet the nightwatchman when we're talking to Monika and the other cleaners. He comes into the ladies' toilets to ask Monika if she's all right because he's seen Mitch in there studying the place with his artist's eye. Monika assures him that she is fine.



**'I love my nails,' she says.  
'Just because you're a cleaner  
doesn't mean you cannae look  
nice after your work.'**

We leave the cleaners to their shift – we’re lightweights, I know, it’s barely midnight. Monika is cleaning toilets and wearing rubber gloves so we don’t hug. She holds her arms out in front of her instead and waves her gloved hands. The gloves will be to protect her hands from germs and the effects of bleach but they’ll be protecting her nails too. I ask how she manages to clean while keeping her nails from breaking or chipping. ‘I love my nails,’ she says. ‘Just because you’re a cleaner doesn’t mean you canny look nice after your work. Funny enough,’ she says, ‘I didn’t get them done when I was sitting in the house with the kids for years. That’s why I’m glad I go back to work. Because you care more. I think it’s a lot to do with the place. I’m happy to work here.’ She waves her gloved hands again. Tonight she will be doing a deep clean of the Revue Bar floor. Have a look at it next time you’re in.

At the doors I see Kev and Davie from Bear’s Den on the pavement beside their tour bus talking to some fans who have stayed at the doors. The band’s bus is leaving for Manchester in fifty-five minutes and they’re keen to find a pub for a pint. I remember asking them in the main hall what made them do their spontaneous bow at the end of their encore. ‘The audience,’ they said without hesitation. Yes, the audience. And that’s the point of this place, that’s the point of bands and musicians; surely, the audience.

I look over my shoulder up the stairs that lead to the lit-up crush area, the rooms off which Monika and Aga will soon be cleaning. Above them, the young men will be mopping the dance floor a second time and the nightwatchman will be doing his hourly tour. I think of the place hot and full up with passion, almost empty now but ever ready, poised and primed for its next set of punters, thanks to its staff who make it so.

## BAR PRICES

PRICES *Prices in Pence* IN THIS BAR

<i>Draught Beers</i>		<i>Spirits</i>		<i>Soft Drinks</i>	
	pint		35ml		baby bott.
LAGER	470	BACARDI	300	BITTER LEMON	120
BEST	440	GIN	"	GINGER ALE	"
CIDER	"	MORGANS SPICED	"	TONIC WATER	"
		SOUTHERN COMFORT	"		
		VODKA	"	FRESH ORANGE	130
BECKS	260	WHISKY	"	PINEAPPLE JUICE	"
BECKS BLUE	260	JACK DANIELS	350		
BUDWEISER	290	MARTELL BRANDY	"	GINGER BEER	140
CRABBIES	520			MINERAL WATER	100
KALIBER	220			RED BULL	270
KOPPARBERG PEAR	480	<i>Liqueurs</i>			
KOPPARBERG FRUIT	570	COINTREAU	300		½ pt. pint
MAGNERS	430	DRAMBUIE	330	COKE	80
		JAGERMEISTER	"	IRN BRU	"
NEWCASTLE BROWN	470	MARTINI	200	LEMONADE	"



—  
Blingy Bunnet:  
Christmas at the  
Barrowland  
·  
22/12/18  
20:04:34

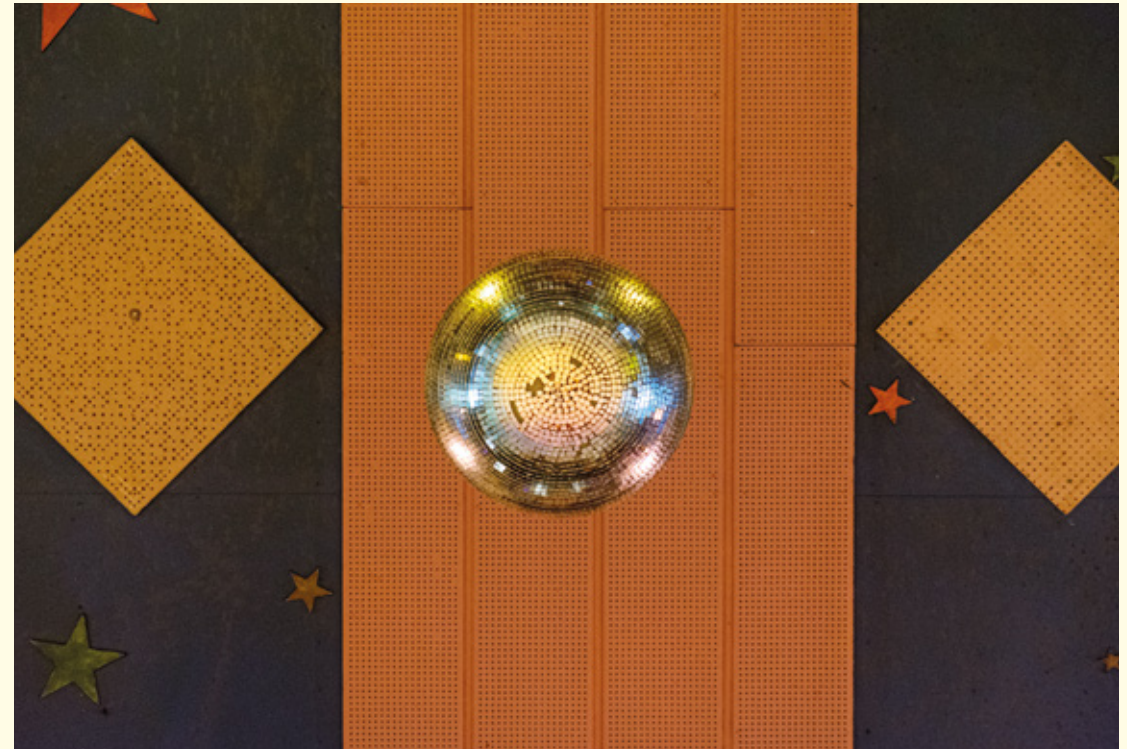




Punk (is not dead)  
17/03/19  
20:20:05



Glitterball and  
Acoustic Tiles  
12/03/17  
15:23:06



A Kiss for Ziggy:  
The Barras Legends  
'Christmas' Party  
19/01/19  
21:50:29



**I can see Bjork, Slash,  
Gene Simmons and  
several David Bowies.**



# TEN

## Barrowland Legends

Christmas comes and goes. New Year too. Staff take holidays. Gigs resume but not at the pre-Christmas pace and Tom and his staff breathe. Chris, Mitch and I come to the end of months of interviews and gigs and poking our noses into Barrowland business and our final weeks of research coincide with the belated Barrowland Christmas party.

We know that Tom is pleased with his staff, and thankful too, because the months have been tough and they wouldn't have got to that Gerry Cinnamon gig on Christmas Eve without the whole team's hard work. He's been planning a party since before Christmas and his ideas are becoming more ambitious now that he has the time to devote to its organisation. He tells us the party will be called Barrowland Legends and there will be a free bar and free food. The brief is to Dress like a Rock Star. There will be a competition for anyone on the McIver payroll – that's the bar staff and office and maintenance staff and toilet attendants – the prize being a Barrowland Legends Hall of Fame trophy. The competitors are to be judged on likeness, effort made and a ten second performance. We, Recollective, are to be the judges.

On the night the Revue bar is a glorious commotion of wigs and lycra, face paints and platform shoes. There is Prince in a purple velvet suit and Kate Bush in red, wafting around the dance floor. I can see Bjork, Slash, Gene Simmons and several David Bowies. Over there is Hank Williams (I will leave you to guess who that is).

The Revue bar is transformed. A gold curtain cascades down the walls beside the stage. To the left of the stage there is an actual golden doorway through which participants will make their costumed entrance and to the right of the stage is the table at which we, as judges, will sit. Michael has created the Barrowland Legends set – he sourced the flowing gold and he decorated the bar. When we find him he isn't dressed up. He's in his usual black T-shirt and jeans.

Where's your costume? I ask.

'I don't want to sound like a bore,' he says, 'But last night I left at eleven, went home, got up at five and was here for six this morning. So I don't care that I'm not dressed up. I'm going to wait till I get word from Tom and then I'm –'



—  
No Holds Barred:  
The Christmas Party  
·  
20/01/19  
01:55:44

—  
NOT the booby prize:  
Tom records the judges'  
decision.  
·  
19/01/19  
23:44:45



He makes a gesture as if he is going to leave.

You're leaving?

'No, I'm going to get something to eat.'

I see him later with a takeaway polystyrene tray of pakora and chips. He sits at a booth, eating fast, while the rest of the table gets on with the business of drink and chat.

Then the competition begins. Donald MacLeod the music promoter and *Sunday Post* columnist is MC for the night. He welcomes the rowdy Barrowland crowd and pitches his jokes over the rumble of chat at the back of the booths. 'This is the first free bar Tom has allowed since the place opened in 1934,' he says. He pulls Stan on to the stage. 'Tom and Stan have been here since 1934.' He's reeling the crowd in, getting some laughs. Stan joins Tom and his colleagues and daughter at the side of the dance floor. They've come in to the Revue Bar from the support band room which Tom has turned into a green room for more senior members of staff who want to escape the mayhem. In this special room there is a makeshift bar and one of the younger family members serves the drinks.

But for now, all the Barrowland staff are in the Revue Bar watching the entertainment. First up is one of the Bowies. Then it's Revue barman Alberto as Prince, and Slash follows him. They look spectacular but none of them sings at the microphone so we can't mark them highly for performance. It takes Gene Simmons, otherwise known as Elaine from the main bar, and her ten-second performance at the microphone to break down the shyness barrier and from then on we have bursts of song from Dolly Parton, Agnetha from Abba and Cindy Lauper. Pete Doherty stumbles on stage and recites a poem and James from the upstairs bar sings a few lines of 'Sweet Dreams' as a slick-haired Annie Lennox.

It's John's turn next. He strides through the golden curtain wearing a rhinestone jacket, jeans, cowboy boots and Stetson hat and, as if he was born to do it, he begins to play on his guitar and sing Hank Williams' 'Hey Good Lookin'". He takes much more than his allotted ten seconds at the microphone but it's a crowd-pleasing performance and nobody complains. Amy Winehouse, Bjork and the second David Bowie follow him, then George and Andrew of Wham then Britney Spears then a bewigged Ozzy Osbourne who cries out: 'Sharon! Sharon! I'm at the Barras!' Madonna is next and is joined onstage for a snog by Britney Spears who has run back to play her part. There's a cool black-clad Siouxsie Sioux and finally a jaw-dropping Tom Joyes dressed as Colonel Mustard, having borrowed the gold jacket, hat and trousers from the lead singer of the Colonel Mustard and the Dijon 5 band.

It's a riot. Such talent for dressing up these Barrowland staff possess. Some of the costumes are meticulously thought through and the make-up is spectacular, if a little frightening. We wish there were prizes for everyone, of

course, but there aren't. There are first, second and third place trophies, a coconut and a Gary Barlow autobiography.

Tom adds up our scores then Donald calls the Revue Bar to order and announces the winner. It's Ozzy Osbourne, or Sam Ross, barman from the Revue Bar and quite new to the Barrowland staff. His combination of costume, likeness and onstage stagger towards the mic where he nails his 'Sharon! I'm at the Barras!' pips him past Pete Doherty, Siouxsie Sioux and his boss Hank Williams.

The band plays and the dancing starts. Colonel Mustard and the Dijon 5 squeeze on to the small stage and whip the party-goers into a happy frenzy. The dance floor is full of Barrowland legends now, pumping the air, joining in with the actions and singing along. 'Love is all the Drug you Need!' they cry. David the 'Dijancer' holds a Lollipop Stop sign and has the crowd standing on one side of the dance floor for the song which begins 'I'm gonna teach you how to cross the road . . .' and at David's command, the dancers cross the road. 'Don't be an amber gambler granny, don't be an amber gambler grandad' goes the reggae refrain. It's the most perfectly bonkers band for a perfectly bonkers Barrowland party.

Colin the front door security supervisor tells me he's a civil servant by day and this is his fun job. Fiona with the strong voice: 'Keep moving up the stairs please people!' – is without her beanie tonight and wears her hair long down her back. The stewards usually in yellow T-shirts are in costume or their glad rags and Eireann isn't politely hustling anybody out of the building tonight. Sharon and John Junior of the cloakroom are dressed up and partying, indulging John in his Hank Williams outfit, taking turns at trying on his Stetson hat. Billy Coyle of the Glasgow crew is Boy George tonight and I almost don't recognise him when he greets me in his hat and black plaits. Bar staff, stewards, security, cleaning and office staff, first-aiders and cloakroom attendants are all here, drinking up the free bar and getting stuck into the party. I spot Michael dancing too – or at least he is on the dance floor, playing some kind of chasing game pursued by two women. He appears to be having fun at last.

The Barrowland staff pause for a few minutes to remember their colleague, Mark, the security steward who passed away. They pause too to find tips for their colleagues who have worked spells behind the bar throughout the night. Lynn in her Wham T-shirt passes round a plastic pint beaker which is soon filled with coins and notes.

When Colonel Mustard and the Dijon 5 finish their set the DJ plays some records and the dancing continues. It's some sight this private party in the Barrowland Ballroom. No public to serve or keep safe, just each other to talk and drink and dance with. Tom is pleased with the night. It's at its peak now, the dance floor

**We'll leave this party with all its staff and stories and clocked-up years of Barrowland shifts right here at its vibrant peak and raise a glass in thanks.**

full of dancing bodies, and although it's a one o'clock finish, I sense the party could go on and on. Mitch sketches, Chris takes photos and I make a few notes in my notebook, content to observe these Barrowland legends on their night off on this most special of evenings. We've got to know many of the staff very well over the course of our research and here they all are behind closed doors, having the best of nights. Tonight it's exclusively their space, this happy crew with their eclectic array of jobs and duties and responsibilities.

Here is where we'll leave them; arms thrown in the air and feet swivelling on the dance floor, or talking, lips to ears, in booth seats with the party tunes blaring from the speakers. We'll leave this party with all its staff and stories and clocked-up years of Barrowland shifts right here at its vibrant peak and raise a glass in thanks. Let's extend this party metaphor – why not, it's late, we're emotional, we've had a bit to drink – and hope with ferocity that the whole Barrowland party, and the market too, will retain its vibrancy, its popularity and ability to charm bands and audiences for decades, no, centuries! to come; for our sake, for music's sake, for Glasgow's sake.



It takes two: Prince Ozzy (and 'Venom') at the Barrow Legends Christmas Party  
20/01/19  
01:30:49

At the Ready:  
The Revue Bar  
19/01/19  
16:30:49



Sweet Dreams are  
Made of This: A quick  
staff conference before  
the Christmas Party.  
19/01/19  
21:53:34



'Mitch sketches, Chris takes photos and I make a few notes in my notebook, content to observe these Barrowland legends on their night off on this most special of evenings.'



SLASH & AMY



MICHAEL

PIT  
-PIT??

JAK  
-MISTAKEN  
FSA A MURK!

(2) OF WHI??

DO - PEAR  
KCOO  
PULLIN  
MITH



Big Wheel Keep  
on Running: The  
NeonBarrow Wheel  
'chandelier', the  
only survivor of  
the original 1934  
Barrowland Ballroom.

28/08/18  
14:57:56



# Acknowledgments

Special thanks to Tom Joyes for supporting our project from the very start and opening the Barrowland doors. Thanks to all the Barrowland staff including: Linda Craig, Stewart Craig, Willie Florence, Monika Markiton, Stan Riddet, Michael Stepien, John Swift, John Swift Jnr and Sharon Swift. Also: Billy Coyle and the Glasgow crew, Tam McLean, Gary Penders, Karene Forrester, Rock Steady Security including Alan Beattie, Fred Cucchi, Donnie Dunsmore, Ben Gordon, Eireann Harkins, Colin Muirhead, Valerie Smith-Lang and Fiona. Thank you to the bands, musicians, technicians, promoters and managers who allowed us access to sound checks, gigs and dressing rooms including: Del Amitri, Bear's Den, Laurie Binns, David Blair and Colonel Mustard and the Dijon 5, Mark Cameron, Justin Currie, Dogtooth, Rianne Downey, Fatherson, Garbage, Iain Harvie, Louis Harvie, Honeyblood, Dylan John Thomas, Donnie MacNeil and the Vatersay Boys, Dave McGeachan, Angela Naughton and Geraldine Naughton, Ian Quinn (Quinner), Pat and Gary Waite of Dancelines, The Specials and Stiff Little Fingers. Thanks to our interviewees who shared their Barrowland stories and memories: Jacquie Bradley-Heeps, Andy Dewar (Turning Point Scotland), June Dunphy, Ian Martin, Pammy Given, Ann and Robert Hughes, Hannah McAllister, Johnny McBrier, Alan McGregor, Sharon McKinstry, Sharon Ross and all the participants of our Barrowland tours in 2017 and 2018 as well as the many gig-goers we photographed, sketched and spoke to on concert nights. Thank you to our funders and supporters: in particular Gemma Barnett and Daisy Jones (Glasgow City Heritage Trust), Alan Bett (Creative Scotland), Lorenzo Mele (Merchant City Festival) and Natalie Palombo (Many Studios). Special thanks to those who assisted and advised: Eddie Burns, Chick and Jan Irvine, Emma Lennox, Lynn Leslie, Sophie Rowan, Maureen Myant, Les Wood, the Glad Writers Group and staff at Cove Park. Lastly, respect and thanks to Gareth Fraser, Barrowland expert and tour guide, and Gabriel Durnan of Graphical House.



