

## BRISTOL

→ SOUNDING OUT

## Bristolian Tony Benjamin delves into the musical hotspots of this West Country port city

It may be nearly two decades since the distinctive collage of rock, reggae and dance music of Massive Attack, Tricky and Portishead led to talk of a 'Bristol sound' but there's no doubt that the city still punches well above its weight as a centre of musical activity. As the biggest conurbation in the south-west of England, Bristol has always been a magnet for the region's artists, musicians and performers, while its long history as a port brought the world to its streets. If the shadow of the slave trade is a blot on Bristol's historical record, it can, nevertheless, boast one of the country's longest established African and Afro-Caribbean communities whose annual St Paul's carnival is a highpoint of the cultural calendar.

Though commercial shipping no longer visits the port and the dockland warehouses have morphed into waterside apartment blocks, the much-redeveloped harbour remains at the heart of Bristol. It's an area where the vast steam cranes of industrial heritage loom over successful new industries like Aardman Animations (creators of Hollywood's plasticine megastars Wallace and Gromit) and numerous hotels, bars, galleries and restaurants reward the curious visitor. The many ferryboat companies provide tourists with easy access to 'sights' including Brunel's mighty SS Great Britain and the contemporary art exhibitions at the Arnolfini gallery. But the more adventurous visitor would also do well to check out the self-styled 'cultural quarter'

of the fiercely independent Stokes Croft area, tucked away behind the main shopping centre and teeming with idiosyncratic bars, cafés and music venues. Its streets are an ever-changing open-air art gallery reflecting the vibrant graffiti scene that spawned the celebrated Banksy, and still holds a few of his original pieces.

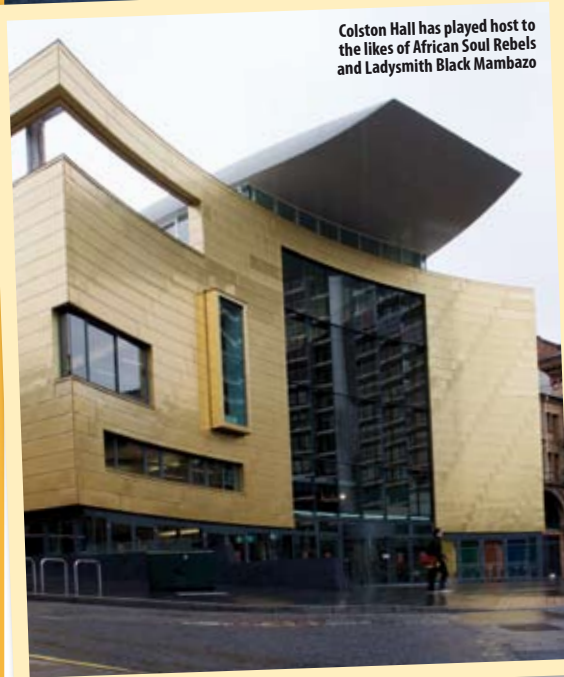
The recession seems to have had little impact on the musical nightlife of Bristol. Pick up local listings magazine *Venue* and you'll find a bewildering mix of visiting attractions and home-grown talent playing at venues ranging from the 2,000 capacity Colston Hall down to intimate pubs and bars. Many gigs are cheap or even free, but don't overlook them for that reason: most venues have a quality standard that ensures a good night's entertainment.



Although the picturesque city is most commonly associated with the 'Bristol Sound' artists of the 90s, it's always acted as a magnet for performers and boasts a wide-reaching and diverse hub of musical culture

ANT FOLEY/WWW.MUSICBRISTOL.CO.UK

Colston Hall has played host to the likes of African Soul Rebels and Ladysmith Black Mambazo



## VENUES

### Colston Hall

The city's largest concert hall offers big world and roots music tours like Ladysmith Black Mambazo, Buena Vista Social Club, The Imagined Village and African Soul Rebels. Recent refurbishments have provided a smaller auditorium for more specialised visitors, while the lavish new foyer offers free pre- and post-gig appearances by local combos.

**Colston Street, Bristol, BS1 5AR, +44 (0)117 922 3686,**

**[www.colstonhall.org](http://www.colstonhall.org)**

### St George's

This converted church has a real commitment to classical, jazz, folk and especially world music. Now in its second year, their 'Migrations' programme has offered concerts from the likes of Oumou Sangaré, Bassekou Kouyaté, Chango Spasiuk and others, with local musical migrants performing afterwards in the atmospherically crypt-like bar.

**Great George Street, Bristol, BS1 5RR, +44 (0)845 402 4001,**

**[www.stgeorgesbristol.co.uk](http://www.stgeorgesbristol.co.uk)**

## IS THE RHYTHM CALLING YOU?

Check out [www.songlines.co.uk/musictravel](http://www.songlines.co.uk/musictravel) to seek out the trip that will tickle your musical tastebuds



A dazzling fireworks display signals the finale of the Bristol Harbour Festival



## FESTIVALS

### St Pauls Carnival

One of the most long-established Caribbean parties in the UK, the annual carnival in early July sees the streets of St Pauls come alive with a massive colourful carnival procession and an evening of live African, Jamaican and Trinidadian music before the sound systems take the party into the small hours.

[www.stpaulscarnival.co.uk](http://www.stpaulscarnival.co.uk)

### Bristol Harbour Festival

What started as a regatta at the end of July grew and grew over the years and now the whole city gets involved. It's a big, free weekender centred on the docks with dance and music stages a key ingredient and acts like Daby Balde, Ska Cubano and the Jaipur Kawa Brass Band among recent world music headliners.

[www.bristolharbourfestival.co.uk](http://www.bristolharbourfestival.co.uk)



### Bristol Acoustic Festival

Breaking the chill of midwinter, the BAF brings together traditionalists with contemporary acoustic performers, world musicians and even jazzers like Get The Blessing 'going acoustic' for the occasion. The result is a rich mix of musical textures that refreshes every year.

Every January, St George's Hall, 0845 402 4001, [www.stgeorgesbristol.co.uk](http://www.stgeorgesbristol.co.uk)

### Celebrating Sanctuary Day

Part of the annual Refugee Week celebrations, this open-air event in Queen Square showcases the musical cultures that refugees and migrants have brought to Bristol. Zimbabwean and Congolese dance bands have featured alongside Polish traditional choirs, chanting Tibetan monks and Kurdish dancers.

Every June, [www.celebratingsanctuary.co.uk](http://www.celebratingsanctuary.co.uk)

### The Cube Microplex

This former arts cinema is a hub for alternative cultural activity. Their offshoot promotion company, Qu Junktions, boasts Inuit artist Tanya Tagaq and Omar Souleyman's wonky electro-dance as a few of their past successes.

Dove Street South, Bristol, BS2 8NQ, +44 (0)117 907 4190, [www.cubecinema.com](http://www.cubecinema.com)

### Mostar Muzyka Mahazyn

A brand new shop, which opened in June this year, specialising in Eastern European, Balkan, Gypsy music and culture. They also hold instrumental workshops.

64-65 St Nicholas Market Corn Street, Bristol BS1 1LJ, +44 (0)117 926 2987, [www.mostarmuzykamahazyn.co.uk](http://www.mostarmuzykamahazyn.co.uk)

### St Bonaventure's Social Club

A local mecca for fans of alt-country/Americana scene with a consistently high quality of 'living legends, young pretenders and troubled troubadours' including Mary Chapin Carpenter, Sam Baker and Thea Gilmour.

Berkeley Road, Bristol BS7 8HQ, +44 (0)1452 411466, [www.crhmusic.com](http://www.crhmusic.com)

### El Rincon

A tiny treasure-trove, this little Southside tapas bar houses contemporary, traditional and global acoustic delights on Friday nights for the lucky few who manage to squeeze in to catch the likes of Spiro.

298 North Street, Bedminster, Bristol BS1 1JU, +44 (0)117 939 3457

## CLUBS

### Big Chill Bar

Stylish year-round offshoot of the famous festival hosts a Globalista night on Thursdays, with world music DJs and the occasional live appearance.

Small Street, Bristol, BS1 1DE, +44 (0)117 930 4217, [www.bigchill.net/bristol](http://www.bigchill.net/bristol)

### Warehouse

This large nightclub goes to Rio when the monthly Brazilian Beat party bring their carnival dance, *capoeira*, costumes and samba. DJs keep it going well into the night with all that's hip on the global scene.

Prince Street, Bristol BS1 4QH, +44 (0)117 927 9279, [www.warehouse-club.co.uk](http://www.warehouse-club.co.uk)

### Mr Wolf's Noodle Bar

Tiny and friendly city centre club famed for its eclectic music policy. Check out their Spanish themed 'Ole Vybz!' nights for live flamenco-rumba, tapas and sangria.

33 St Stephen Street, Bristol, BS1 1JX, +44 (0)117 927 3221, [www.mrwolfs.com](http://www.mrwolfs.com)



## PUBS

### The Grain Barge

Moored up in the docks just off from the city centre this amiable venue offers a splendid selection of locally brewed beers, as well as a leftfield mix of world music, jazz and acoustica gigs below decks on a Friday evening.

Mardyke Wharf, Hotwells Road, Bristol BS8 4RU, +44 (0)117 929 9347, [www.grainbarge.com](http://www.grainbarge.com)

### Golden Lion

Very popular music pub in the north of the city with Bristol's twin faves of reggae and Balkan music regularly featuring in the live music at weekends. Gypsy-step, anyone?

244 Gloucester Road, Bristol, BS7 8NZ, +44 (0)117 924 6449, [www.goldenlionbristol.co.uk](http://www.goldenlionbristol.co.uk)

### Canteen

The informal hub of Bristol's self-styled 'cultural quarter' of Stokes Croft, Canteen is a capacious and lively, crowded bar with a programme of free music nightly that ranges from traditional folkies to cutting-edge dubstep, with plenty of local *mestizo* bands offering their own fusions of Balkan, Caribbean and African ingredients.

Hamilton House, Stokes Croft, Bristol BS1 3QY, +44 (0)117 923 2017

The Grain Barge is famed for its live music nights and beautiful harbourside location

