



News Release

New V&A display celebrates the UK's lost music venues and clubs as spaces of community and creativity

- Following the V&A's call out to the public for material, *Lost Music Venues* brings together over 100 objects that tell the story of around 50 British venues - including gig posters, membership cards, club photography, band merch, and subculture fashion staples
- The display explores the role of live performance venues in establishing the careers of some of the biggest names in British music, featuring handwritten Oasis lyrics from the tour bus, a Blur set list from a career-defining set of performances, and Mark Webber's briefcase from his stint as Pulp's tour manager
- Further highlights include a pager used to monitor noise levels at the infamous Hacienda club, the exterior sign from the Astoria London loaned by Damon Albarn, Joan Baez's note of support for Rainbow Theatre, a poster for an early Banksy exhibition held at The Arches, a bespoke club outfit designed by Vivienne Westwood, and flyers from Plastic People

On 30 May, V&A South Kensington will unveil a new display exploring the legacy of lost music venues and club culture. From fundraiser queer club nights to infamous 'toilet' venues, the display features around 50 spaces across the UK from the 1980s to 2010s that have established some of the biggest names in the music industry, from Pulp to Ezra Collective.

Lost Music Venues celebrates these once vibrant places as an integral part of our cultural heritage, that have nurtured talent, community and creativity. Featuring over 100 objects ranging from gig flyers to club outfits, over half of the items on display came to the V&A's collection via a call out to the public for items related to lost venues.

The first section of the display explores how music venues mostly evolved from dance halls and cinemas in the 1980s to meet demand for rock 'n' roll tours, becoming places of connection and community. These stories are told through membership cards from iconic venues such as the Hacienda, posters advertising early gigs from the likes of The Smiths, and fashion subculture staples such as Converse and Doc Martens. Highlights include the original 1985 sign for the London Astoria loaned by Damon Albarn, one of the UK's most famous concert venues that was demolished in 2009 to make way for the redevelopment of Tottenham Court Road and the Elizabeth Line. Also on display are materials from the 1980 campaign to save Finsbury Park's Rainbow Theatre, such as an annotated sketch by Joan Baez in support of the venue that was home to history-making gigs from artists including David Bowie and Bob Marley.

The display then looks at how grassroots venues give musicians and performers the space to develop their craft, playing an established network of venues to build their fanbase. The 1990s saw the rise of the indie music scene and the infamous ‘toilet circuit’ network of rough and ready venues, like the Charlotte in Leicester, Moles in Bath, and the Roadhouse in Manchester. The importance of touring for emerging bands is explored through Mark Webber’s stint as tour manager of Pulp as they tried to break out of the North-East circuit near their home city of Sheffield in the 1980s. Further highlights include a set list for a Blur performance at the Bull and Gate in London in 1990, which ultimately secured them a publishing deal, as well as handwritten Oasis lyrics for *Half the World Away* that were inspired by Burt Bacharach’s *Never Fall in Love Again*, which Noel Gallagher heard on the tour bus in 1994. The display also looks at the way social networks in the mid-2000s transformed how bands such as the Arctic Monkeys and Coldplay were discovered and documented, as well as the heyday of the gig photographer.

The third section looks at the challenges that have faced the sector, many of which continue to affect venues today. Archival material from venues such as North London’s still open Roundhouse illustrates how noise complaints, licensing laws, and issues with the police place pressure on live music venues. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic is documented by photographs of venues taken by Alex Amorós during lockdown, the impact of which still lingers. The display highlights the work of charities like Music Venue Trust, and grassroots organisations such as Northern Ireland’s Free The Night, Leeds’ No Place Left to Play and the UK-wide Save Our Scene that work tirelessly to protect venues, raise awareness of the issues that they face and lobby for changes to current licensing policies.

The final section explores the rise of club culture in the UK in the 1990s and 2000s. Highlights include the exterior sign for the legendary Hacienda club founded by New Order in Manchester in 1982, flyers from queer nights run by Paula Harrowing that sought to create spaces for gay women and raise awareness of HIV, and an early Banksy exhibition poster from Glasgow arts venue The Arches that closed in 2015. The display also features flyers from multi-genre club Plastic People, founded by Ade Fakile on Oxford Street in 1992, as well as the original doors from one of the first superclubs, The End. The section also highlights how club culture inspired individuality and exhibitionism, creating the perfect environment for experimenting with new styles. Visitors will see a one-off leopard print Vivienne Westwood ensemble designed specifically for Gerlinde Costiff, co-host of outrageous Kinky Gerlinky club night that drew the likes of Leigh Bowery and Naomi Campbell.

Harriet Reed, Curator of Contemporary Performance, said: “Music venues – be they gig spaces or nightclubs – are not only the lifeblood of the music industry but an integral part of the creative sector. As sites of experimentation, entrepreneurship and artistry they nurture talent and provide vital spaces for connection and community. For this reason, I am thrilled to open *Lost Music Venues*, the first display at the V&A to celebrate UK venues across four decades, from Plastic People in London to the Roadhouse in

Manchester. Developed with the support of Music Venue Trust, *Lost Music Venues* joyfully celebrates this vital sector and raises awareness of the challenges it faces.”

Beverley Whitrick, COO of Music Venue Trust, said: “When MVT were first approached by the V&A about being involved in the development of an exhibition about music venues we were excited by two things. The first was that a cultural behemoth like V&A choosing to highlight the loss of these vital venues demonstrates how much the movement has grown over the last few years. The second was that the curatorial and design team were committed to balancing the loss with real efforts to shout about the venues we still have, their importance and that there is a future for grassroots music venues. We are grateful for their support and excited at how many people will experience this exhibition during 2026 -27.”

- ENDS -

Notes to Editors

- *Lost Music Venues* has been curated by Harriet Reed, and developed with the support of Music Venue Trust.
- The display is free to visit.
- The design is by Misty Buckley Creative, graphics by Raissa Pardini, and AV by NorthHouse and Stewart Baxter.
- The display runs from 30 May 2026 to 30 October 2027

For further **PRESS** information please contact g.morgan@vam.ac.uk or press.office@vam.ac.uk

About the V&A

The V&A is a family of museums dedicated to the power of creativity. Our mission is to champion design and creativity in all its forms, advance cultural knowledge, and inspire makers, creators and innovators everywhere. We share a 5,000-year-old story of creativity through exhibitions, events, educational programmes, digital experiences, conservation, research, and an ever-evolving national collection of over 2.8m objects spanning every creative discipline. **V&A South Kensington** is a world of extraordinary global creativity, set in one of London’s most iconic buildings, with a collection spanning 5,000 years, and unmissable exhibitions and experiences for all.

About Music Venue Trust

Music Venue Trust is a UK registered charity which acts to protect, secure, and improve the UK’s Grassroots Music Venues. Created in January 2014, Music Venue Trust aims to secure the long-term future of GMVs in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, whether they are iconic venues such as Hull Adelphi, Exeter Cavern, The 100 Club, Band on the Wall, King Tut’s, and Clwb Ifor Bach, or lesser-known venues that are equally important to their geographical or musical community.

These venues play a crucial role in the development of British music, nurturing local talent, providing a platform for artists to build their careers and develop their music and their performance skills. MVT works to gain recognition of the essential role these venues fulfil, not only for artist development but also for the cultural and music industries, the economy, and local communities. The geographical spread of GMVs provides access to live music, for both performers and audience members, in many locations that do not have alternative cultural venues. The charity provides advice to the government, the cultural sector, and the music industry on issues impacting GMVs and is the nominated representative that speaks on behalf of the Music Venues Alliance, an association of venues from across the UK.