

OutOf Space

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How
UK
Cities
Shaped
RaveCulture

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CHAPTER 1

WENT OUT FOR THE WEEKEND, IT LASTED FOREVER...¹⁵

The best records of that time were like messages from different countries and cities – they were transmitted through the clubs and allowed you a window into what was going on elsewhere.¹⁶

Neil Landstrumm

Scotland's appetite for rave is almost as legendary as its eye-watering enthusiasm for artery-clogging snacks.

From macaroni pies in vending machines¹⁷ and deep-fried Mars Bars in chippies to raw, pummeling techno and never-ending after-parties, elements of the Scottish national psyche can tip towards the extreme. Or at least embody a passionate lust for wringing every drop from any situation.

Glasgow is Scotland's biggest city and enjoys notoriety as an epicentre for nightlife which only a few can rival¹⁸. Alongside other forward-thinking electronic music hubs such as Berlin or Barcelona, this infamy is propelled by a glut of brilliant clubs and record shops and a string of internationally loved producers and DJs all calling it home.

In 2022, Glasgow's population is 1.6 million and expanding. This makes it the fourth biggest in the UK, a size reflected in how it has been well served when it comes to clubs and live music venues. From the dearly departed Arches and the Soundhaus in Finnieston to La Cheetah via the Berkeley Suite, warehouse and arts hub SWG3 and grungy bar, Nice N Sleazy, the city's late-night offerings are as varied as they are electrifying. But to trace Glasgow's enviable electronic music lineage, you need to go back to a time when it was known more for industry, manufacturing and trade than an unquenchable thirst for Buckfast and beats.



As the curtain fell on the 19th century, Glasgow's reputation as a hub of production was well established, forged in the white heat of an industrial revolution driven forward in the city by shipbuilding. The arrival of heavy industry was heralded by the opening of William Elder's famous Fairfield yard in 1864 around the River Clyde, an essential route for trade that weaves its way through Glasgow¹⁹.

The subsequent population explosion saw its size swell from 84,000 in 1800 to 762,000 by 1901 as its evolution attracted hordes of workers, all keen to get a piece of the action²⁰. The yards on the Clyde played an important role in ship production during this period, with workers surrounding the river responsible for almost a fifth of the manufacturing of the world's steamships²¹. The toil of this industry helped shape the city's economy here and around the Govan district of Glasgow.

If you trace the ebb and flow of the river to the southeast of the city, you run into the Glasgow Bridge (also known as Jamaica Bridge), a route connected to Jamaica Street and teeming with hustle and bustle. This part of town would have been where hands shook over rum and sugar, with the latter road name taken from the booming trade success with the West Indies during the back end of the 18th century. Alongside other avenues through the city, such as Buchanan and Ingram Street, Jamaica Bridge's name is derived from Glasgow's connections to slavery and its transatlantic trade, tethering the city to the people and pastimes of the British Empire's painful history²². If you imported goods in and out of Glasgow back then, chances are you would have stored it in a warehouse on Jamaica Street. As the century progressed, it became a centre for drapery, an industry that was almost as important as shipbuilding to the local economy. Historian Clare McDade has described how, by the mid-19th century, one in ten Glaswegians were employed in textiles²³.

It was during this period that Glasgow earned its name as "the workshop of the world" and became known as the second city of the empire. This area would have seen many industrial changes as it grew in line with its rapid economic expansion. However, Glasgow entered a period of decline and unemployment in the wake of successive world wars. In contemporary times, Jamaica Street remains an active vein of Glasgow, although one where money is now briskly exchanged in the remnants of high street shops, chain hotels and fast food joints.

Typically, it's a street blurred by movement, lined with honking buses and trains running in and out of Glasgow Central station just around the corner on

Gordon Street. But if you allow your eyes to cut through the buzz, zone in on the small doorway of 22 Jamaica Street, and follow a flight of slightly perilous stairs down into the basement, you'll find yourself transported to a different dimension. On most pre and post-pandemic Fridays, Saturdays and even Sunday nights, it'll be one where sweat drips from a low-hung ceiling onto a wild array of roaring arms and hands. They'll be moving to an electronic soundtrack propelled by a well-heeled sound system, specifically designed to pummel those in the room into submission.

Welcome to the Sub Club, one of the UK's smallest, rowdiest and hardest-working basement spaces. It has lorded over this small spot of Glasgow real estate for more than 30 years and is quite rightly revered among ravers and clubbers, despite only being capable of ramming 400 of them in at a time. While so many clubs and venues have faded away over recent years, the Sub Club has managed to fend off adversaries via a mixture of astute business acumen from current owner Mike Grieve and an on-point musical booking policy. The brilliant resident DJs, Harri Harrigan and Dominic Capello, are an essential part of the club's makeup and ongoing success, helming Saturday night's Subculture and laying claim to one of the longest-running residencies in clubbing history.

Throw in the eclectic, infamous Sunday nights previously hosted by fellow locals Optimo (DJs JD Twitch and JG Wilkes) and a loyally raucous crowd, powered by a love for chrome-hoofed house and techno, then its appeal is irresistible. Alongside record shop institution Rubadub and the long line of Glaswegian DJs, producers and nights from the likes of Slam and their influential Soma record label to the latest generation of talent, including Eclair Fifi, Jasper James and Nightwave, "the Subbie" is one of the main reasons Glasgow is a must-play destination for dance music's best. Everyone from Carl Craig to Lil' Louis and Honey Dijon has rinsed the room from that dark booth.

Sub Club owner Mike Grieve's life is thickly intertwined within the story of Scottish rave culture, a narrative that is closely aligned with the Sub Club. Originally brought up in Glasgow, he cut his teeth in Aberdeen, a city 150 miles northeast and one with an unlikely influence over those first vibrations of Scottish acid house.

"I was in Aberdeen around the late seventies and early eighties and that's when I first started kicking around with Harri, who also lived up there at that time," he remembers. "We've been pals for a long, long time and used to go to

a local club called The Venue. It had a typical indie disco repertoire, so playing the same music every week while putting on live bands.”

“At the same time, we were starting to explore contemporary Black American music,” he continues. “Hip-hop was appearing and we both loved reggae. Harri’s first DJing experiences were as a reggae DJ. I helped him promote a night in Aberdeen back in the early eighties, then Harri moved back to Glasgow a few years later. He had started playing at a night called the Sub Club before there was even a venue with the same name.”

After Harri returned to Glasgow, Mike started running a night called the Bang Club with fellow music obsessive Jim Rennie. This fresh sound of house, blending machine-made beats with strong melodies, was beginning to detonate in clubs up and down the UK. Killer tracks included *‘The House Music Anthem’* by Marshall Jefferson, an early house music classic alongside Hamilton Bohannon’s *‘Let’s Start II Dance Again’* and the upfront funk of Lyn Collins’ *‘Think (About It)’*.

“Around 1986, we started to buy a lot of this new music,” Mike says. “One guy at a London shop said we were buying more house records in Aberdeen than they were in London at that time. Jim Rennie and I went on to open our own club called Fever in early 1989, which grew out of the Bang Club. This was a house music club right at the point when the whole ecstasy revolution happened.”

Those early energy flashes in Aberdeen were an important driver behind dance music taking hold in Scotland, driven by strong connections not only with some of London’s music retailers but with burgeoning scenes elsewhere. Mike and his crew used their connections to access the latest US imports while magazines such as *Blues and Soul* and *Record Mirror* provided reference points, particularly when searching for the best incoming tracks.

“DJs submitted charts to those magazines all the time,” he states. “Graeme Park was DJing in Nottingham and we would devour his selections. We hooked up with him when Fever opened and invited him to Aberdeen to play with us alongside our other resident DJ, Jacqui Morrison.”

“Just as we opened Fever in 1989, HMV had opened a massive store on the main street in Aberdeen. The manager, who Jim had previously worked with in a Glasgow record shop, set up a dance music department, the only dedicated section at any of its stores across the UK.”



While Mike was in Aberdeen, as the eighties progressed, Glasgow's nightlife was beginning to bubble over with different shades of club music. Stuart McMillan and Orde Meikle are legendary Scottish dance music duo Slam. With their early forays as DJs taking place during the decade, they went on to establish themselves as international stars and heavy hitters in electronic music, known as innovators and forward-thinkers with influence stretching well beyond the Scottish border. They were key players in Glasgow's sweaty embrace of dance music and worked with Harri on his return from Aberdeen.

“Funnily enough, two of the best nights in our formative years were in the same place as you’ll find the Sub Club now,” say Stuart and Orde. “In the mid-eighties, the venue was known as Lucifer’s and Harri ran and played at a night on Fridays called Beatbox. The Saturday night was called Sub Club and run by Graham Wilson, then they renamed the venue after this in 1987. We also went to a place around the corner called Fury Murrays, where we did our first semi-regular night Black Market. That started the same year too.”

Slam grew in stature to become one of Glasgow's most beloved musical exports from these beginnings. As artists, DJs and label owners of Soma, they were responsible for releasing early tracks by French duo Daft Punk, co-founded the Riverside Festival and hosted the Slam Tent, originally at T in the Park, now a standalone event in its own right. Bangers such as *‘Positive Education’* and *‘Lifetimes’* have become rave classics and the duo continue to release, DJ and tour. They also ran their own venue in the form of the Arches, a hallowed clubbing space that sadly shut its doors in 2015. When it comes to dance music, they’ve seen and done it all.

“Slam was the name of a club night we started up in July 1988 and by the end of that year, we had nights running Thursday through to Sunday, all packed with a completely new crowd of acid house devotees,” the duo says. “We had Black Market at Fury Murrays, Joy at Sub Club on Fridays and Slam on Saturdays at Tin Pan Alley alongside Sundays at Sub Club, which had a few different names including Hustle. Three of these nights got into the top ten UK acid house nights out in the i-D magazine annual in 1988.”

Mike Grieve, who was then still in Aberdeen, recalls some of the changes to nightlife as the twin pincers of ecstasy and house music began to grab popular culture by the scruff of the neck.

“When we planned to open Fever, we were still aiming to have a mix of programming – we’d play hip hop, soul, jazz, house music – all mixed together,” he says. “Obviously, the music became more uptempo as the night wore on, so you’d be playing louder and faster. But when ecstasy really kicked off, things changed dramatically. By the summer of 1989, six months after we opened, the place was properly into house music and the programming reflected that.”

Fever operated for a few years before the club night was forced to close and Mike decided to move back to Glasgow. After a stint managing a new bar in the city, he was asked to run the Sub Club in 1994 and has been at the beating heart of the venue ever since.

Long before Mike’s return to Glasgow, and even before Slam’s days of playing at the venue in its previous guise of Lucifer’s, the Sub Club has been through numerous musical incarnations, and it’s a history Mike has dug into since he’s been connected to the club. During the fifties and sixties, it was known as Le Cave²⁴, a ‘speakeasy’ after-hours jazz venue which, legend has it, saw many of the scene’s luminaries including Louis Armstrong and Ella Fitzgerald performing after hosting live shows at bigger Glasgow venues, such as Green’s Playhouse.

“Later in the sixties, the venue attracted artists like Lulu who sang there when the underground rock scene peaked,” says Mike. “Maggie Bell from Stone the Crows, one of Scotland’s greatest ever vocalists, performed with the original members of The Sensational Alex Harvey Band. It’s got this history of live music alongside being a club. Then bizarrely, in the seventies, it became a dinner dance venue. Reo Stakis owned it and it was the original Jamaica Inn which spawned a chain of steakhouses under this name.”

In its current guise as a cutting-edge party space, the Sub Club has attracted many house and techno legends over the years, with Chicago house king Derrick Carter, master at work Louis Vegas, and Detroit maestro Jeff Mills just some of the top talent to have graced the decks. But it is the residents’ skills that have helped keep the club locked on the future and given it a reputation as a space any dedicated clubber must dance in. Optimo managed to run a brilliant Sunday night for an incredible 13 years²⁵, maintaining a left of centre booking policy and an aural aesthetic slung around post-punk, techno, dub and electronic experimentalism. From 1997 to 2010, they ensured Monday mornings would be a struggle for discerning ravers across Glasgow who would slump into work with only memories of the previous night to sustain them.

Even more impressive are the achievements of Harri, who has been a Sub Club resident since 1990²⁶, firstly as part of Atlantis with Slam until 1994 before launching Subculture on the same Saturday night. Over the years, he's become revered by his peers, yet still one of the most underrated house and techno DJs around.

"In the late eighties and nineties, it seemed that everyone went out four times a week," Harri remembers. "I've played at the Sub Club pretty regularly since 1985, even before I was a resident. I don't remember a bad night. Some of my favourites are playing with my son [DJ Jasper James] when he'd just turned 18 and a six-hour back-to-back with Andrew Weatherall."

He lists tracks such as Mike Dunn's *'Magic Feet'*, Mr Fingers' *'Washing Machine'*, Lil Louis' *'French Kiss'* as perennial Sub Club favourites from the depths of his record box. Despite his lengthy association with the venue, he still gets a rush from playing in the space.

"I love Saturdays down there, I always have and the next one I play will probably be my favourite," Harri laughs. "My best nights blur into one lovely, verging-on religious experience with like-minded people. I love meeting clubbers who say it's their first time at the Sub Club and are blown away by the venue and the music. I always love that. I always remember the captain of the Scottish football team, off his face, trying to order drinks at the cloakroom too."



Dr Sarah Lowndes is a writer, curator and lecturer who moved to Glasgow in 1993 to study. Now a Research Fellow at Norwich University of the Arts, she's written numerous books covering the creative scene, including *'Contemporary Artists Working Outside the City: Creative Retreat'* (2018), *'The DIY Movement in Art, Music and Publishing'* (2016), and *'Social Sculpture: The Rise of the Glasgow Art Scene'* (2010). Sarah became embroiled in nightlife as much as her studies and cites the Sub Club alongside the Arches, Slam's venue which opened in 1991 just around the corner under Glasgow Central station, as two of the city's most important clubbing destinations.

"I went out dancing with my friends at both, where you could feel the bass through your entire body," she remembers. "Detroit techno and Chicago house were the order of the day, played by visiting American DJs like Juan Atkins,

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