





**ZAP**

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF INNOVATION

**edited by Max Crisfield**

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Cover image: The Wild Wigglers – Ralf Higgins, Liz Aggiss, Simon Hedge, © Billy Cowie, 1984

Zap Art

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**Z A P**  
A r t



## Still inspiring...

Amongst others: Bob Carroll, Jago Eliot, Pete McCarthy, Carlos, Kathy Acker, Paul Burwell, Leigh Bowery, Nico, Fanny the Wonderdog, John the Builder, June Bain, Bob Shelton, Mike Mann, Malcolm Hardy, Peter Lebourne, Adrian Henri, Jeff Nuttall, Mike Mann, Sarah French and Sergeant Stone.



# LA BOUCHE

Zap - Twenty-five Years of Innovation

ELECTRIC

VOICE

DANCE

—New Musical Express 21st June, 1995

## N'M'E'

Joyful too seeing dance, dance music and theatre ingeniously blended by La Bouche. Their song 'Hero And The Heroine' could easily bring performance art to *Top Of The Pops* for the first time since 'O Superman'.

DAVE JENNINGS

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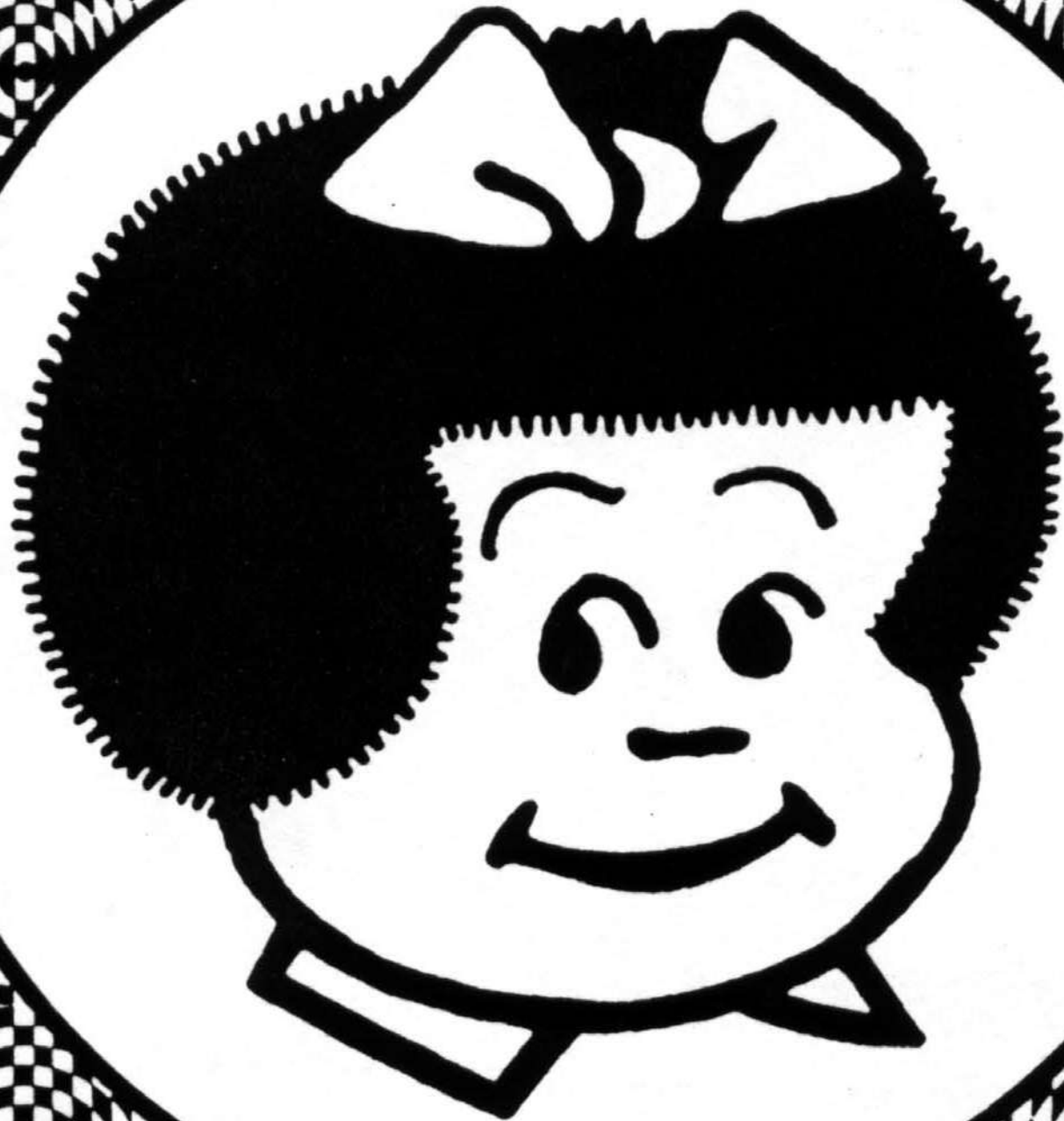
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**Main picture:** *La Bouche*, a vibrant mix of rock and modern dance, Zap Tent, Brighton Festival, 1987

# THE ZAP - Fridays



Zap - Twenty-five Years of Innovation



# Acknowledgements

Let us acknowledge the curious, loyal audiences, the courageous artists who have inspired us, the hundreds of remarkable dedicated teams of staff who have sacrificed their time, sleep and (possibly) sanity to make it all work. We thank the funders who occasionally took their careers in their own hands and of course our friends and partners who shared the vision, the pain and so many inspirational moments.

Thanks for collecting, checking or proofing content:

[www.mybrightonandhove.org](http://www.mybrightonandhove.org)

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# Zap Directors Then & Now

## Neil Butler

Neil Butler is today Director of UZ Events, an international company creating strategic cultural projects from Scotland. He is also Artistic Director of Glasgow's Merchant City Festival, Scotland's National Street Arts Festival and the Chandrasevana Creation Centre, Sri Lanka. He is UK representative of pan-European network InSitu.

## Dave Reeves

Dave Reeves is today Chief Executive/Artistic Director of Zap Art. He has produced two Matsuris in Hyde Park, Radio One's 25th Anniversary Party and Brighton's millennium celebrations for Zap Productions, for which he was also a director. He set up the National Street Arts Festival and is Artistic Director of Streets of Brighton.

## Patricia Butler

Pat Butler left Zap Productions in 2003 and set off to Granada for a cultural stop: her first career was as a teacher, and returning to teaching was always an option. After attending a refresher course she started teaching English as an 'Additional' language in a 'challenging' Croydon high school. She continues to teach and has found teaching these students a delight.

## Angie Goodchild

Following her departure from the Zap Club, Angie has pursued a career in politics. She became active locally in the Lewes Labour Party and nationally with various Blairite networks in the run up to Tony Blair's election as Labour Party Leader in 1994 and Prime Minister in 1997. She remained at Number 10 for the next decade: for the first three years in the Political Office and the last seven working closely with Mrs Blair. She left with the departing incumbents on 27 June 2007 and continues to work with Mrs Blair in her new life.

## Robin Morley

Robin Morley is Director with Jon Linstrum of Magnetic Events, one of the new breed of creative producer companies. His focus is on creation of innovative work for public spaces, through commissioning and advising on the strategic development of arts and cultural programmes. He works with major UK clients including Brighton Festival, NewcastleGateshead Initiative and Arts Council England. He was previously a founder and working director of Zap Productions and UZ Events, producing and managing UK cultural events from Aberdeen's Hogmanay Celebrations to international arts at Canary Wharf.

# Zap Art Board

Collin Matthews (Chairman), Indy Hunjan, Pam Jarvis, Cath Kidman, Jerry Le Sueur, Mike Majendie, Sal Robarts, Dino Skinner, Pip Tyler

**Main picture:** 'Groovy and vital sounds' care of Craig Woodrow and Pete on the *Peep Sound System*, Zap Club, Fridays, 1991



Above: Jonathan M. Woodham

## Foreword

**Jonathan M. Woodham**

‘Disrupting borders, breaking rules, defying traditions, resisting definitions, asking awkward questions and activating audiences, Live Art breaks the rules about who is making art, how they are making it and who they are making it for.’

Live Art Development Agency, 2006

### Zap then and now: 1982 to 2007

Zap, in its earliest incarnation, grew out of a relationship with what today is often nostalgically referred to as the ‘Art School’ (currently University of Brighton). To understand the Zap story over the last twenty-five years one must first trace those rich and diverse connections.

At the beginning of this period the ‘Art School’ (even now an essential point of reference for Brighton taxi-drivers) was in fact the Faculty of Art and Design at the then Brighton Polytechnic. Creative links were established between students and staff involved with the pioneering Expressive Arts course that had been launched there in 1978 and the early, often anarchic, performance-related activities associated with the Zap Club. Just as Zap unsettled the Brighton bourgeoisie with its innovative blend of often provocative performance, cabaret, theatre, music and the visual arts, so the mildly anarchic activities and outlook associated with the Expressive Arts course (with its focus on a similar range of artistic activities) disconcerted a number of those working at the Faculty of Art and Design in more traditional forms of practice, which were then the bread and butter of contemporary visual arts education.

A key figure in the launch of the Zap Club, and now Artistic Director and Chief Executive of the internationally renowned creative production company Zap Art, was Dave Reeves. His early connections with the ‘Art School’ included being a doorman for Brighton Polytechnic

Students Union (BPSU) events at the cavernous art students’ Basement Club, located under the Glenside annexe of the Faculty of Art and Design building in Grand Parade. Another of Zap’s founding lights was Neil Butler, who had not only known Reeves for a number of years, but in 1976, as the Vice-President of the BPSU, was responsible for booking many performance events at the Basement – a talent that was put to further imaginative use at the Zap Club. Amongst the many younger and emerging artists and performers from the Polytechnic’s Expressive Arts course with close links to the early Zap Club era were student Ian Smith and lecturers Liz Aggiss and Billy Cowie, who together formed the dance company The Wild Wiggles and the band Birds with Ears. Until his departure for Scotland in 1989, Smith also became a permanent MC and host of the weekly Tuesday night veterans club *Performance Platform*, later entitled *The Silver Tongue Club*, a showcase for the exposure of fresh talent. The Zap Club hot-house in which the trio worked was, as Reeves articulated in an interview published in the mid-1990s, ‘a space where new ideas in music, poetry, performance art, whatever, can be expressed’, going on to say that he hoped ‘that the people we give space to now will be big in ten year’s time. The rave scene has produced some very interesting artists and we want to be the place where they start to be recognised.’ This was clearly achieved. Numerous Brighton Polytechnic (now University) graduates turned Zap performers became artists of major standing. Anne Seagrave, who

toured her solo performances in South America, Europe and Israel in 2006, received an Arts and Humanities Research Fellowship in 2006/07 and was, in 2007, invited to be Artist in Residence at the celebrated National Review of Live Art in Glasgow. Louise Rennison, comedian, comedy script writer and author of best-selling *The Confessions of Georgia Nicolson*, was a former Polytechnic and Zap graduate. As was Graham Duff, comedian, writer, performer and one of five Brighton students who comprised the Theatre of the Bleeding Obelisk before going on to become widely known as a radio broadcaster and collaborator with Steve Coogan and Henry Normal on the script for BBC2's *Doctor Terrible's House of Horrible*. Arts Council-supported solo performer and choreographer Fiona Wright, who will become a Visiting Artist at the School of the Art Institute in Chicago in the autumn of 2007, likewise trod the Zap boards in her early days.

The Zap Club also did much to attract alternative audiences through its club nights that took place on specific, regular weekly slots, the first of which were held in 1988. Amongst the early generation were Danny Rampling's *Club Shoom*, and the *Frenzy* and *Coco Club* nights with DJ Chris Coco, a leading figure in the acid house movement of the time (who went on to form Coco Steele & Lovebomb). In 1989 Paul Kemp commenced a gay night, *Club Shame*, which attracted a regular London crowd to its *Pure Sex Dancefloor* every Wednesday. Able to pick up advertised transport from London – double-decker buses from Trafalgar Square and coaches from The Fridge on Brixton Hill – clubbers could experience a variety of attractions. 'Dressed to liberate', they could participate in the *Brighton Beach Bums – Two Nights of Shame* events in August 1990. Themed *Club Shame* evenings that year included the *Barbarella Party* and the *Boxing Day Sex Maniacs Ball*. Other club nights included *Cutting Edge*, *The Honey Club*, *The Pussycat Club*, *Pro-Techtion*, *Fundamental* and the legendary DJ Harvey nights when the audience and sound system decanted out of the club and reconvened to dance till dawn further down the beach.


Such an agenda did much to reinforce both the Zap Club's and Brighton's image as a major centre of social and cultural change, as well as considerable controversy – exemplified by the *Daily Mirror* headline (27 November, 1995) 'Lotto Gives £150k to Rave Nightclub; fury as cash goes to improve toilets'. Other headlines included *Brighton Evening Argus*' 'Under Attack' (January 22, 1994) when a leading Tory councillor questioned a £1,000 award towards the *Violence of the Imagination* festival to be held at the Zap Club, the Brighton Arts Club and the University of Brighton in February, warning that 'several of the eleven acts booked are known for their shocking on-stage routines'. Presumably he had never visited the Zap Club.

But the Zap Club had many other sides to it, as a perusal of the membership book commencing October 1985 makes evident. The first four members were well-known stalwarts of the Labour Party in Brighton: Joe Townsend (later Mayor of Brighton), Jeanne Lepper, David Lepper (MP for Brighton Pavilion from 1992) and Ken Bodfish (later leader of Brighton & Hove Council). Other early members were Harry Spillman (chair of the Brighton Pavilion Labour Party) and Pat Hawkes (more recently chair of Brighton & Hove Council's Families and Schools Committee). Performers listed amongst members at this time included comedians Jeremy Hardy, Louise Rennison and James Poulter. The latter two were graduates of the Brighton Polytechnic Expressive Arts degree, Poulter touring extensively with his co-graduate, Graham Duff, to the Edinburgh Fringe and elsewhere.

Complimentary memberships were given to the Nightingale Theatre Company, Riverside Studios and, perhaps unsurprisingly, given the financial astuteness of Zap's directors, South East Arts. Prominently headed under FREE ENTRANCE TO EVERYTHING were Luke Cresswell (who, with Steve McNicholas, formed Yes/No People, were members of Pookiesnackenburg, and produced and directed *Stomp*, which featured at the Zap Club in 1990); Simon Fanshawe (now a media celebrity, but in the 1980s increasingly

# the Zap Club

## JULY'S LISTINGS



The Zap is at  
191- 193 Kings Road Arches  
Brighton

**Above:** Throughout the 80s and 90s the Zap was a hotbed of alternative comedy talent from John Hegley and Simon Fanshawe to Eddie Izzard and Julian Clary.

‘I want the word Art to vanish off the face of the earth, then artists can take risks which they wouldn’t normally take.’

Dave Reeves, *Festival Times*, 1988

Zap – Twenty-five Years of Innovation



well-known as a stand-up comedian and winner of the Perrier Award at the Edinburgh Fringe in 1989); the late Pete McCarthy (writer, performer, broadcaster and travel writer who, in the 1980s, was a compere at London's Comedy Store before going on to win the Critics' Award for Best Comedy in 1990 with his piece *The Hangover Show*); and Terry Garoghan (radio broadcaster and writer-performer of the almost perennial *Brighton the Musical*). There was also a list entitled EMERGENCY ARTISTS under which the ubiquitous Fanshawe also appeared, along with Topo, Lynn Thomas and Mike Mann.

But Zap was also appearing on a wider front, with the establishment of Zap Productions (and the addition of Robin Morley as a Zap Director), which sought to promote high impact events beyond the club. Early manifestations included the Rose Street Carnival at the Edinburgh Festival and Hogmanay Celebrations in Glasgow in 1987. The following year at the Purcell Rooms, South Bank, London, the Ian Smith-devised and Neil Butler-produced *The Tell-Tale Heart*, featured the late Kathy Acker (author), Captain Sensible (narrator), Peter Sinclair (mechanical orchestra), Liz Aggiss (choreographer/dancer), Roger Ely (film-maker/poet), the Grand Theatre of Lemmings (cabaret theatre) and Holly Warburton (images). On a more international front, in 1991 Zap Productions also organised a Japanese Festival (Matsuri – Japan in the Park) in Hyde Park, London. The Zap Tent, launched in the mid 1980s, also featured acts at festivals around Britain, ensuring that Zap's particular brand of innovation in the visual and performing arts reached the widest audiences.

The many significant Zap initiatives, nationally and internationally, are too many to recount here, but Zap was instrumental in setting up the National Street Arts Festival network in 1998, the importance of which is highly evident a decade later. Seeing it as a significant platform for art and entertainment, Zap did much to lead the way, at a time when Britain was described as 'the Third World of Street Theatre' (*The Stage*, August, 1995), and lagging far behind France. Zap co-ordinated

an international programme of street theatre in Glasgow, the European Capital of Culture in 1990, and launched the first Streets of Brighton at Brighton Festival in May 1995. Zap has gone on to be one of the leading forces in this field.

From a 2007 perspective, considerable distance has been travelled since the frenetic energy that characterised those early experimental years of the Zap Club. Likewise, in the intervening years, Live Art has become a far more widely accepted sphere of cultural activity, recently described, somewhat academically, as 'work that broadly embraces ephemeral, time-based visual and performing arts events that include a human presence and broaden, challenge or question traditional views of the arts'. This is a powerful legacy of the Zap Club, once described by Reeves as an 'innovative venue that combined the wild art of cabaret with clubbing' at a time 'when there was no clubbing scene in Brighton at all.' Today the national Arts and Humanities Data Service (AHDS) for the Performing Arts has an on-line Live Art archive, a Digital Performance archive and the archive of the National Review of Live Art. AHDS is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and, through the Joint Information Systems, the Higher Education Funding Council for England. Such support is indicative of the extent to which this has become an area of real cultural and academic significance.

Zap's role in this transformation from a 'no holds barred' approach to experimental exploration of the visual and performing arts scene of the early 1980s, through to its more widespread acceptance in the twenty-first century, is testified by the 381 events listed on-line in the Live Art archive. Similarly, the more youthful work of the then Expressive Arts lecturers involved in the early Zap Club era has matured into work of significance and international recognition. Liz Aggiss was made a Professor of Visual Performance at the University of Brighton where Billy Cowie also works as a Principal Research Fellow in the School of Arts and Communication. Since their Zap days, their pioneering and innovative work has been



**Main image:** Publicity shot for *The Tell-Tale Heart*, 1988 at the Purcell Rooms, South Bank Centre (Captain Sensible, Grand Theatre of Lemmings, Ian Smith, Roger Ely, Liz Aggiss, Kathy Acker, Art by Holly Warburton) © Francois Lagarde  
**Above:** Streets of the South West flyer, 1997, part of Zap's nationwide 'Streets of' outdoor festival programme

recognised internationally, including important awards in the Czech Republic (2002), the United States (2003), Hungary (2003), Romania (2003), and a Special Jury Mention in Italy (2004). They have also recently co-edited and contributed to a highly significant collection of essays entitled *Anarchic Dance* (2006), its title conveying clearly something of the alternative vision that their work still embraces. Ian Smith, erstwhile collaborator of Cowie and Aggiss and former MC at the Zap Club who had graduated from Brighton Polytechnic with a first-class honours degree in Expressive Arts, also went on to develop a successful post-Zap Club career, working for a while with the anarchic French circus troupe Archaos in 1991 and setting up an experimental performance group Mischief La-Bas in the following year. He continues to be a regular MC at the National Review of Live Art in Glasgow.

Today Zap Art, the creative production company and cultural inheritor of the Zap

Club mantle, still holds on to a number of the fundamental principles on which the Zap Club had been founded in 1982. When the latter first acquired permanent premises in the arches on Brighton seafront in 1984 it had set out explicitly 'to support all that is new and innovative in the performing arts; to provide performers with the best possible facilities and environment that their finite resources can supply; [and] to make work accessible to as wide an audience as possible; to create new audiences'. In 2007 the major principles of the Zap Art mission are to help 'artists to push the boundaries of artistic forms' and to break 'the boundaries of the way art is perceived and experienced'. But today's ambitions are greater and deeper as Zap also seeks to 'create cultural exchanges with big impact, commissioning crowd-pulling avant-garde street theatre, which brings alive unusual and everyday spaces' and to 'involve local communities in the creative process'.

### Jonathan Woodham

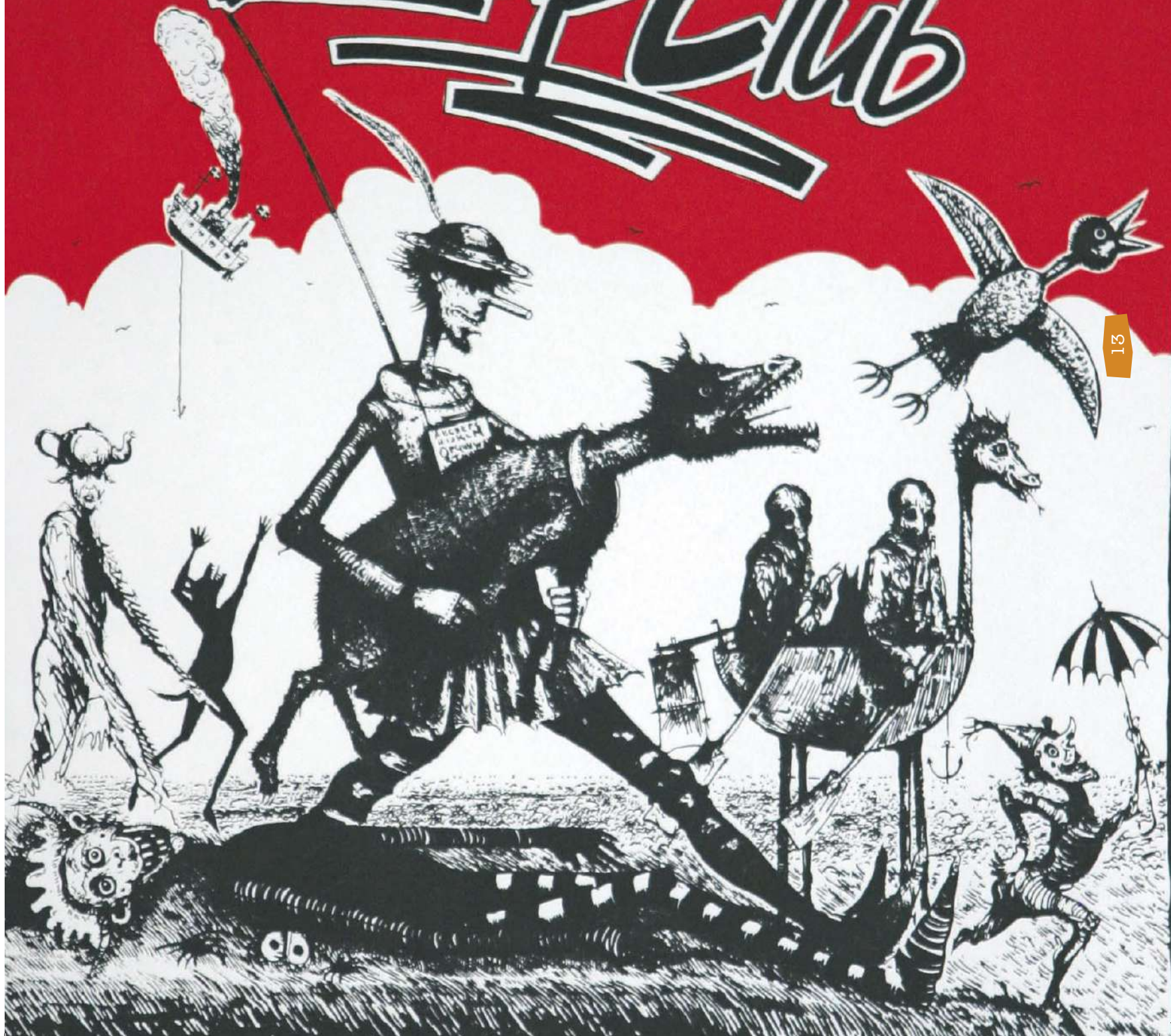
*Jonathan Woodham is a Professor of Design History and Director of the Centre for Research & Development (Arts & Architecture) at the University of Brighton. He has written more than 100 articles and books and has frequently been invited to lecture around the world to major international organisations and institutions. Amongst other projects he is currently consultant for a major exhibition of Postmodernist Art, Architecture and Design (in all its aspects) planned for opening in Washington DC in 2010, before touring internationally.*

**Below:** Happy birthday to the Zap Club, *Brighton Evening Argus*, November 1985 (Angie Goodchild, Dave Reeves, Neil Butler, Pat Butler)

**Main image:** From a Zap poster by Ian Miller



# The Zap Club





## Introduction

### Neil Butler

‘The Zap Club was an experiment. Everyone who creates a real club is making a place that doesn’t exist – a space they want to go to. We wanted to see visionary artists inspire us. We wanted to be challenged by new vocabularies and subversive thoughts. We wanted a great night out we would remember and could think about. And we had found the right place to do it. Brighton.’

Bob Shelton leaned across the bar of the New Oriental Hotel. It was the launch night of the Zap – 1 April, 1982.

‘Now I get it,’ the veteran New York journalist said. ‘This isn’t just cabaret – this is something different – I’ve been entertained but that guy’s a serious poet.’ The guy in question was Roger Ely who was performing alongside performance artist and compere Ian Smith, X-rated Punch and Judy Sergeant Stone and local band Resident Zero.

Shelton had somehow found himself in Brighton where he was moonlighting as Arts Editor of Brighton’s *Evening Argus* as he wrote the definitive biography of Bob Dylan. He’d discovered Dylan and now he’d discovered the Zap. My partner Amanda Scott and I hoped that Shelton would not have to move into writing obituaries.

The Zap Club was an experiment. Everyone who creates a real club is making a place that doesn’t exist – a space they want to go to. We wanted to see visionary artists inspire us. We wanted to be challenged by new vocabularies and subversive thoughts. We wanted a great night out we would remember and could think about. And we had found the right place to do it. Brighton.

#### Zap manifesto:

##### 1. Do what you believe in and find a way to get paid for it.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of Brighton as the incubator for the Zap. In the 1970s the town was only just moving on from what had inspired Graham Greene’s *Brighton Rock*. It seemed to be full of knocker boys and eccentrics and theatre people. A bohemian town where hippies, entrepreneurs and artists could hatch ideas and make a living doing it. It was this environment and prevailing attitude that created the conditions for the Zap to launch in the 1980s.

I met Roger Ely in 1976 when I was Vice-President of Brighton Polytechnic Students Union. I was leading a sit-in. Roger had offered his services as a performance poet to entertain the students. I’d had an entertaining four years at college, met Pat Butler and Dave Reeves (future Zap directors), and trained to be a teacher. I’d played music and run the college folk club with Vanessa Pemble. I’d learned about anarchism and the International Situationist movement. I’d got myself elected to the communications and entertainment portfolio of the Students Union. I was getting paid to run sit-ins and protests and promote my favourite bands – the Clash, the Damned, the Vibrators, the Stranglers.

Roger and his visceral, experimental and strangely entertaining poetry was something different. The sit-in was successful and Roger

**Above:** Neil Butler, 1989 © Mark Power

**Main image:** Extremists in an Igloo with Neil Butler and Pat Rogers, 1982 © Richard Paul-Jones







**Above:** The Theatre of the Bleeding Obelisk poster, 1986  
**Main image:** Early Zap Club poster, 1983

and I became friends and then partners in creating a series of events and festivals that introduced a niche audience to Live Art, experimental theatre and dance.

We spent a lot of time arguing about the nature of art and entertainment. We developed or appropriated whole critiques of the process by which art was funded and promoted by an elite to a privileged minority.

At the time everybody I met seemed to be immersed in art or entertainment. Roger was writing or performing. I was performing in a series of groups from New Rotics and Extremists in an Igloo to Screaming Sirens in Search of Utopia.

By the early 1980s Brighton was awash with music and performance. Outlandish clothes and eccentricity were commonplace and there was a generosity towards new ideas and new approaches to performance. There were a number of key influences at work: Bob Carroll's richly symbolic fusion of art, poetry and entertainment – a formative inspiration; Alan McGowan's early alternative comic nights at the Brighton Pavilion. And David Lavender (later to found Komedia) was translating the work of the little known (in Britain) German writer Karl Valentine, presented as a Komic Kabaret.

Nearly all the elements that were to provide the platform for the Zap were in place. And then there was Ian Smith, a notable eccentric in a town besieged by eccentricity. As well as attending our events at the Art School, he had been effortlessly creating cults and presenting performances and exhibitions throughout the town.

Meanwhile Amanda Scott and I had formulated our ideal night out: an edgy club that would push the limits of art and entertainment. So we scraped together all the money we could find, hired the basement of the New Oriental Hotel, and devised a programme. We decided that we needed a master of ceremonies for our cabaret and there was only one suggestion – Ian Smith. We printed the posters, told all our

friends and made sure Bob Shelton came along. The Zap started to attract a loyal audience with its unique atmosphere and programme, but lived on a financial knife edge. After a few weeks the finances continued to terrify, and Amanda gracefully withdrew. Pat Butler took her place, running the door and remaining the cool-headed voice of reason through the various relocations, the purchase of the arches, its expansion, and its eventual sale in 1997.

### Zap manifesto: 2. Zap – the trusted (!?) brand

The early Zap Club was built as a brand – a night out that you could trust. A brand that would expose you to thought-provoking and sometimes worrying art, programmed alongside anarchic, iconoclastic entertainment. You would leave challenged, sometimes shell-shocked, but generally having enjoyed the experience. You would come back for more. And of course, it was in a cabaret format, so you knew if you weren't enjoying an act it would soon be over. And it worked. From 1982–84 around 200 people came every week to the New Oriental Hotel, then the Escape, and finally the Richmond for the Zap experience.

Our time at the Escape seemed to inspire the highest demands on the audience. The full-sized brontosaurus skeleton (Forkbeard Fantasy) down the middle of the room; the actors ejecting troublesome punters (John Godbur's *Bouncers*); the front row being submerged in red paint as Extremists in an Igloo enacted a volcanic eruption. Then there was the show that got us evicted in a salvo of explosions and flashes. The photographer went into shell-shock, the audience into thunderous applause, and the Zap was ejected. Next.

### Zap manifesto: 3. Find the leading edge of art and the leading edge of entertainment. Locate the appropriate space. Mix with an audience. Await alchemy.

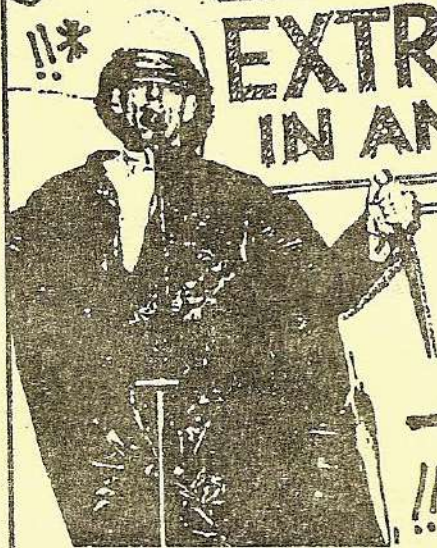
The move to the seafront arches was a huge risk. Dave Reeves brought entrepreneurial business experience and a unique performing

# The Zap Club

# MARCH

SUPPORTED BY THE SOUTHEAST ARTS ASSOC.

## Saturday 5<sup>th</sup>



!!\* **EXTREMISTS  
IN AN IGLOO**

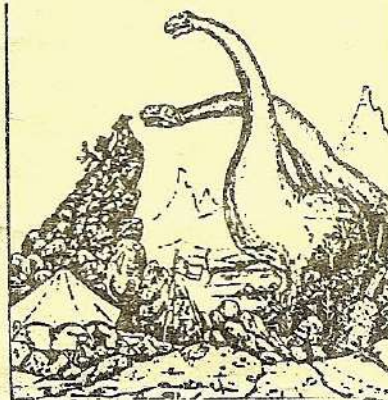
John Hegley

!!\* **Tom Bell**

**The Chip Shop Show!!!\***

## Saturday 12<sup>th</sup>

FORKBEARD FANTASY  
THE BRONTOSAURUS  
SHOW



TOM HICKMORE

VIDEO

ROY POETRY...  
BAYFIELD

DISTRICT

\* JAZZ FUNK

## Saturday 19<sup>th</sup>

TED MILTON



POET!

the  
EVENT  
GROVE

"He also serves who only incubates"

**PODOMOFFSKI**  
\*SURREALIST MAGICIAN\*

**Plus LIVE MUSIC!**

## Saturday 26<sup>th</sup>

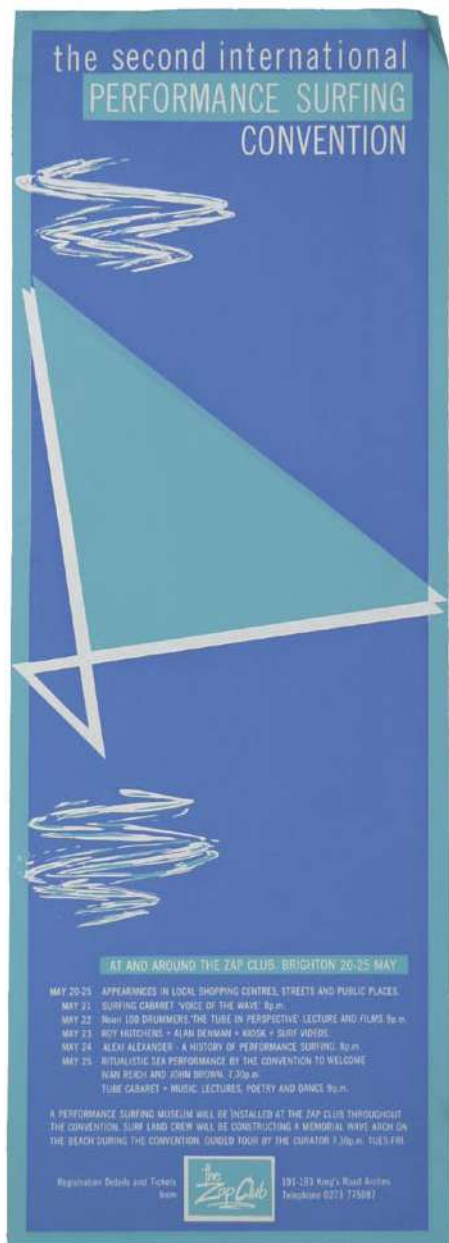


Poland Miller

TIM BATT  
JUGGLER...

HIP TROOP

+ CABARET



**Above:** Performance Surfing Convention original poster, 1985  
**Opposite page left:** Neil Butler – Extremists in an Igloo, Zap Club, Royal Escape, 1983 © Richard Paul-Jones  
**Opposite page centre:** Poster for Zap Club's *Cinderella* panto, 1992, written by Sue Long, choreographed by Ginny Farman and directed by Andy Walker  
**Opposite page right:** Early Zap Club flyer, 1983

style. Angie Livingstone (now Goodchild) came with a background in catering and a love of fashion. And Pat Butler kept us (sometimes tenuously) attached to reality. Between us we mortgaged virtually everything we owned. The new Zap at the arches was built by friends, many of whom were artists or performers or firemen, and in at least one case, a builder. We were all living off the 'minimum wage', adrenaline and self belief.

The atmosphere and programme of the new Zap Club was influenced by the relationship with the Brighton Polytechnic Art Faculty. One of the attendees at the early Ely/Butler events had been a young dancer /choreographer/lecturer Liz Aggiss. Her mad Bauhaus performance group the Wild Wiggles created a cross between art and entertainment that was perfect for the Zap. It also sealed a long-term working relationship with the Polytechnic.

At that point in the 1980s it seemed the arts economies of Europe were dominated by the 'churches' to art – the galleries, the theatre, and the concert halls. Admission to these spaces seemed dominated by those privileged or educated enough to gain entrance. To us, the high priests of these 'churches' were an elite, living in a rarefied world where artists' reputations and fortunes could be made whilst those who didn't play to the rules were marginalised or ignored.

Conversely, those artists who sought a new audience and walked the knife edge between art and entertainment had their work diminished by the elite who saw them as a threat to their power as mediators of taste and value.

And so we asked: Why shouldn't good, serious artists work in a nightclub or the street or a field? Why can't art be entertaining? Can entertainment made by artists become art? So we made art and entertainment in the club, on the beach, in the streets, and even out at sea. Somehow this was achieved through its own economy with little or no support from the public purse.

Somewhere along the line the cutting edge of entertainment moved from cabaret and alternative comedy into clubbing, and in 1989 the club expanded and changed its name from the Zap Club to simply the Zap. Ironic really, as it was at this time that it also became the 'clubbers' club'.

And the stakes became higher. As we introduced edgy art into the euphoric cauldron of rave culture, we found new battles to be fought alongside the regular debates with Brighton Council and the English Arts Council. Now we had to deal with evicted drug dealers, suspicious police, the older Zap audience who felt we should have stuck with what they knew (cabaret), and the delirious press, delighted that so many shock horror stories could be fabricated around one small venue. They seemed to think the Zap was a hotbed for subversives. When we were at our best this was undoubtedly true. And the Zap seemed to burst out of its own walls powered by a creative energy that took it around the UK and eventually around the world.

In 1988 Zap had programmes at the South Bank Centre and was part of the creative team for Glasgow's year as European City of Culture. Robin Morley became a partner, bringing a rare combination of artist sensibility and high level production skills. Zap Tents with their distinctive edgy programming had started appearing around the UK, and Zap began a short but explosive relationship producing the perfectly named Archaos Circus.

**Zap manifesto:**  
**4. All is myth – when two people gather to share a myth that myth becomes reality. (Performance Surfing catechism)**

Zap was always about providing alternatives to the established arts economy. The trick is to imagine an alternative economy that can effectively support the work of artists. If it's in a ticketed venue – like a club – the production values of the work will always be determined by the size of the venue and the wealth of the audience.



As we moved beyond the club we continued to look for ways to present work to audiences who didn't visit the art 'churches'. But if you are going to work in the street and the great outdoors, who pays? To some extent the answer lay in Glasgow.

Glasgow embraced art as a central driver in its recovery from industrial decline. It won the accolade of European City of Culture in 1990 and took on the mantle with an exuberance and verve that established the city as a benchmark for years to come. Bob Palmer, Neil Wallace and a team of officers and politicians across the council demonstrated that strong vision and leadership could transform a city and make it an exciting place for the arts to flourish.

Much of the justification used to draw in financial support revolved around the instrumental use of art to achieve economic, political and social objectives. Those theories have dominated the thinking of art managers for the past twenty years. They have brought money into the arts economy. They have also brought dangers. Historically art has been supported by some form of patronage. So there is always a tension between the artist who wishes to make art for art's sake and those who wish to enter into a transaction to ensure it is made. The kind of

transactions that artists had to work with in the 1990s and indeed today were born out of Thatcherite monetarism that was embraced by New Labour as a way of justifying and investing in art and exploiting its impact on cultural life.

The difficulty of measuring that impact in qualitative terms means that funding of the arts is often justified through audience numbers and bed nights rather than the nature of the experience that makes good art 'art'.

The early Zap was an extraordinary time when we made our passion the centre of our lives and found a way to make a living doing so.

For me, Zap was always about ideas and ideology. Imagine a place of visionaries and iconoclasts, tricksters and dreamers. Where artists think of their audience and audiences demand to be challenged and provoked. Where there is no right and the only wrong is the disrespect of others who don't hold your view. Where the economy supports the ephemeral and ignores the commodification of ideas. Then you have the flavour of what was circulating through the Zap arches in those early days. You also have the essence of what has guided the various Zap organisations and offshoots, from Zap Productions and

Zap Art to UZ Events in Glasgow.

In its simplest form, the Zap was a platform that moved out of the club into the street. It moved from playing with the chemistry of place, art and entertainment in an arch by the sea to commissioning work for clubs, fields, the street and shopping malls. Always exploring new economies and new partnerships that would keep artists free from institutions and exposed to an audience that hadn't been trained to a particular art form in a particular environment.

So in 2007, as a consequence of what had happened in the New Oriental Hotel way back in April 1982, the Chandra Creation Centre was launched in Sri Lanka. And one of the inaugural pieces of work by performance artist Ian Smith was then presented to rave reviews at the National Review of Live Art in Glasgow 2007. In April an extraordinary pan-European orchestra was commissioned into existence as La Banda Europa to create 'the sound of Europe' for the NewcastleGateshead Initiative. Also in April Glasgow Art Fair continued to attract sell-out audiences, while Scotland's National Street Arts Festival Big in Falkirk continued to combine leading edge music and pop alongside commissioned British and international art and performance, environmental arts from Glasgow



**Above left:** *Cock!* – an AIDS Positive Underground Theatre production as part of Zap's Sex and Sin season, 1993

**Above right:** Sack the Senses Festival at Camden's Diorama, featuring Ian Smith, Kathy Acker, Open Secret et al., 1986

**Main image:** Pierrot Bidon's maverick alternative French circus Archaos, Brighton, 1991

School of Art, and a cornucopia of street theatre. And in May Zap Art's Streets of Brighton hosted a crammed conference of street arts and presented *PlayRec* by KompleXXKapharnaüm, one of the most exciting collectives of artists working in Europe today. This show draws together every element that Zap exemplifies. Meanwhile Glasgow Merchant City Festival presented opera in pubs, and dancing in the streets; classical music in courtyards, film shows in hair-dressers and estate agents; and music, comedy and theatre everywhere.

And now for the first time Zap is publishing a book, a twenty-five year retrospective since that first spark of an idea took flame in a crowded basement of the New Oriental Hotel. Many of those movers and shakers, performers and pundits, allies and critics mentioned in the book have contributed their own perspective on the Zap story in a series of short essays and interviews. These range from a trip back to the early pre-Zap days in the company of Roger Ely to an analysis of Zap Art's recent success with WildWorks' *Souterrain* from Rebecca Ball, Head of Combined Arts, Arts Council England, South East. Together with reminiscences, anecdotes and archive material from across the Zap years, they help sketch out the Zap story in its various



incarnations – though inevitably, perhaps, the full picture remains beyond the scope of these pages. At the same time they attempt to locate Zap in the cultural history of Brighton & Hove and, where possible, the wider context of arts and cultural development in the UK. At the very least I hope they provide a flavour of what has been and continues to be an exciting and stimulating ride. So with that in mind read on ...

### Neil Butler

*In 1988 Neil Butler co-directed The Tell-Tale Heart at London's South Bank before moving to Scotland to create festivals and events for Glasgow 1990. In 1991 he returned to the Zap where he directed The Coming and BabelFish for Manact. In 1994 he co-founded UZ Events with Robin Morley, Pete Irvine and Barry Wright. In 1999 Butler's artwork wrap the world was broadcast worldwide by the BBC with simultaneous events in Johannesburg, Delhi, Sydney, New York, Oporto and Glasgow. Since 2000 Neil has directed festivals for UZ and worked with Nicky Sheehan to develop cultural programmes for the Scottish Executive in North America and Europe, plus workshops/events in South Asia. In 2001 they set up the Sunbeach Hotel with Roger Ely in Sri Lanka. Butler is Chairman of the Hikkaduwa Area Relief Fund.*

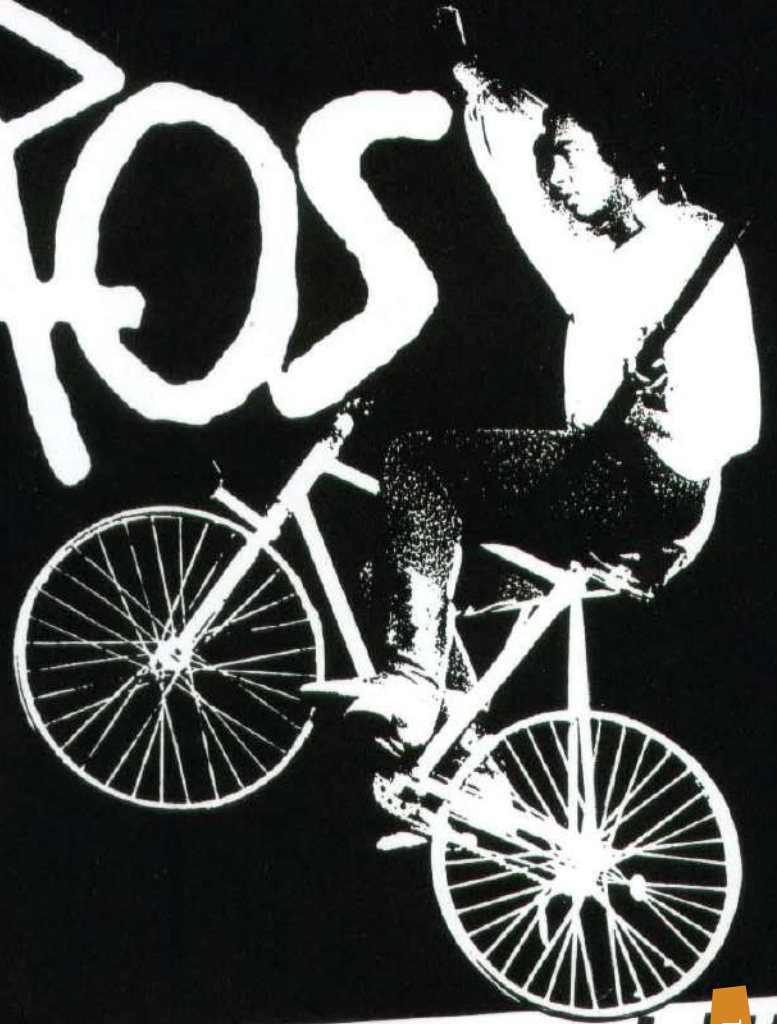
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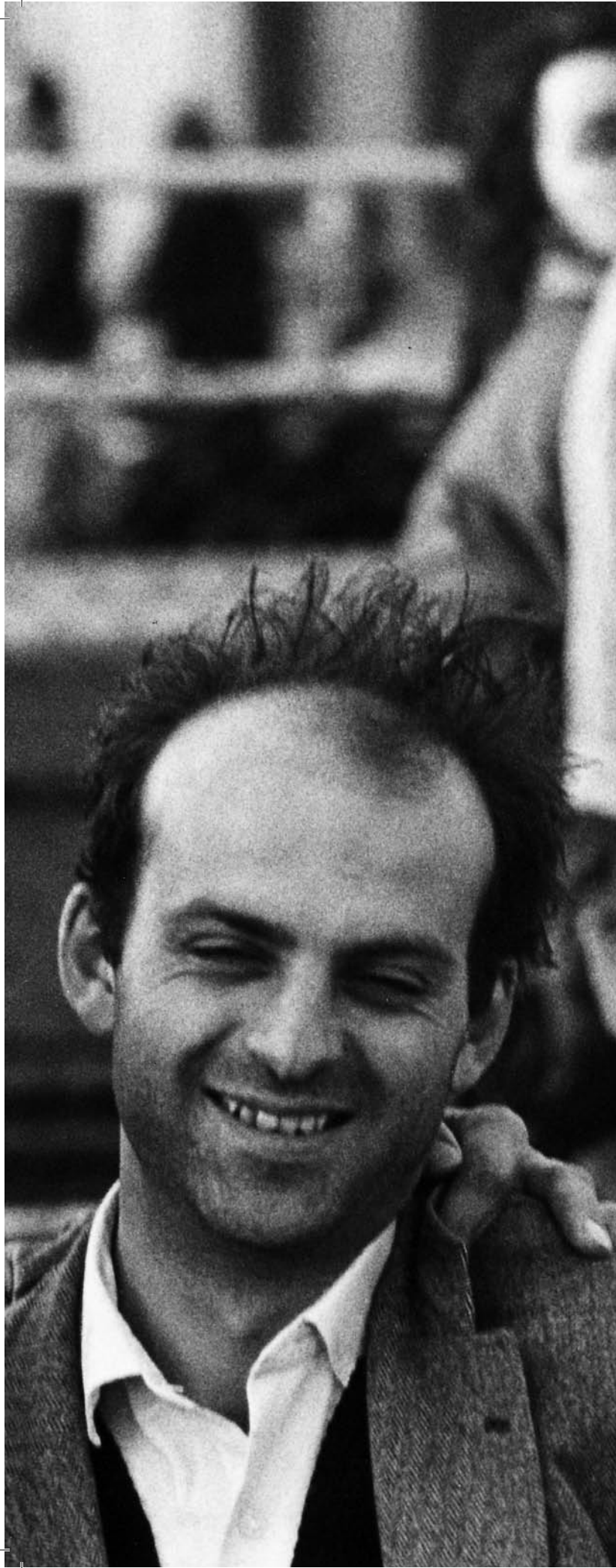
OFF LEWES ROAD, BRIGHTON





**Main image:** Neil Butler and Roger Ely, Brighton Contemporary Festival of Arts, 1977 © Mike Laye





## Chapter One

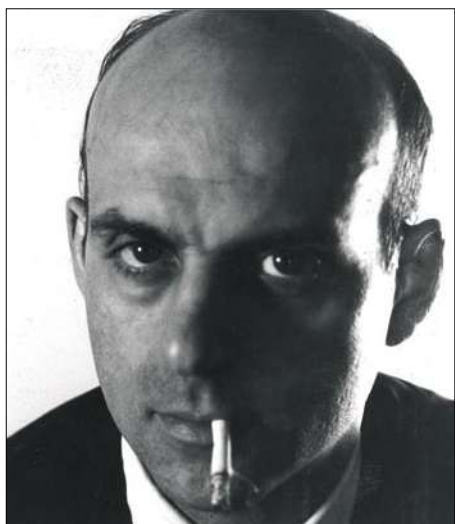
# Zap – The Early Years

‘A new enterprise, theatrical in impact if not so stated, opened on Tuesday night at Brighton Belle, Oriental Place. It features “performance artists”, that voguish area in which nearly anything goes. It’s called the Zap Club, an amorphous sort of alternative cabaret ... based on the turnout, they’re a going concern, its direction to be determined later.’

Bob Shelton, *Brighton Evening Argus*, 24 April, 1982

The whole concept of Zap grew out of a natural meeting of minds. Neil Butler, Pat Butler and Dave Reeves had all been students at Brighton College of Education in the early 1970s which later merged with Brighton Polytechnic. In 1977 Neil Butler, now Vice-President of the Students Union at the Polytechnic, conceived and instigated an annual Contemporary Festival of Arts with poet and performer Roger Ely. Meanwhile, the newly established Expressive Arts course at Brighton Polytechnic had become a breeding ground for many cross-media artists including Ian Smith, Liz Aggiss, Billy Cowie, James Poulter, Louise Rennison and Roy Hutchins.

This loose affiliation of artists and performers became the mainstay of a peripatetic alternative cabaret night, organised by Neil Butler and (initially) Amanda Webb, and hosted in a series of makeshift ‘homes’ at the New Oriental Hotel and Royal Escape (1982) and the Richmond Pub (1983), before finding more permanent residence beneath the seafront arches in 1984. These are the seeds of the early Zap Club and beyond.



## Sowing the Seeds – Pre-Zap Years

### Roger Ely

‘When the work surprises you – when it lifts people out of their standard consciousness – that is when all the hard work, persuasion, subterfuge and penury makes sense. Then, there is nothing better.’

My relationship with Neil Butler and the Zap Club spans thirty years; in this short text I have tried to concentrate on the early pre-Zap years, because the *raison d’être* and the way of working were formed then, laying a basis for subsequent projects for both of us individually and together for decades to come. The seeds of this work began some years before, and as the present is always informed by the past, I need to return to a city that was in many ways the antithesis of Brighton.

Leeds was a grey and dank place in the 1970s. Once one of the powerhouse cities of the industrial revolution, it had only just begun to reinvent itself for a new age. I was studying at Leeds Polytechnic Fine Art department. A unique anarchic establishment, it was at times an abrasive, alcohol and drug-driven, *laissez-faire*, competitive and creative environment, where egos were strong, and god help you if you were not truly committed to the exploration and making of ‘Art’.

I had begun to develop a way of performing the ‘word’ in a manner that was both colloquial and formal – read and improvised. At the same time I was experiencing a whole new means of artistic expression in the teaching and work of Jeff Nuttall, Roland Miller, John Fox’s Welfare State and in the work of the other students around me. People performed in the streets, got locked up, and then went out again as soon as they were released. The students took their work on tour around the UK and to Europe.

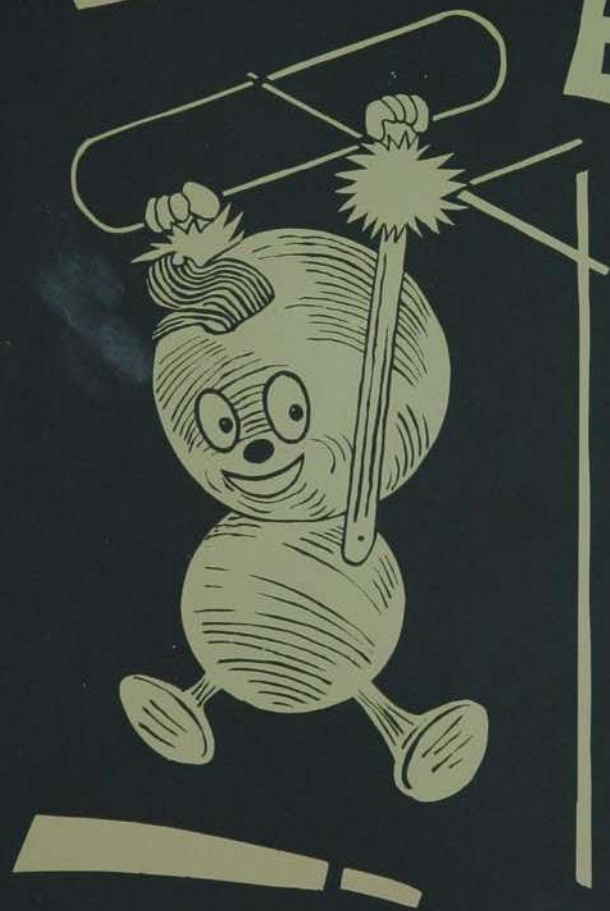
The influences were diverse and many: Hugo Ball’s Dada cabaret (Jacques Rigaut reaching out to pull the trigger – as easy and meaningless as switching on the light in the early light of dawn); Arthur Craven and Jacques Vache (charging enemy lines in a First World War uniform that was both German and French in design); Joseph Beuys sharing a NYC apartment with a coyote; the satirist and comedian Lenny Bruce; Gilbert and George. Alfred Jarry’s ‘Pataphysics’. Ken Kesey’s Merry Pranksters. Charlie Manson’s Black Bus passing by Antonin Artaud, ‘burning at the stake’ musing over the ‘operation on an ironing board’ by Lautreamont. And of course W. S. Burroughs; the ‘Happenings’ of Allen Kaprow and Jim Dine; People Show; Yves Klein. And more and more: all consumed, mythologised and reinvented.

In 1975 Jeremy Lane, Billy Cummings and I started a night club called Pause in the centre of town. We presented lots of beer, Indian food and ‘performance art’ in between dance music and live bands. It was also our first experience of dealing with the law and gangsters – barely indistinguishable. We learned the hard way – the only caveat being that the CNA Fine Art degree inspectors Adrian Henri and John Latham included the club as part of our degree assessment. Different times indeed!

When I arrived in Brighton in September 1976, I was twenty-four years old. I was determined to make something happen in the real world – as opposed to the world of my own head. Alchemy alludes to a state called *Nigredo*, where

**Above:** Roger Ely  
**Main image:** Birds With Ears (Billy Cowie and Ian Smith) poster, 1983

# Birds with Ears



Laughing Man Records BONK1

new single

# Mr. Sneed / Doggy



**Above:** Early Zap Club arches flyer, featuring Ian Smith  
**Main image:** Original Brighton Contemporary Festival of Arts poster 1977

matter has been reduced to a blackened base state. The alchemist must now try to build a new beginning – *Rubedo* – or waste himself. Artistic creation is like this – it involves risk. I wanted to make a difference by presenting different view points of what people call ‘reality’ and to fight the general 1970s malaise.

The first series of events was staged at Brighton Polytechnic’s PGCE Faculty in Sussex Square. The principal objected to the content of the performances, particularly a monologue by Dave Stephens called *Filth*. Subsequently the rest of the series was banned from the premises. Looking for a new home and a little PR and finance, I telephoned the Polytechnic Students Union and spoke to the Vice-President – Neil Butler. It was one of those moments: you stake your claim and expect to be knocked back. Instead there was enthusiasm and the offer of assistance. Neil booked me to perform at the 1976 student Freshers’ Ball. He liked the gig and wanted to see more. He not only found a home for the rest of the series at the Polytechnic but also proposed that its Basement Bar and Sallis Benney Hall be used for future events.

We both believed that imagination and creativity could make a difference to people’s lives and wanted to deliver some of the new work that artists, writers and musicians were creating. We wanted people to experience the diverse and exciting nature of what has variously been called: happenings, actions, performance art, and more recently Live Art. Whatever you decide to call it, it is a way of working that challenges you to fail when attempting to define it.

Realising that this ‘art’ could be shaman and terrorist, trickster and saint; that a person’s life could become their work, we chose artists that would represent the widest cross-section of work. This is not the place to single out artists, but the Throbbing Gristle: *Music From the Death Factory* event was a good example of the tougher end of the work presented. Entering the Sallis Benney Hall, posters advertising the event featured the gates of Belsen concentration camp. Inside, machines cleaned the air, sterilising the venue. People were experiencing hallucinations from the volume; the audience becoming fragmented and isolated. The toilets were full of punters trying to escape. It was an expert presentation of dehumanisation; a sonic psychic attack that was both exciting and frightening.

Neil and I wanted the 1977 Brighton Festival of Contemporary Arts to introduce the diverse work of these emergent and established artists to the people: ‘A showcase of contemporary performing art previously unavailable in Brighton and to involve the community by presenting free and publicly available events that will reinforce their efficacy in society.’

We prioritised these free site-specific outdoor events over the consideration of any financial gain, because we saw them as being the most important element in kick-starting creative activity in Brighton. There were pockets of alternative culture surviving from the 1960s, particularly the Public House Book Shop (who we were to work closely with in producing festivals and events in 1978 and 1979), but most had moved on.

# Brighton Contemporary Festival of Arts

5-11 June 1977

27

‘Neil and I wanted the 1977 Brighton Festival of Contemporary Arts to introduce the diverse range of these emergent and established artists to the people:

“A showcase of contemporary performing art previously unavailable in Brighton...”

Roger Ely



**Above:** The irrepressible Ian Smith went cannibal in a three-day Zap mini festival, July 1989

**Main image:** IOU Theatre company performing on Brighton beach at Brighton Contemporary Festival of Arts, 1977 © photo Mike Laye

When we presented the first series of events in 1976 and the first Festival proper the following year, people had had very little experience of this diverse, indefinable area of creativity. There were few venues supporting this type of work. We distributed publicity far and wide, attracting supporters and artists from all over the UK. We even made a short 16mm advert for the '77 festival that was shown at the North Street cinema in Brighton. Many of these artists were spending more and more time working in Europe, where there was an enthusiasm – with funds to match – and a lack of that deep suspicion the UK holds for 'Art'. We felt that a festival of this kind could help address this drain of artists abroad and facilitate the social and political change needed in the country. By centring the festival at Brighton Polytechnic we set it up as an example of what other educational establishments and student unions could do.

The 1977 Brighton Contemporary Festival of Arts opened with an outrageous Lindsay Kemp and troupe at the Pavilion Theatre. Artists used Brighton's beaches, the Lanes and North Street as their palettes: IOU conjured up a sea procession and built Moorish bell towers along the beach. Meanwhile, on the aquarium roof, Roland Miller and Shirley Cameron *'took a figure – themselves – and added to it accretions of possible meanings, lines and forms and colours too.'* (Miller)

There were free lectures at the Friends Centre and performances in pubs (Ian Hinchliffe's Matchbox Purveyors ran a human juke box out of the Norfolk). Those events staged in galleries and at the Polytechnic also encouraged new faces. There were mixed programmes that included: Henry Cow, Ivor Cutler, Ron Geesin, People Show, Lumiere and Son and Derek Bailey's Company.

We had worked hard to get the word out to the South East region and the media responded, broadcasting TV and radio features, while the local papers published stories and listings. The people came. The after-burn of images, ideas and thoughts remains.

Just as I had experienced opposition in the staging of the first series, we encountered opposition to our plans for this festival. The Arts Council, South East Arts and some recognised artists, lecturers and art critics were 'cool' at best and violently opposed at their worst. One day we received a letter offering us a grant towards the festival from South East Arts. I dragged myself out of a sick bed down to a phone box and told the director exactly what he could do with it! Only through the brave action of the then South East Arts Theatre Director, Bob Henry – who threatened to resign if we did not receive adequate funds – did the festival take place.

Of course, they all should have known better! By the time of Festival '79 many had 'joined the party'. By then the music press, particularly *NME*, fanzines and the emergence of a performance art press (*Performance Magazine* and *PS Primary Sources*) along with punk/new wave distributors and companies like Rough Trade had emerged. The music business simultaneously borrowed and embraced performance art and gave it an audience previously not seen.

In Brighton there was a growth of bands and performers and a new degree course at the Polytechnic called Expressive Arts, out of which a certain Ian Smith emerged, wanting to perform in Festival '79. A man very much enthused by life and art, he was an artist who was to play a leading part in the Zap Club and a man who was not afraid to take risks to express himself.

Festival '79 was different from the preceding years' events, in that the local arts and music scene had developed strongly over the two years since the first festival, and this was reflected in the programming. Many of the events were free and took place outside and over extended time periods (from hours to days). There was the continued practice of having workshops and lectures by visiting artists – encouraging local artists and introducing new ideas and skills. There was a large video and film programme at the Polytechnic, programmed by

‘The festival opened with an outrageous Lindsay Kemp and troupe at the Pavilion Theatre. Artists used Brighton’s beaches, the Lanes and North Street as their palettes: IOU conjured up a sea procession and built Moorish bell towers along the beach.’

Roger Ely



Mick Hartney, as well as exhibitions/installations in which performances were presented. This festival used many spaces around town, many of them acting as a base for groups of artists and musicians to take their work to the people all over the city. There was an environmental sound project based at the Open Studios in the Kings Arches. Performance art events took place in the Lanes, on the beach, and Churchill Square. The Last Resort Theatre Company performed on the buses around town.

Live Art develops through public performance. Where a painter or a sculptor sketches or makes a *maquette* in the studio before embarking on a 'finished' work, a performer has to take risks and develop the work live in public. Therefore the site becomes part of this work and can determine the nature of the work (no more so than at the Zap when artists had to perform to mixed audiences of crazed dancers and art lovers). Consequently the programmer or administrator has to do more than just find the funds and promote: they become part of the creative process – whether it is finding a tug boat (as we did in Festival 1979 for a People Show hoax); or supplying electrical power in a crazy place; or talking through the ideas; or when the publicity is part and parcel of the action.

In 1979 I moved to London, continued to edit *PS* magazine with Allen Harrison and to perform with Ian Hinchliffe. Then in 1981 I embarked upon organising *The Final Academy*, a celebration of the life and work of William S. Burroughs with Genesis P. Orridge and David Dawson of the B2 Gallery in Wapping. I would curate live events there until 1984, when B2 closed. Neil then invited me to programme events at the newly opened Zap Club. My interest in artists was still eclectic but I wanted to invite performers, writers and musicians to contribute to central themes: to examine sexual taboos, violence and alchemical transformation or, as with *Performing the Word*, to present the very wide range of poets and performers who were working with language in a live context. The series and festivals that followed: *Taboo*, *Sex*, *Art*, *Eroticism* and *4 Nights of Fear* (with



Ian Smith in 1985/86) and then the International Festivals of Live Art in 1994 and 96 (*Art of '94 – Violence of the Imagination*, *Art of '96 – Transmutations*, and *Die Lieber Rausch* with Mark Waugh) commissioned artists on themes and produced some of the most successful and exciting performance art at the Zap Club.

In effect, the organiser becomes an 'engineer of the imagination', mustering up as much energy, money, bullshit and conviction as possible to make it happen. And oh, my god, when the work surprises you – when it lifts people out of their standard consciousness – that is when all the hard work, persuasion, subterfuge and penury makes sense. Then, there is nothing better.

This relationship with Neil and Zap has been a successful and fulfilling partnership – one that continued throughout the life of the Zap Club in the 80s and 90s and beyond to the present. We each covered our weaknesses with the other's strengths and I learned (slowly) not to shoot before looking. Neil was excited by this new work, not just because of the street/outside/site-specific nature but because artists chose to present their work in pubs and clubs and not exclusively in art galleries or traditional theatres. This 'Art' was taking

itself to new audiences in a direct fashion. These were the seeds of the Zap Club.

### Roger Ely

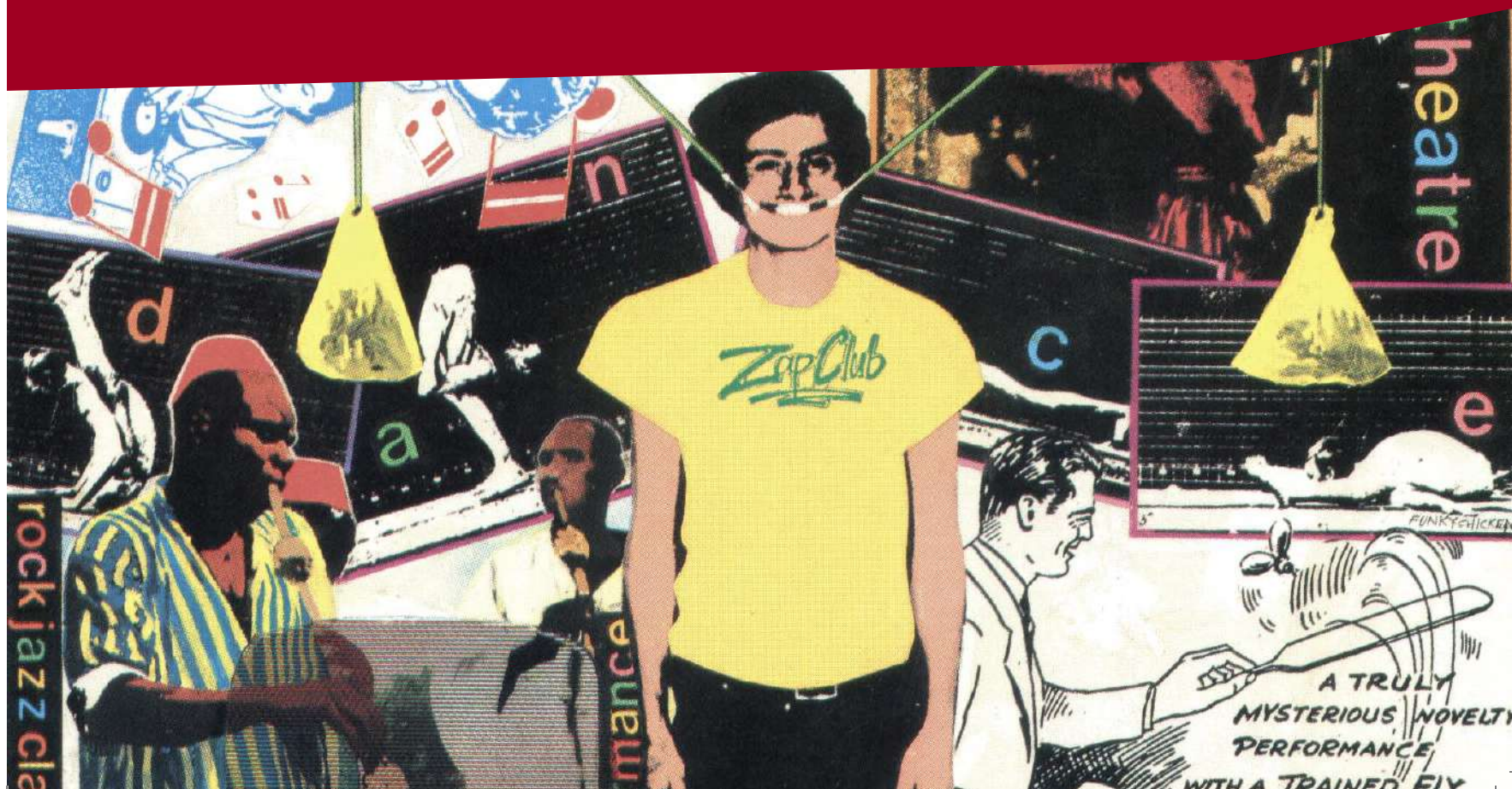
*Roger Ely is a poet/performer of Dreams, Fantasies and Recollections and curator/publisher of performing arts, who worked with Ian Hinchliffe's Matchbox Purveyors (1976-82), Ruth Adams (projections) (1982-83), and Ian Smith (1986-87). He founded the Devil's Chauffeur in NYC (1988-96). As an organiser/curator of performance art/music/literature/multimedia work, he founded and organised with Neil Butler the Brighton Contemporary Festival of Arts (1977-79); edited and published with Allen Harrison PS Primary Sources – a journal of performing arts (1979-82); was organiser/editor of The Final Academy: William Burroughs Event (1982) with Genesis P. Orridge and David Dawson; was curator of literature/performance at B2 Wapping Wall (1982/84); organised with Paul Buck of Violence Silence: the Georges Bataille Event in London (1984). He also organised various series and festivals for the Zap Club (1984-96).*

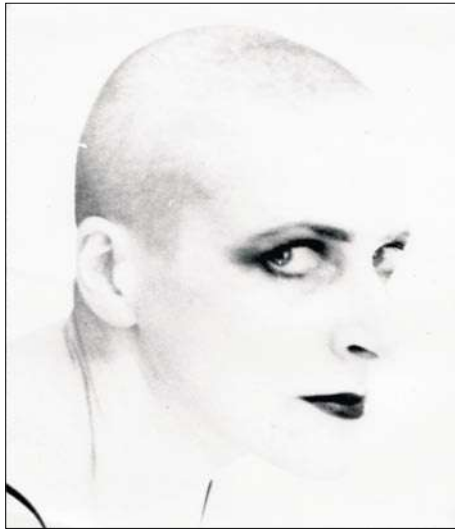
**Above:** Phil Hall and other performance surfers – Sacrifice of Surfboard – Brighton Beach, 1995 © Chris Craske  
**Main image:** Zap Club postcard, 1980s



‘It must be initiatives like [Neil] Butler’s that will provide a way out for the beleaguered world of performance art. His Zap Club is not a gallery and not an art venue. It’s a snappy club with cabaret, music, disco, videos. And, in the midst, they cunningly slip in performance art. The move into the marketplace can’t be bad and, who knows, could confound performance artists themselves. The popular does not need to be trashy, the difficult not necessarily the rejected.’

Naseem Khan, *New Statesman*, November, 1984





## Kakarella Ka Diva! – Zap and the Early Years

Professor Liz Aggiss

‘The alternative Live Art/performance culture that had, through the Zap, an ad-hoc start in Brighton has now become a recognised part of the fabric of the community. It has only taken twenty plus years.’

Here’s what I remember: 1982, the Zap as a concept. The Zap as a homeless, virtual, roving space: from the New Oriental Hotel (still there) to the Escape (now Audio), onwards to the Richmond (now Pressure Point), flitting into the Basement (now No Longer Anything), settling into the Zap arch (now multiple arches). Finding a home.

A home for soaking up the excesses of performance misfits and refits. A place to see and be seen: a mixing, a mêlée, a melange of art, entertainment, vaudeville, sit down, stand up, lie down, roll over, fall down performance art; a space for trial and risk, a space for old dogs with old tricks, and new dogs with no tricks and no fear.

This is my memory. Not a comfortable home. Not exactly a conventional home, but what is conventional about publicly disembowelling a muted rabbit (Trevor Stuart), a woman cramming her hand into a liquidiser (Lumiere and Son), a raving Ken Campbell, a mutilating and cacophonous Andre Stitt, a man with a Mind-Reading Rat called Magritte, Ivor Cutler, Bow Gamelan banging on with Heath Robinson instruments, the Brighton Bottle Orchestra and all the many other assorted old lags?

Forget glamour. A dripping dank single seafront arch, morbid black and sweaty brick, a permanent cloud of cigarette smoke wisping from a single sloping roof arch and a nasty night-before-night-after reek of all the ‘yous’ and ‘mes’. Sounds poetic? Sounds interesting?

Well, many of us thought so at the time.

This was a liberating space for trial and error that welcomed the new breed of avant-garde students from the University of Brighton (née Polytechnic) Expressive Arts course (now Performance and Visual Art courses), who were prepared to whittle away the barriers between dance, theatre, music, and visual art. The student body, at the inception of these courses from 1978 onwards, was a political animal and was instrumental in challenging the prevailing structures and institutional attitudes. Whether the work presented for the Zap was ‘serious’ art, visual comedy, or ‘subversive performance’, it was part of a radical shift throughout the 1980s towards researching, developing and questioning the temporal, spatial and conceptual limits of dance/theatre/music as it related to the overlapping fields of Live Art, performance and visual art. These formative experiments were a pioneering part of a developing and changing state of live culture today.

Introducing, in no particular order, the University of Brighton students who performed their first public forays at the Zap, with apologies for the many missed out: Anne Seagrave, Fiona Wright, Women with Beards, Louise Rennison, Jane Bassett, Etheldreda, Tollygunge, Steve Edgar, Roy Hutchins, James Poulter, Phillip Knight, Open Secret, Theatre of the Bleeding Obelisk, Graham Duff, Miriam King, cult band Birds with Ears, The Little Green Hondas, Ian Smith, The Vagabond King. Offering no more than a platform and an

**Above top:** Liz Aggiss  
**Above bottom:** Alternative performance team  
**Open Secret:** James Poulter and Philip Knight  
**Main image:** Billy Cowie and Ian Smith as Birds with Ears, 1983 © David Bailey



audience the Zap was a working space to lubricate and pit your wits, locate a performance identity and exert your ideas, all wrapped up and introduced by Brighton's treasured Master of Ceremonies Mr Yip-Yip-Yelp Ian Smith, now Mischief La-Bas. Today the Performance and Visual Art course at the University continues to offer a unique approach to cross-disciplinary activity and has built a reputation for developing artists who make visual performance that ranges from live to screen, site-specific performance to performance installation.

Since the demise of the Zap Club a different culture has developed within the Brighton arts community, with organisations that provide artistic support and another kind of 'home': Brighton Fringe Arts Productions,

The Nightingale Theatre, South East Dance and others. The alternative Live Art/performance culture that had, through the Zap, an ad-hoc start in Brighton has now become a recognised part of the fabric of the community. It has only taken twenty plus years.

As an opportunity to contextualise practice in the mid-1980s for students, local wannabes and future artists, there was the pleasure of seeing 'established' performance/dance/alternative artists (soon to be named Live Artists but in those interim lean years known as Combined Artists) right on your Brighton doorstep: Rose English, Kathy Acker, Phil Jeck and his Turntable Orchestra, John Hegley and his glasses; alternative artists, dance artists; Laurie Booth, Lea Anderson and early Cholmondeleys. You name it. It was there. A roll-call for a future. Bleating on and on, demanding recognition: a supported birth of a Visual Performance in Brighton. The Zap flourished because there was an audience, an interest, and a thriving and ambitious community, and it gave artists, whether from Brighton or elsewhere, an opportunity to perform, practise their art, and ply their trade.

This is where I cut my performance teeth and learned my craft, creating with Billy Cowie The Wilder Wiggles, a trio in spiralling yellow and black leotards, enormous pointy conical hats and dogs to be worn on the head. Originally featuring Ian Smith and Eva Zambicki, and later

including Neil Butler, Ralf Higgins, Simon Hedger and Patrick Lee, this was Brighton's cherished answer to alternative dance wrapped up in Cowie's scant heavy-bass-deep-syncopated music. We demonstrated an unwavering ability to perform at micro scummy gigs, in rarified artnik spaces, outside and under or indeed anywhere with an audience, or eyeball to eyeball with punks in pubs and clubs, and on Zap tours outside the Brighton 'home'.

**'Inspired by music hall, pantomime and punk, "Wiggling" involved a twenty-minute set of interchangeable visually connected dances ... these simple animated gestures – hopping, jumping, scuttling, rummaging, skittering, blobbing, slugging – were grasped and choreographically "worried to death" in succinct three-minute visual performance wonders, which locked into immediate engagement with the audience.'**

**(Aggiss, L. 2006)**

And after all the jumping and hopping, and after all the notoriety in the pubs and clubs and shopping malls and theatres, and after all the Saturday children's television shows, and The Stranglers gigs, what next? Could The Wild Wiggles become part of the UK



**Left:** Wild Wiggles, 1983 – Neil Butler, Liz Aggiss, Ian Smith © Billy Cowie

**Opposite:** Aggiss/Cowie's Divas, *Eleven Executions*, Ginny Farman, Kay Lynn, Maria Burton, Ellie Curtis, Rachel Chaplin, Sian Thomas, 1988 © Ginny Munden

dance scene? Unlikely. So, what's a girl to do then? Answer – form a dance company, call it Divas Dance Theatre, move sideways but not outside the picture. I cannot deny, as a tutor on the University of Brighton Visual and Performance Arts course, the influence of the students whose spirited, insistent, creative and energetic ebb and flow provoked questions that impacted on my own research and practice and helped inspire the developing of this alternative dance aesthetic.

In 1986 the Zap offered a small commission, one of the earliest, and in itself an almost unheard of opportunity, but enough to prompt Cowie and myself to make what became later our trademark performance piece – *Grotesque Dancer*. Architecturally inspired (today we might call it site sensitive), by the claustrophobic single arch Zap space, the anarchic dance performer Valeska Gert (1892–1978), and a love of *Ausdruckstanz* (German expressionist dance), we created a solo that looked to embrace the essence of the Weimar. In much the same way as The Wild Wigglers had operated outside the acceptable boundaries of mainstream theatre dance, so we created the solo *Grotesque Dancer* in the spirit of what we knew best, within an alternative live performance culture. Like the early art grotesque performers we were as satirical and perversely entertaining and located a subversive view of the underground world that had been similarly part of the Weimar legacy of the 20s and 30s.

As artists, mainlining in dance and movement and working within an art school, it was logical to draw broad ideas, contexts, and research beyond a contemporary dance world. We resisted the dominant dance aesthetic of the mid-1980s, mostly sweat-panted pedestrian work-wear. We disobeyed the vogue of a touchy-feely-considerate-tactile concentration on sensation and contact performance experience. And like all good art that shakes the core of the establishment, *Grotesque Dancer* did just that, causing critical polarisation and audience unrest.

To make this particular visual performance it

seemed utterly logical that the work would not simply be about the body alone, that the context would simply not be about movement itself. The desire to make work about something, not nothing, was obvious. To intellectually challenge an audience and present an alternative view of the world and to raise questions about identity, sexuality, the female performance aesthetic, and to challenge received notions of dance aesthetics – if this is part of the legacy and footprint we (Aggiss/Cowie) leave behind then so be it.

The choreographic and performance language developed from performing in incredibly small spaces (the Zap arch), with intimate connections to an audience (the Zap arch), with little or no technical support (the Zap arch) did indeed shape an aesthetic and identity that continues to mark the work.

**‘Survival in this particular arts marketplace meant: demand only the smallest space in which to perform (usually on a sixpence just in front of a drum kit), secure five minutes to ‘tech’, enjoy your alien audience for whom contemporary experimental dance is not a buzz word, be prepared to perform at midnight, be seen and above all learn to perform.’**

**(Aggiss, 2006, p. 144)**

Interestingly, *Grotesque Dancer* as a ‘serious’ work of art eventually found its way into a more mainstream contemporary dance culture, but nevertheless when performed in Guildford twenty years on: ‘it frightened Surrey students and makes other people take refuge in the idea that this is not dance. But dance it is, a most powerful form of dance and performance, of drama and music.’ (Kant, 2006, p. 35)



The Zap, despite its development into multiple arches and succumbing to stand-up comedy and club culture, continued to support Aggiss and Cowie's work, showcasing a duet for Aggiss with opera diva Naomi Itami titled *Falling Apart at the Seams (so it seams)*, the solo *Absurditties* and most memorably *Drool and Drive! They Care!* The latter work was an irresistible opportunity to develop political dance with a capital 'P' and create a satire on Mrs Thatcher's years in power. There could be no more appropriate venue to perform this work than the Zap. The world premiere was 22 November, 1990 and as some people may recall Mrs T resigned on 22 November, 1990. We like to think we had some part in her downfall. The question of effectiveness always arises with political artworks. How much do they achieve? In this case, clearly the downfall of Thatcher, however it was gratifying to note that this choreography did result in an article that raised the debate about the politics of dance:

*'The company takes its influence from a mix of cultural clichés and a tradition of performance expressionism. It has long been a problem for dance programmers, funder and critics alike. How to take dance seriously that does not seem to take itself seriously? How to criticise content performed with such technical nonchalance? The Divas attract rave appreciation whenever they perform. What they have become are the darlings of the anti-dance world eschewing more contained experimentalism of the recognised 'cutting edge'. In this sense the Divas are the Dadaists of dance.'* (Phillips, 1991, p.p. 46-47)

Now twenty-five years on, Aggiss and Cowie sit sometimes queasily but often easily in UK dance culture and in some ways this is the testament to their unconventional upbringing. Locating themselves in an alternative performance culture, developing outside the London-centric climate, struggling for years without any funding support, being championed by

the Zap and The Gardner Arts Centre and The South Bank, and frankly just getting on with it has resulted in an impressive history that Aggiss and Cowie like to call Anarchic Dance.

And like all good Outsiders, Aggiss and Cowie are now Insiders, firmly fixed into the establishment of a broader UK arts culture, embracing a breadth of dance practice, which in turn encompasses dance theatre, dance for camera, screen dance, installation performance, screen dance installation, all of which are now finally acceptable parts of wider dance culture.

This short sharp trip down memory lane is just part of a bigger history (see *Anarchic Dance*, eds Aggiss and Cowie, 2006 for a fuller picture). The history is written and available, the chronology identified, the 'I's' and 'T's' dotted and crossed, and the Zap and its early ethos in providing more than a conceptual home, has played its part in that legacy.



## Professor Liz Aggiss

Liz Aggiss is a performer, choreographer and filmmaker and Professor of Visual Performance at the University of Brighton. Her commissioned screen dance work with Billy Cowie includes: for the BBC *Dance for Camera Awards*, *Motion Control* and *Beethoven in Love*; for the Arts Council of England and *Capture Award*, *Anarchic Variations*, *Men in the Wall* and *Doppelganger*; and for Channel 4 *Dance4* season, *Break*. Their screen dance work has received numerous international awards. Liz Aggiss has received many awards including the *Bonnie Bird Choreography Award* (1994) and an *Arts Council Dance Fellowship Award* (2003). Aggiss and Cowie's book *Anarchic Dance* (Routledge, 2006) comprises a book and three hour DVD-Rom and is a visual and textual record of their live and screen dance work.

## Notes

Aggiss, L. (2006) Chapter 14: Reconstruction: or why you can never step into the same river twice, in Aggiss, Cowie, Bramley (eds) *Anarchic Dance*, London: Routledge

Kant, M. (2006) Chapter 4: Liz Aggiss and 'Authentick' grotesque expressionism, Aggiss, Cowie, Bramley (eds) *Anarchic Dance*, p. 35. London: Routledge

Phillips, Andrea (1991) *Dada Dance*, *Dance Theatre Journal*, 8 (4)

'A midget eating cornflakes with a birdcage on his head topped with lighted candles is just the kind of act you can expect to see at Brighton's Zap Club.'

*The Gazette*, 1984, pre-arches

**Opposite:** 'Five Thatchers' – Jane Bassett, Liz Aggiss, Virginia Farman, Sian Thomas and Ralf Higgins in *Drool and Drivel They Care*, 1990 © Billy Cowie

**This page:** Dance/performance troupe Women with Beards: Jane Bassett, Joanna Boyce, Louise Rennison, Sarah Tompkinson





## The Zap Club – an Accident Waiting to Happen

Ian Smith

'In Brighton today I suspect there are myriad 'scenes' accommodating every sub-genre of fashion, lifestyle and culture you could possibly think of – with the possible exception of those who wear spats. For a short bright time the Zap Club (sometimes within a single week) provided a home (and an audience) for all those genres in one place. And it was magical. Honest.'

I arrived in Brighton nineteen years old and ready to jump into the newly formed 'Expressive Arts' course, created as one of the very first experiments in mixing arts disciplines. I was ready to eat up any opportunity thrown at me – and I wasn't the only one. This Polytechnic course provided a breeding ground for many of the cross-media artists that would later present work at the Zap Club and beyond. In 1978, however, there was no Zap Club, but it was an accident waiting to happen.

What was going on was a developing Contemporary Festival of Arts. Organised by Neil Butler and Roger Ely, the programme included the prime movers of the British alternative scene, who were creeping out of agitprop street theatre and delighting in subverting the status quo indoors, outdoors, and more often than not, in the pub. By offering my services as a leafletter, sandwich-board wearer etc. I got to hang out with the likes of Ian Hinchliffe, Dave Stephens, Rob Conn, Jeff Nuttall, Roland Miller and Shirley Cameron, Lol Coxhill and of course Roger Ely.

Seeing these madmen and women at their best and worst, and tentatively joining in with a few endurance performances of my own, it was encouraging to encounter grizzled grown-ups who thought presenting weirdness a perfectly valid lifestyle. One particular solo performer (the late) Bob Carroll – explaining the entire universe via the life cycle of a salmon just

by waving his arms around and declaiming in a room above a pub – provided an iconic standard for everybody that witnessed it.

Ordinary theatre, ordinary music and ordinary art was no longer enough. With an eye for the radical, Neil Butler, fan and promoter of alternative politics, music and press saw no reason to limit such programming to a couple of weeks a year, and set about looking to develop the home grown scene.

Anyway, back in those heady days, like everyone else I was having the time of my life courtesy of the inspirational maniacs playing every other night at the Richmond, the Alhambra, Open Studios or the Resource Centre. The Piranhas, Nicky and the Dots, Dick Damage, Smeggy and the Cheesy Bits et al. They were all very theatrical and entertaining, even if they would have balked at 'arty', and the whole 'Vaultage' scene made the glamour of gigging seem possible. I wasted no time in experimenting myself by starting a band, Birds with Ears, and presenting dubious cabaret as 'The Vagabond King' (with Stella Anscombe), featuring poetry, Super-8 films and slideshows, all of which would later come in useful at the Zap Club.

When The Golinski Brothers started taking cabaret packages from Brighton to small London clubs like the Moonlight, I got the chance to cut my teeth alongside Sergeant Stone's



Punch and Judy, Magician Lynn Thomas and the fabulously sordid Binky Baker. Their (often overlooked) initiative helped maintain Brighton's reputation as a 'happening place' as the eighties alternative cabaret scene kicked in. On a more arty front Richard Strange with his *Cabaret Futura* and the 'happenings' at Wapping's B2 Gallery were also getting attention in London.

All this activity was the real legacy of punk rock attitudes. Everybody who had been inspired by 'here's three chords form a band' found it a short leap to realise 'here's two legs, form a dance company', or 'here's five wigs form a theatre company'. All anybody needed was a place to do it.

### Needed – a natural home for unnatural people

When I set up a Sunday lunchtime poetry/comedy platform at the Alhambra, featuring the likes of Tony Morewood and Graeme Kaye, Neil Butler and partner in crime Amanda Webb approached me with a view to being compere for their nascent venture – the Zap Club. I decided I would take my chances.

My all too hazy recollection of compering the first gig in a tiny 'jazz basement' is of Roger Ely's dark poetic ramblings offset by my delight in absurd comedy and the band's delight in making as much noise as possible. A blueprint for the future, in fact.

When the Royal Escape offered the chance of actually being able to move and breathe, things moved up a gear, and we began to play around with decor and even the possibilities of taking stuff out onto the beach. Audiences grew, and the key difference in attitude that evolved was that people came to a *Zap Club Night*, not necessarily to see a headliner or favourite act. The billing was so esoteric, punters probably wouldn't have heard of most of the artists anyway. The point was that everything and everybody – acts, audience and atmosphere – could be fresh and fascinating when juxtaposed with unlikely partners. This helped keep the club accessible and not

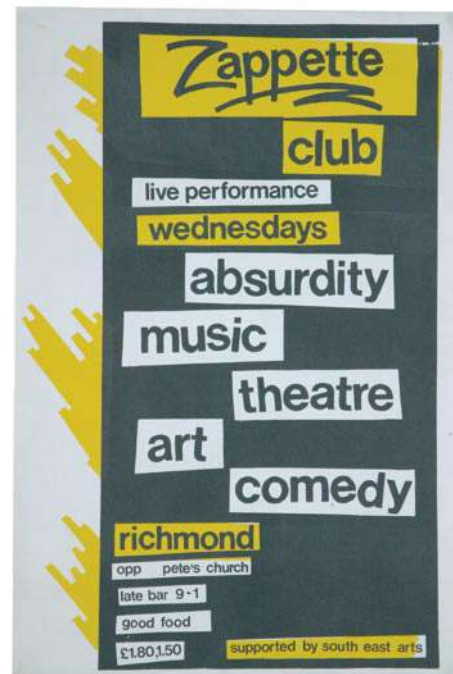
merely the domain of the young and trendy. Audiences became prepared for the mixed programme, but the mix also had implications for the artists. Those on the regular 'alternative' comedy circuit might be used to merely handing over a mic stand to the following act – at the Zap they might be sandwiched between some hearty interactive neon-painted women with shrimps ensnared in their fishnet tights (The Neo-Naturists) and a rabid performance artist spewing up VP sherry (Andre Stitt). Generally speaking, the running order was not about headliners and supports, but dictated by dynamics and the practicality of setting or clearing the stage.

Stalwarts at the Royal Escape included everyone from Lynn Thomas and Pete McCarthy, to Topo the Mime, J.J. Waller, John Hegley and most of the Liverpool poets. The larger venue also allowed for bigger companies to abuse the space, such as The Event Group, IOU, People Show, Welfare State and Forkbeard Fantasy.

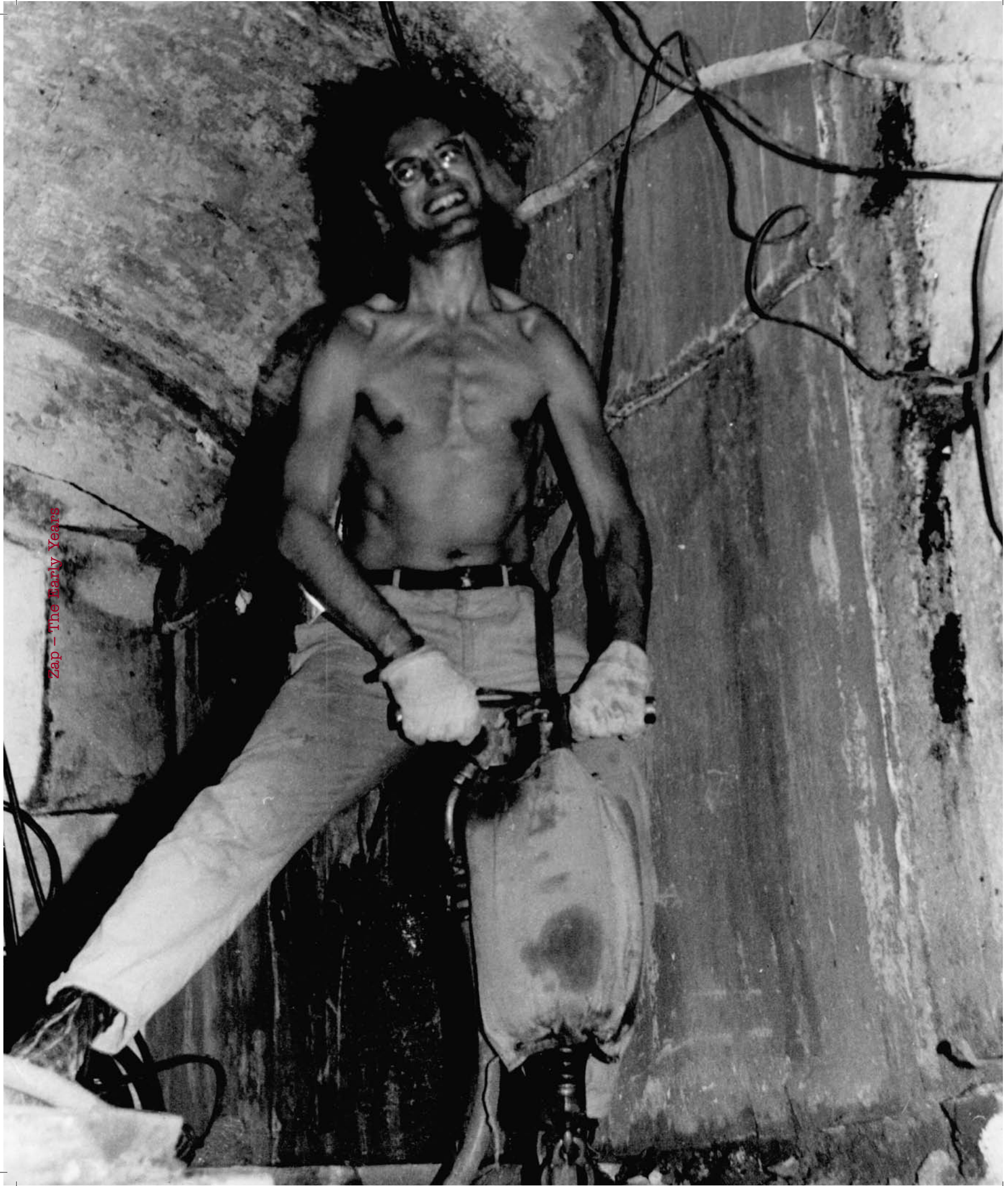
The club soon began to attract regular media attention, and the support of journalists like Bob Shelton, Tim Curran and Alison Cridland helped spread the word. Bob Henry's invaluable support at South East Arts helped to develop the programming so that artists could be invited from further afield. We could at least pay extra for their travel – even if they did still have to crash on our collective floors.

Soon television started to pick up on 'the scene' and Channel 4's youth programme *Ear to the Ground* featured a mini-documentary shot in the Royal Escape. More features followed and eventually, in my compere persona, I was cast as the contemporary entertainment 'face' of Brighton alongside Dora Bryan and veteran Douglas Byng in the BBC documentary *The Last Resort*.

When the experiments at the Royal Escape became a little too ambitious and outrageous for the landlord (too many explosions), we needed to move on, and found a temporary home upstairs at the Richmond. The landlords



**Opposite:** Ian Smith, the Vagabond King, 1983  
**Above:** Zapette poster, 1984



Zap - The Early Years

were well-seasoned hosts of the formerly rambunctious music scene, and therefore unfazed by our antics. I recall making screenprinted posters describing this interim period as 'The Zapette' while Neil and Pat Butler (who had taken over from Amanda), joined by additional partner Dave Reeves, began searching for a permanent home.

The club ran on its usual shoestring while the partners ran around searching for premises, and the regular cabarets maintained its profile on the 'Brighton scene'. The famously bouncing floor of the upstairs room added a certain frisson of danger to the more enthusiastic punters.

### **Oh we do like to be beside the seaside...**

When the seafront arches had been secured and Angie Livingstone (now Goodchild) came on board with some much needed extra cash, the nasty work began. My best pal from school, architect Anthony Browne, had begun to envy the glittering wonderland I had discovered and also wished to escape the comparative bleakness of south-east London. I introduced him to two people – Neil Butler and landlord Nicholas Van Hoogstraten. For one he designed a nightclub, for the other a magnificent palace. The budgets were remarkably dissimilar.

I recall a trip taken with Neil in a flatbed truck to a railway yard for some 'firewood'. It made a lovely floor. Enthusiasm also led to a lot of unpaid labour, and I remember martyring myself alongside the real builders, wielding a jackhammer and excavating dead rats. When the building work on these original two arches was as complete as it was ever going to be, all the regular staff spent night and day waterproofing and painting the walls. They were still wet on opening night. (And closing night too, I suspect.)

Underground once more, windows were not a big feature. Comedian Tony Morewood once noted that you could always identify nightclub workers – 'skin like orange peel'. Apart from the bad skin, I like to think that the

staff I worked with over those first five years or so really did have something in common. We were all there to make something happen.

My strongest recollections are not so much of particular acts, but rather of the general running of the place. The constant banter in the lobby, or behind the tiny bar, was as good as anything happening onstage. Everyone had their own style, from Roy Bayfield's janitor persona (based on Bukowski's *Factotum*), to cashier June Bain's 'Headmistress' – scolding ticketless punters, then erupting into outbursts of filthy raucous laughter as she sized up young boys in need of a bath.

The after-hours ranting sessions were legendary, when we would lock ourselves in and sing bad versions of sixties classics until dawn. Roy Smiles was unstoppable, and our 'winding down' sessions necessarily featured much 'winding up' too. Post-session it became a regular amusement for the Western Road police patrols to pop out of a doorway and ask me what I was doing staggering home at 5 a.m. with smudged eyeliner and a burglar's holdall containing a sixties dress and a gold nose.

**'Same as last week, officer ... I'm still a ... comedian!'**



**Main image:** Ian Smith digging out the Zap Club foundations, 1984

**Below:** The Zap Club opening flyer, 1984



**Above:** Tuesday Night Platform posters (1984) and *Silver Tongue Club* poster 1988, the inheritor of the Tuesday Platform legacy

The staff camaraderie found a more public outlet in the occasional staff presentation, such as the first few 'Zap Pantos'. These really bonded the punters with the familiar characters they knew did all the dirty, exhausting background stuff that the whole 'glamorous' shebang depended on year-round. The 'family feel' was emphasised by the (sometimes complicated) membership system, which was necessary for licensing, and I'm sure drove many people (including front of house staff) nuts. Doormen, following the example established by the gentlemanly original – 'Nadge' – tended to deflect undesirables and hooligans with wit and charm, rather than baseball bats.

Many punters came to their favourite nights as regularly as clockwork, and none were as loyal as the aficionados of the Tuesday Night Platforms. This was my particular baby, and although maybe it didn't make much sense financially for the club, I still believe it symbolised the heart of the whole operation. If credibility waned elsewhere, the dependability of this night always held true.

As the general weekly programming became more glamorous and the 'alternative performance scene' more established generally, I wondered about the people who had aspirations

to perform but perhaps not the chutzpah to face the increasingly cruel and cynical 'open spots' and 'gong shows' that were becoming the accepted routes to 'going professional'. What if you didn't want to be professional? This would be a genuine platform, where everybody would get a chance to express themselves in whatever way they wished, and where they would be guaranteed sympathetic and enthusiastic support regardless of how terrible they were.

The 'Tuesday Night Platform' was born. The chemistry required an unspoken contract between the audience (mainly other aspirants) and the performers – 'don't abuse the scene by over-running your five-minute spot, and we won't give you a hard time'.

By and large this worked for about six or seven years, including the later transformation to *The Silver Tongue Club*. To quote a contemporary song: 'the woodwork creaked, and out came the freaks'. And very charming they were too.

Of the myriad Tuesday night veterans – too abundant to mention but a few – Roy Smiles and Aaron Williamson are still at the top of their game, Captain Stupid and Monty the Moron both found a friend in platform aficionado Captain Sensible,

and other allies like John Hegley and The Levellers have expressed fondness for the memories of those interminable nights.

The audience deserves recognition for its part in all this, not only for its spectacular endurance, but also for undergoing random ‘interval abuse’ backstage. Also, if a rat had expired under the stage, the ventilation system blasted the sweet smell of corruption directly up the trouser-legs of those in the front row. Nice.

Highlights of the legitimate programming for me were the themed seasons above and beyond the regular nights. Seasons such as Roger Ely’s *The Violence of the Imagination*, ‘performance banquets’ generally, and Pol Wijnberg’s women-focused *Taking Liberties*. These mini-festivals allowed us to introduce more controversial artists and taboo topics, and they balanced my need for perversity and experimentation that was diminishing in the increasingly conventional cabaret scene. Visiting performers were often more amusing offstage than on. Favourite memories include shaking Tiny Tim’s (enormous) hand as he expressed squeaking outrage that nobody in Brighton was sure where Ivor Novello’s house was, the wide-eyed innocence of (enfant terrible) Kathy Acker as I took her on her first ever Ghost Train

ride, and the seemingly panic-stricken eyes of a Jack Daniels-clutching Nick Cave as he nervously prepared for a public reading from his first novel *And the Ass Saw the Angel*.

With a secure base in Brighton, the Zap started looking further afield and we were able to venture forth on trips to venues such as the Diorama, the ICA and The Scala in London, as well as the Edinburgh Fringe, Glastonbury, Nottingham, York and Sheffield. As the empire grew over the years, and more and more schemes were developed – outreach programmes, sponsored tents and the like – I began to suspect the joys of the eighties ‘wheeler dealer’ culture were beginning to provide more jollies than the art itself. When dance culture began to erode the cult of the ‘personality’ and the crowd itself became the fun, I realised that the original experiment in perverted music-hall had run its course and it was time to move on. So I did.

If there is one image that sums up the true spirit of the Zap for me personally, it is not a performance by anyone famous or glamorous, or even one of the more spectacular and subversive events watched by hundreds on the seafront. It is Gary Hawke, silk bandana tied around his head, furiously attacking the maximum volume presets on his cheap keyboard as he

loses himself in the screamed psychedelia of ‘Sputnik Sputnik, Hendrix Yeah!’ Most Tuesday Night veterans drift to the bar, knowing this always signifies an interval of sorts, but also knowing that for five minutes every week, Gary is transformed – and like it or not, so are we.

### Finally ...

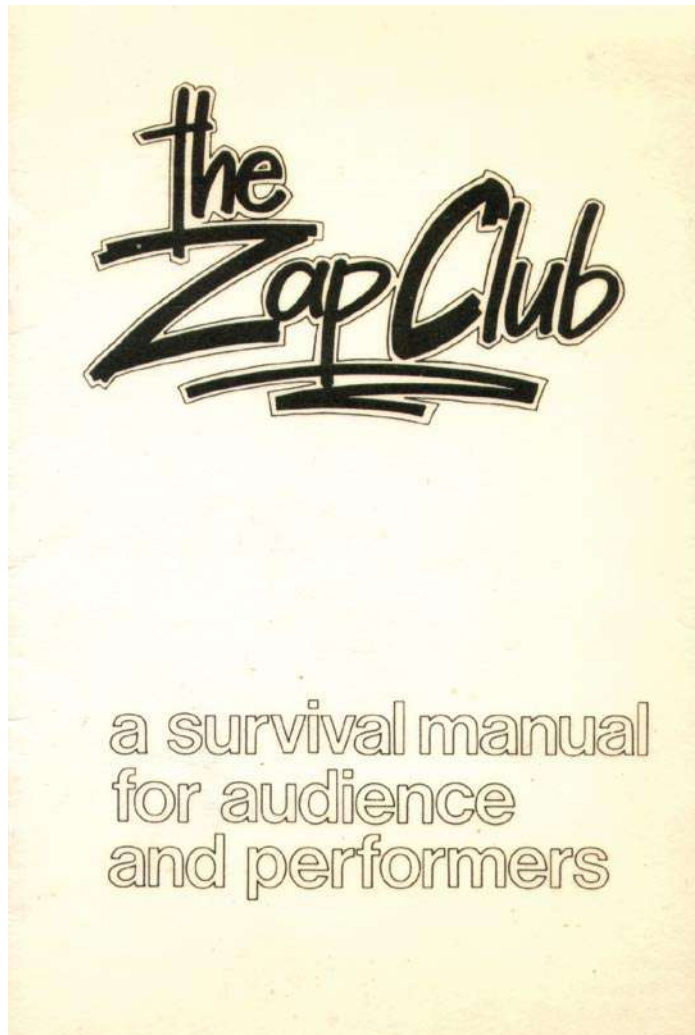
In Brighton today I suspect there are myriad ‘scenes’ accommodating every sub genre of fashion, lifestyle and culture you could possibly think of – with the possible exception of those who wear spats. For a short bright time the Zap Club (sometimes within a single week) provided a home (and an audience) for all those genres in one place. And it was magical. Honest.

### Ian Smith

*Ian Smith was the public face of the Zap Club from its inception through to the late 1980s when the club’s main focus moved from performance to dance culture. He ran away to Scotland, joined the circus, and started a company devoted to making mischief. He now runs Mischief La-Bas in Glasgow with wife, partner and ex-Zap barmaid Angie Dight (currently a flamenco dancer). Their kids Stan and Lil are apprentices to the trade and most recently appeared as cartoon terrorists spraying their policeman father with graffiti. Life goes on.*

‘The club, which is dedicated to innovation in entertainment, actually started nearly four years ago, but led a gypsy like existence until the founding of its permanent home under Brighton’s seafront arches last October. Since then it has gone from strength to strength staging more than 2,000 offbeat performances and boasting queues of customers impatient to witness another varied programme of theatre, dance, cabaret, poetry and music.’

*Brighton Evening Argus, October, 1985*



**Above:** The Zap Club original survival manual for new members, c. 1984  
**Main image:** 'Overture' Liz Aggiss in *Grotesque Dancer*, 1986 © Billy Cowie

## Zap Facts

### The Zap Debut (April 1982)

The first Zap gig was organised by Neil Butler and Amanda Webb in the Brighton Belle Club, the New Oriental Hotel with Ian Smith as compère and an eclectic bill of fare that included poet Roger Ely, Sergeant Stone and house band Resident Zero. It was reviewed favourably by New York journalist and Dylan biographer Bob Shelton.

### The Last Resort

The BBC featured Zap's Ian Smith as the 'contemporary entertainment face of Brighton' alongside Dora Bryan and veteran entertainer Douglas Byng in its documentary *The Last Resort*, broadcast in 1984.

### Royal Escape Eviction

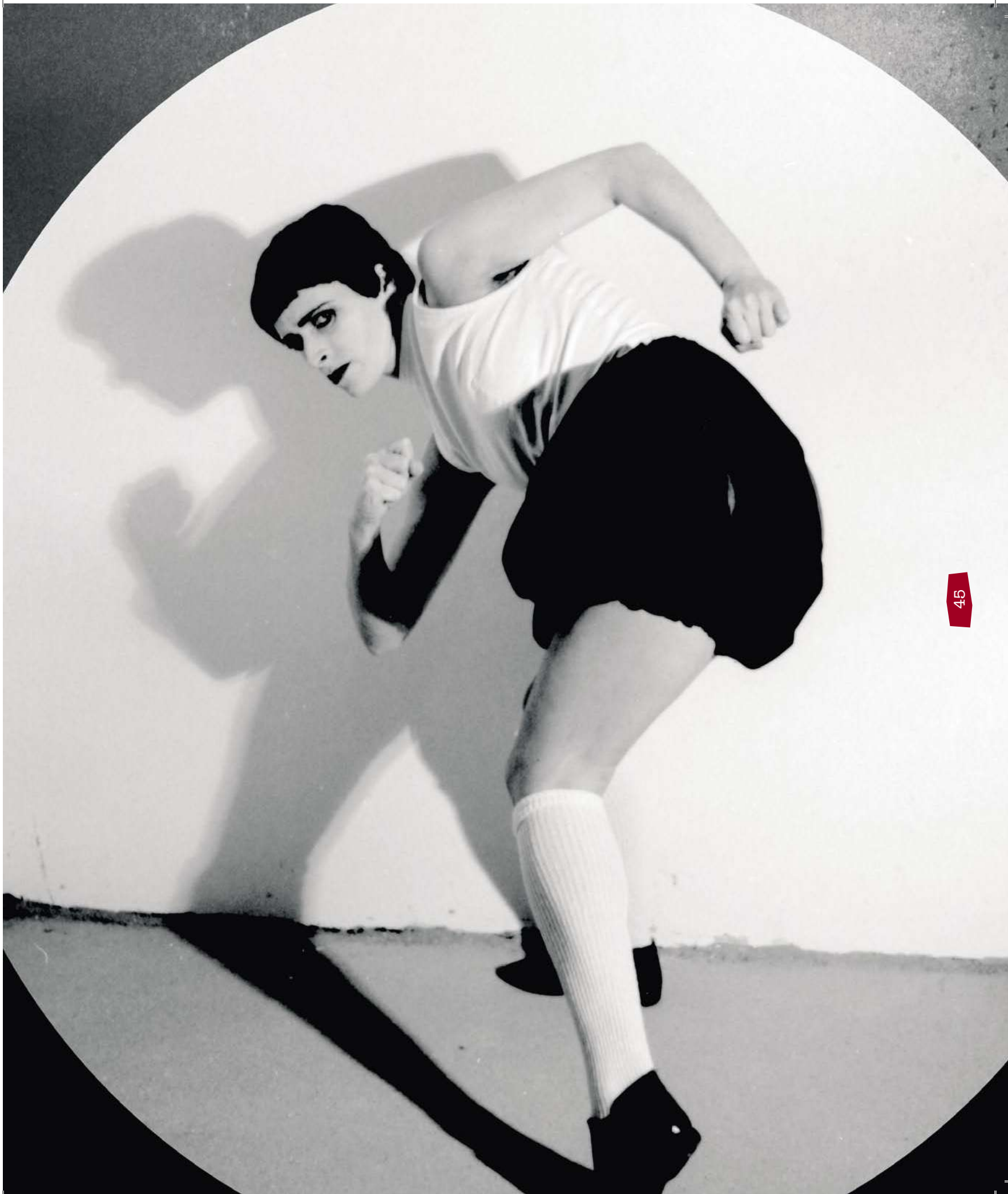
After endlessly testing the owners' patience with ever more elaborate events, this particular chapter in the Zap story came to an end when the audience was issued with laser specs as Neil Butler detonated 20 flashes and explosive maroons he had laced around the room.

### Zap Club Opening

Three and a half years after the idea was first conceived, the Zap Club got a permanent home in two (191/193 Kings Rd) arches on 1 November 1984. The arches were converted by architect Anthony Browne, with staff and artists volunteering labour, from digging foundations alongside the real builders to painting the damp walls with endless coats of waterproofing. On its opening, the Zap was marketed to members as a 'club for artists, run by artists who understand performers and their needs'.

### Performance Platform

Ian Smith's Tuesday night *Performance Platform* and later *Silver Tongue Club* (Sundays) played host to an eclectic mix of musicians, poets, stand-up comedians, artists, dancers, theatre groups and other acts that defy categorisation. Memorable Tuesday night veterans include: Steve Zen-Zen, Evrol, Marcusa, Monty the Moron, Toad Squad, Garry Hawk, Captain Stupidt and even Robin Scott of 'Pop Music' fame.



## Zap Memories

The Zap Club was the place for all the maverick creative acts that didn't fit anywhere else, it was the centre of gravity for all kinds of magical lunacy. (I once saw the wonderful Ron Geesin play there and he said it was ideal for him.) This being so the Tuesday Night Platform was therefore the 'fringe of the fringe'. It was a night when all the crazed creative lunatics of Brighton emerged from their dungeons, ivory towers, closets and sewers to entertain, astonish and occasionally torture the frenzied audience whipped into shape by a tall flamboyant fellow with long thin sideburns, square-frame glasses, a zig-zag pointed left eyebrow and commanding voice like John Lydon crossed with Vincent Price: Mr Ian Smith. He was the perfect compere for that circus of the strange: theatrical, Dadaesque, punky and unfailingly enthusiastic, he would get support and applause for even the most inept act, 'And now let's go ape-shit banana crazy for this great performer by crikey, let's erupt!'

**Monty Oxymoron, former Zap regular and keyboard player with The Damned**

When the Zap moved into the arches I made a heap of tables for them with little faces visible at low level on all four sides of the bases. They were 'Zappy Eaters', named for the high quality eateries around the country. When the arches were redeveloped most of them still survived and it was hard work to destroy them. I had undone myself with a planned obsolescence that never happened...

**Dave Clayden**

At the time I was an aspiring art student. It was Ian Smith's mad energy and his casual mention to me when he saw the band I was in (we played many times in the old Zap arches) that 'Did I know there was a place I could do this stuff at college?' that was [my introduction to] the Zap. Life in Brighton is like that. It is a small world.

**Jane Finnis**







# THE THRESHOLD

Produced By The AD/BC Workshop

KEN TURNER  
YOLANDE SNAITH  
ANDY COWTON  
DAVID TEMPLER  
ROSEMARY MOORE

DREAMER OF REALITIES  
ROLLER OF HORIZONS  
RUNNER IN THE SHADOWS  
PROJECTOR OF IMAGES  
COSTUME OF REFLECTION

EIGHT DAYS  
Midland Group Nottingham  
Zap Club Brighton

A REVIEW OF LIVE ART  
12th and 13th October  
18th and 19th October

Zap was part of an incredibly potent movement of alternative arts in the 1970s. Alongside such acts as The Pookies, Theatre of the Bleeding Obelisk, Bright Red, The Pierrotters, The Wild Wigglers, the nascent alternative cabaret and street scene had support and a home on the south coast. These seminal groups have had a profound impact on the contemporary performance scene in Britain today. It was only when Zap became more of an agency than a club that the energy declined.

In the 1980s, it was lively, varied, challenging and above all, accessible. The Zap was a genuine club, where like-minded weirdos could meet and be weird.

The Pierrotters would perform every day of the summer season as the club was being built – builders, acts, drinkers and sunbathers would watch and we'd busk. Sometimes the local fishermen (the last ones left, who mended their nets on the front) would give us fish in return for a song, which we'd deposit in the 'Rotterbag' with the rest of the coin – truly singing for our supper! It was the place to meet and to show-off. It was the place to experiment and debate. It was exciting and fun.

**Tony Lidington (a.k.a. Uncle Tacko, Pierrotters), regular performer at the Zap 1983-87**

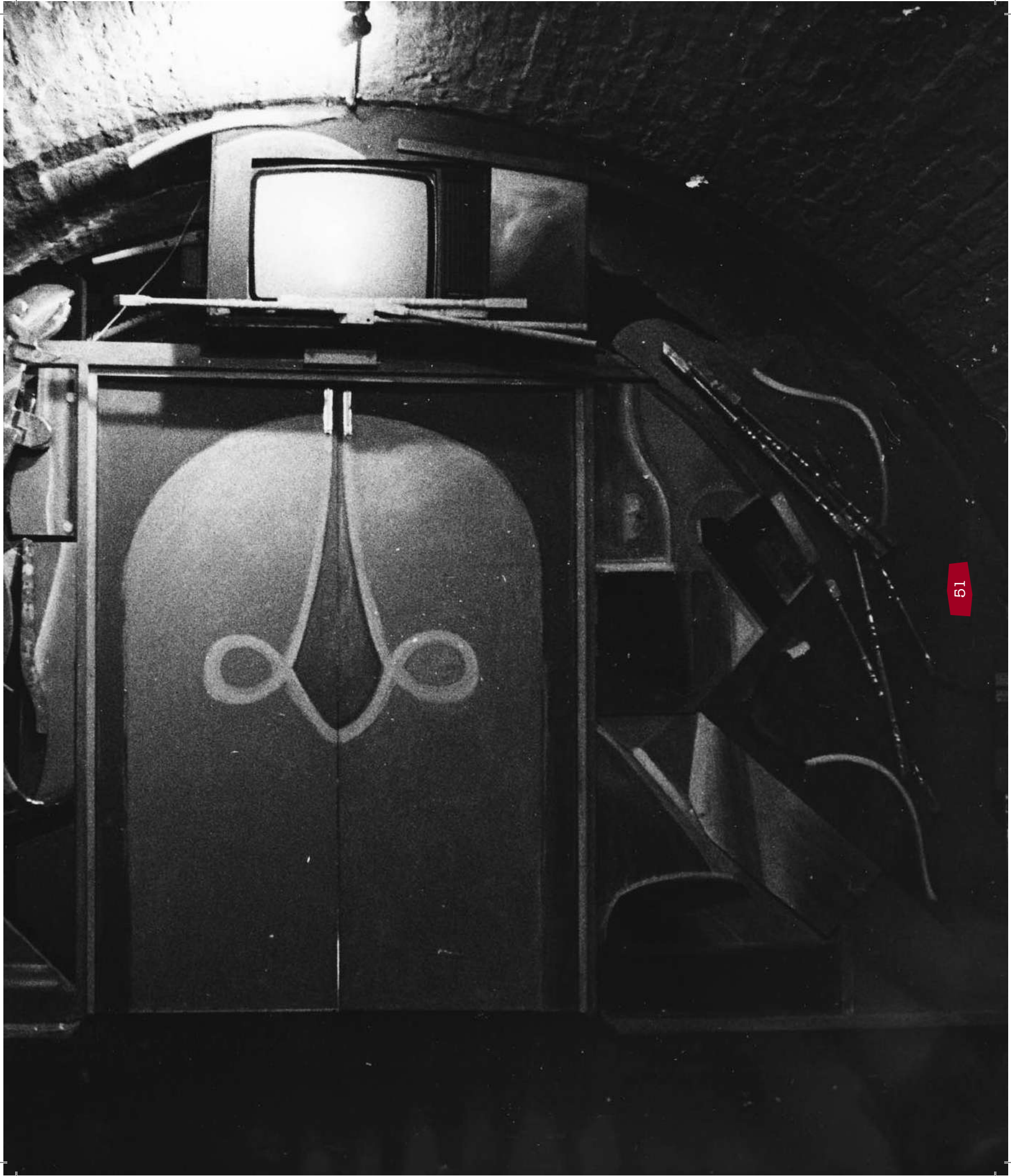
I first encountered Neil Butler at the Edinburgh Fringe in 1982, where I was doing an outside performance. He invited me to get in touch. Then he commissioned me for the Zap Club opening performance in 1984 – entitled *Threshold*. I was very grateful to Neil for the chance of performing. An Arts Council grant enabled the event to go ahead.

A short while before the time of *Threshold* Neil invited me to make a sculpture for the interior. This consisted of a design for the inner door into the bar and meeting arch with several three-dimensional pieces around the walls, including drawings made while I was 'night-watching' and researching ideas for the sculpture. This was happening during the construction and conversion of the arches and I had to be very careful to not puncture the damp-proof sealing substance on the walls. The sculpture made for the door was eventually stolen when the club went on to break through the arches into a larger space. It was made of wood with a gesso surface upon which was laid real gold leaf and tempera paint. The group that performed *Threshold* with me were Yolanda Snaith (the now renowned dancer); Andy Cowton (sound artist); David Templer (video artist); and Rosemary Moore (costume designer). It was part of a programme called *Eight Days – A Review of Live Art*. *Threshold* was reviewed in *Performance Art* magazine.

**Ken Turner, performance artist and first commissioned artist in the permanent Zap arch**

**Main image:** Ken Turner's original Zap Club door installation, 1984





**Main image:** Divas – Maria Burton and Sian Thomas in *Eleven Executions*, 1988 © Ginny Munden



## Chapter Two

# The Zap Club Years

‘One hundred performances and six years after its first night the Zap Club has a permanent home – two fully equipped (and fully licensed) arches on Brighton seafront! Its anarchic mixture of cabaret, art, experimental theatre, poetry, dance, music and video has bemused, entertained and delighted a total audience of over 20,000. The club has presented over 600 acts in nightclubs from Brighton to London and Amsterdam and now the Zap Club explodes!’

from *The Zap Club: a survival manual for audience and performers, 1984*

When the Zap Club opened in its first permanent home in two damp arches beneath King’s Road on 1 November 1984, it marked a new era in Brighton’s art and culture scene. Opening its doors to a pioneering mix of art and entertainment six nights a week, fifty weeks a year, it expanded Brighton’s cultural horizons, and its ripples were felt far and wide. For the next decade and a half it played host to an extraordinary array of performers, artists, DJs, dancers, bands, poets, Live Artists and comedians from across the world, presented in a unique form of mixed media cabaret. It was a catalyst in the regeneration of Brighton’s beleaguered seafront in the mid-1980s, helped launch the careers of many young artists who have since become household names, and introduced a whole generation to a viable and stimulating alternative to mainstream culture.



Above: Simon Fanshawe

## Finding the Edge: the Zap, the Seafront and a Turning Tide

**Simon Fanshawe**

'It may have been happenstance, but the Zap was the start of something by the sea. As the channel always reminds us in Brighton, we live on the edge. And when the tide rolls in and out it always starts and ends somewhere new.'

Brighton & Hove starts at the sea. The water defines the city. Its history is a constant conversation with the waves and the millpond stillness of the English Channel. It had no option but to be a seaside town. No one ever invited it to industrialise. Fishing, yes. But factories, not likely! Briefly during Victorian times the railway provoked an excursion into metal and manufacturing. But that never trumped the sea. Work never triumphed over pleasure. Brighton & Hove always sought its destiny in the happiness of others, while also enjoying the fruits of that indulgence for itself.

It thrived as a fishing village that was then destroyed by the French who set it alight in the sixteenth century in the war with England. It began its recovery, by harvesting the sea until, in the early eighteenth century, it had re-established its prosperity. But the waves took revenge and in 1703 washed the town back into the Channel. It struggled until, once again, the sea came to its rescue in the form of Dr Richard Russell, eighteenth-century entrepreneur and marketing genius.

In 1750 Russell wrote 'A dissertation on the use of seawater in the afflictions of the glands' (an early alternative therapy). And in 1753 he opened his clinic in Brighton, on the site of the Royal Albion Hotel. He persuaded people that the very coldness of the water was exactly what would do them most good. 'Dr Russell guarantees that fresh air and exercise will not damage your health. Each dipping in the sea will strengthen your brain and revitalize your nerves.

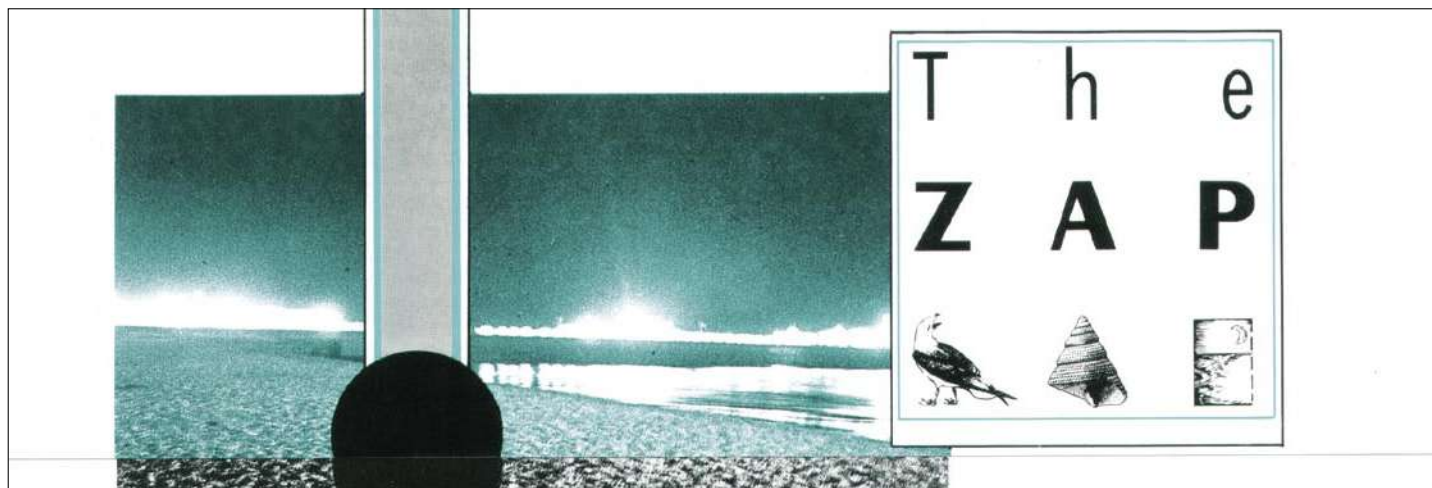
If you suffer from glandular fever, consumption, ruptures or madness (especially the latter), Brighton sea-water is for you!' By the late 1750s Brighton had become the country's principal watering hole, overtaking even fashionable Bath.

The point of this historical diversion is not to give you the wherewithal to dazzle your mates at the next pub quiz, but to remind us all how the seafront has always been the primary influence on the city. The Prince Regent, when he came in the early 1800s, did so because the curative powers of the water had made Brighton the place to be fashionable. And the squillions of tourists who have flocked ever since the railway made it a cheap day out in the 1840s, came to paddle, kiss each other quick on the shingle beach, and break their teeth on seaside rock.

The Zap Club, when it opened in 1984 in its arch under Kings Road, seemed dazzling and original, but in many ways was just another in a long line of moments when the sea came to the rescue of the town. Whatever its claims to novelty at the time, and, make no mistake, it was indeed daring and singular at its birth, it was one marker in a long history.

By the 1970s English seaside resorts, like the old Edwardian ladies they were, had begun to die. Margate, Hastings, Eastbourne all started the slide to genteel disrepair and poverty. They couldn't offer the newly well-off working class the glamour and gloss of a holiday abroad. Parents still came but their children wanted something





more. The man to give it to them was Freddie Laker. This pile-em-high-sell-em-cheap king of the skies had beaten the national airlines by giving the working class an escape from the British seaside to the Med for the price of a fortnight in Rhyl. So the British fled to the sun. Brighton and Hove began to suffer with the others. But the city fathers (and a couple of mothers) on the council saw the signs. In 1977 Laker, having conquered the charter market, started his first scheduled flights. In the same year, the council opened the Brighton Centre. The city transformed its appeal by becoming a conference destination. The town stuttered towards economic life again. But the seafront died. By the 1980s it was Dickensian. A bleak hang-out by day for dropouts, druggies and the disenfranchised who broke into the many unoccupied arches under the road and slept, zonked out and dosed.

And at night there were a few private drinking clubs that clung to life. The old Cruising Club, the Brighton Sailing Club, The Allen West Angling Club and others operated mainly on volunteer help. By day they were shut, and by night a dwindling band of old mates, sailors and anglers drank behind closed doors. Increasingly the seafront became dangerous even to those old hobbyists who had been going there for years.

There were the occasional glimmers during 'the season'. From Easter to September shops selling neon-coloured seaside paraphernalia

(curiously inappropriately named 'fancy goods') spluttered into life. But they battled the decay. They fought off the symptoms of economic syphilis as deprivation allowed the dealers to colonise the now fallen-into-disrepair road, which ran tight up against the arches. The seafront was effectively closed to the public.

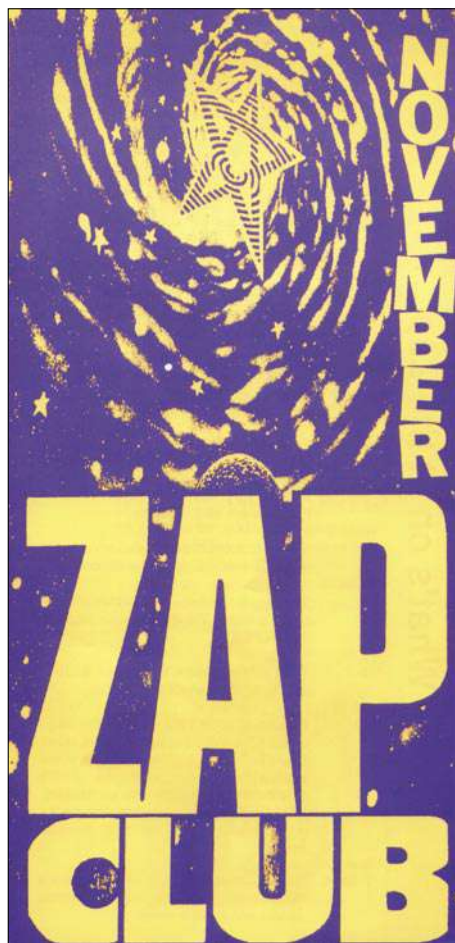
Walking through the artists' quarter now, it's hard to remember how bleak it was when the Zap, having travelled around the town to different venues, stumbled on the idea of acquiring two of the arches. One belonged to the local council and one to the county. Dank, dripping dungeons, they were full of potential, as estate agents say, but you wouldn't want to perform there. It was a leap of faith – for the management of the Zap and for the performers. And as a venue it was a success, in no small part because Brighton likes an odd idea. When Anita Roddick said she was going to start a shop where she made foot lotion out of peppermint, shampoo out of bananas or whatever, people in Brighton said, Bring it on! And when Pookiesnackenburger came in from busking outside to find fame and fortune as Stomp, hitting things indoors, no one really questioned it.

The Zap, a wet arch exposed to the fresh winds of artistic invention and the southwesterly from the sea, was an obvious place for the likes of Stomp to start. As it was for many others. I remember seeing The Blue Man Group for the

first time there. And I was one of the fledgling performers myself – one night with Julian Clary in his Joan Collins Fan Club days. He wore a rubber outfit and there was so much dust in what passed for a dressing-room (a curtained off area behind the bar) that I had to polish him with Pledge before he went on stage.

But while the Zap played host to the unusual, the brilliant, the dire, the dull and the frankly unintelligible, its contribution to Brighton was not just as a venue to experiment and a place for artists to play in. It was the first lick of paint on what was to become one of the city's main attractions.

In the eighties the town was in dire economic straits. The recession had hit an economy already weakened by the decline in tourism. And despite the success of the Brighton Centre, there seemed little to replace it. Unemployment rose to 13.5% and charity shops were the biggest names on the High Street. The town needed to reinvent itself. It found one new lease of life in a new council. In 1986, a young Labour contingent was elected to majority on Brighton Council. This marked a return to its non-conformist roots. Brighton had once spawned the early Co-operative movement. Labour Peer Lewis Cohen had inaugurated Brighton Festival and the Alliance Building Society, which built huge swathes of the suburbs. Yet Brighton's politics had for many years been dominated by the Conservatives. Even some of them felt they had



**Main image:** The Zap Club arches, Brighton Seafront © credit Ray Gibson

been in power too long. This new Labour council saw the potential in the seafront. They encouraged the expansion of the Zap and invested public money. The success of the club started a new conversation with the other traders, who had been very wary of competition. They had tended to see the seafront as a zero sum game. New traders meant money in new pockets and out of their old ones. The Zap had started to prove that this was not the case by attracting a whole new crowd. It had also demonstrated something that was to prove the making of the seafront economically. People who lived nearby in the centre of town realised that the noise from clubs beneath the shallow cliff dissipated out over the sea as revellers left at 2 a.m. Unwittingly, the Zap had become a glimmer of hope in the seafront's future.

In the 1986 Labour manifesto there had been a rather whimsical commitment to a local history museum. Driven by the careful and adept hand of a councillor named Andy Durr, this became the Fishing Museum. Conscious of the wariness of the traders, the seafront's first initiative was this free attraction, celebrating the original occupants of Brighton's seafront. The sea was once more becoming the instrument of Brighton's success by playing host to a revival of its seafaring heritage and sowing the seeds of a new ecology of artistic innovation. Shades of what Brighton was to become by the turn of the century, when, as Britain's newest city, it exemplified a sense of modernity built on a long tradition of innovation and eccentricity.

The Zap had somehow become a model. It gave the council confidence to talk to the traders and to realise the potential of the other arches, many still rotting in disrepair. By 1992 there was a plan. Three million pounds of public money – one million a year – was invested in the regeneration of the seafront. The arches were let at submarket rents to artists on the proviso that they sold goods that they had made. The fish and chip shop was leased on the condition that they ran a proper carousel. And clubs were established in some of the other arches. The tenants were given rent holidays in exchange for capital investment. And while letting to commercial operators, the

council clearly operated an informal policy of avoiding the multiples, the name breweries, in favour of local organisations. Three million pounds of public money, at the last count, has levered some £50-60 million of private investment, as the licensing of the Zap Club gave rise to a deal with the police to concentrate new club licences 'south of the A259', in official speak; in other words, on the seafront.

Again the sea has been the key to another phase in Brighton's life. When 250,000 people gathered peacefully on the seafront to watch Fatboy Slim's free concert in 2002, Brighton pulled a new pair of frilly knickers out of the laundry basket of people's pleasure. Monsieur Culbutto, the human weeble – weebles, you will remember, wobble but don't fall down – hit the front page of *The Guardian* when he came from France to perform in Streets of Brighton (1996), and the town's reputation for eccentric entertainment became fixed in the public's mind. The images tumble out of recent memory. And you can join the dots from the day the first show in the Zap arches peeked over the wall of gloom that had descended on the seafront to the cluster of imaginative enjoyment that is today's beachfront experience. It may have been happenstance, but the Zap was the start of something by the sea. As the channel always reminds us in Brighton, we live on the edge. And when the tide rolls in and out it always starts and ends somewhere new.

### **Simon Fanshawe**

*Simon Fanshawe is a writer and broadcaster and has been involved in Brighton ever since he fell in love with it in the 1970s. He came to University of Sussex to study law, which his mother characterised as 'running away to become a communist'. He never did. Instead he became an award-winning comedian for ten years – the Perrier Award-winner in 1989. He has since pursued a career making programmes for radio and TV and writing freelance on arts, culture and social issues for the national press. He has a column in The Guardian. He is a non-executive director of a number of companies both charitable and commercial. He has no dog.*

‘The Zap Club – which specialises in an effervescent mix of performance art, music, cabaret and video – is staffed by performers: an advantage that cuts both ways. It provides performers (stand-up comics, session musicians, performance artists) with a little security; and the performers, says the Zap’s Neil Butler, give the club a special flavour since the work in the busy programme is being put on by people from behind-the-scenes who know exactly what it’s all about.’

Naseem Khan, *New Statesman*, June, 1986





## An Arts Education – Performing and Working in the Zap Club

Sian Thomas

‘When I needed artistic stimulation, I found it in two arches on the seafront more readily than in my Art School environs. As Jago Eliot put it to me, we grew up together, and much of that growing up was around the Zap Club.’

I came to Brighton to study Dance and Fine Art on the Expressive Arts course (now Visual and Performing Arts) at Brighton Polytechnic (now University of Brighton). During my time at college I became involved with a venue where I forged my own curriculum of artistic learning that took place in the evenings and at weekends.

The decayed elegance of Brighton’s facades was a delight after south-east London’s edgy grime, but as a teenage performance art groupie I found myself culturally bereft. In these current heady ‘London-by-the-sea’ multi-festival-fuelled dance-agencie’d, arts-marketed, gallery-filled, site-specific, live-literature’d days, it is hard to imagine Brighton as a place lacking in underground and fringe opportunities. Brighton Polytechnic gave occasional compulsory offerings that fitted in with educational needs, but such needs did not meet the desire for Super-8 film showings and glass-smashing industrial-found-sound insect poets, such as I yearned for.

It was rumoured that a new venue was opening in the arches on the seafront; that it was called the Zap Club, and that it would be a place where ‘experimental’ was the norm. Not having money to spend on tickets for anything – lack of tobacco and beer was not an option – a group of us ventured to ask if there was anything we could do in exchange for entrance. Thus began a symbiotic working relationship, an exchange of labour for artistic stimulation, connection and interaction.

To begin with I was posted to the table that sold publications, badges and T-shirts; I

distributed flyers and posters, did odd jobs and hung around long enough until the club matriarch, Angie Goodchild, gave me a job on the bar. Those two small arches on the seafront were host to many doyens of the day including Kathy Acker, Bow Gamelan Ensemble, Anne Bean, Richard Leyzell, Anne Seagrave, Laibach, Nico, and later The Happy Mondays.

Like in many small organisations, the staff of the club became a community. Most were artists and/or students. The doormen were philosophy students with an ability to look trouble in the eye so questioningly that trouble questioned itself. The cellar keeper and the technician were both writers of wit, and the box office manager was a lifelong Ray Davies devotee who engaged us daily in debate on the comparative empowerment of winkle picker stilettos over Dr Marten boots. After performances there was music; after music there was more music, and we danced into the early hours and then skinny-dipped in the sea with the odd floating rat and visible sewage.

There would be performances by club staff. In any other environment this could have been a karaoke nightmare, but The Frank Chickens hadn’t introduced them to Britain yet, and the calibre of staff skills was high and varied enough that people bought tickets and the place was packed.

On one particular ‘platform’ evening the rows of wooden fold-up chairs were full. The space between the first row and the stage was crammed with people on the floor, and the spaces around the chairs were rammed with

**Above:** Sian Thomas © Ginny Munden

**Opposite:** *Shoom* club flyer – the groundbreaking London club night hits Brighton, for a special one-off visit, July 1988

people standing. I went up on the small stage and assuredly began a solo comedy dance improvisation that I had been developing. Everything was going fine: the audience was attentive; expectant eyes watched through the smoke, hands held onto pints, still, as they awaited the performer's next move. I awaited the next move too because I didn't know what it was. Synchronistic voices in the ether didn't come through, the intuitive conviction of the improviser was stifled; I did nothing, said nothing, stumph! I was not experienced enough to have any fallback options. I walked to the front of the stage and stood hopefully; the audience were hoping too – if I didn't do something soon the suspense would be lost and replaced swiftly with embarrassment. 'I'm sorry,' I said, 'I have nothing to say to you right now,' and walked out of the room. No one clapped. Not a sound. I ran down to the dingy dressing-room and cried into a bottle of vodka. If, as W.H. Auden says, 'the purpose of education is to teach the student to endure maximum stress,' then that experience was worth years of the official education that I was, by now, neglecting.

Collaborations were formed. One of the doormen, Mark Waugh, and a programmer, Steve Slater, were amongst local artists who formed a Super-8 film installation group called Situation Cinema. Bonds were formed during pantomimes, performances were dreamed up during slow nights on the bar.

One evening, while setting up the bar, a group of London DJs arrived. They wore colourful clothes, dungarees, bandanas and a spattering of yellow smiley faces, yet somehow they looked good. Later that night, balancing and weaving through the crowd with a wobbly stack of dirty beer glasses, I noted that, where normally the crowd were completely unappreciative of the skills of the glass collector, these people were different; they moved out of the way and offered to help. They didn't appear to be religious or evangelical, but they were ecstatic. Fully-grown men wore baggy shorts and head torches and punched the air with phenomenal joy and lack of inhibition. This was called *Shoom* and as such I think that Zap could claim to have

introduced Brighton to house and rave music. *Shoom* and the Balearic DJs became regular. The atmosphere on these nights was very positive, alcohol sales were low, and we just served endless pints of water! Eventually I would be on the dance floor in cycling shorts, vest and trainers, jumping and thumping the air, smiling with everyone at the shared experience of a sort of liberation.

The Zap Club temporarily shut down whilst the two small arches were converted into an architect-designed state-of-the-art club that included a larger performance area and dressing-room. It reopened in May 1989.

My own career as a dancer was developing: I was asked to join Liz Aggiss and Billy Cowie's dance theatre company Divas. The company was popular in Europe where we toured regularly. Divas performed at Dance Umbrella at The Place. That year, the dance festival extended its programme to regional venues. One of these was the new Zap Club and Divas was on the programme. Strangely, one of the organisers objected to me being a performer with the company whilst working on the bar in the club. The objection was on the grounds that it degraded the perceived quality of the dance programme and showed a lack of professionalism. Of course, the programme went ahead and we performed at the club, but it did mark the beginning of a shift in my own perceptions of the value of my work as a professional artist. Whilst I did not think that bar work in any way depreciated the ability to be a devoted dancer, I no longer wanted to perform for nothing, simply because I was a member of staff at the club.

As a solo performer I was still interested in improvised dance, particularly percussive dance. The late performance artist/drummer Paul Burwell asked me to collaborate with him on a piece that was to be commissioned by Zap. This was really a first involvement with Zap beyond the club, and the commissioning process intrigued me. Whilst honoured to be asked, I did not quite understand why we would be given money to



make a piece of work, but not be paid for the performance. We created a metallic flower garden of hidden electronic triggers and microphones. As we moved around the environment packs of Hoovers, drills and old gramophones would come to life and we would interact.

A member of Brighton-based Yes/No People saw this performance and invited me to choreograph a stick sequence for *Night of a Hundred Drums* on Hove Lagoon. This working relationship grew and the company involved me in the first incarnation of their show *Stomp* that previewed at the Zap Club before going to Edinburgh and then the world! The club was a good proofing ground for new shows and was used as such by many local artists.

The house music/rave scene was rolling on, though some of us felt that the sheer energy and joyous sense of play was waning, and in a bid to keep this alive we wanted to put on a dance night that would achieve the necessary lack of cool to rejuvenate the uninhibited participant. Mark Waugh and I had met a true avatar of libertine rave culture in the form of (the late) Jago Eliot. The three of us teamed up with a fantastically costumed glamorous door mistress, Dawn Blake, to put on a night called *Fundamental*. We approached Zap director Neil Butler, and asked him if we could use the Zap Club as a venue. *Fundamental* was truly

successful in mixing up performance and dance culture, where there was no sense of separation between music, dancers, performances and play. Huge amounts of effort were put into the décor. Films and performances were made specifically for each night, and an ever-growing group of people came together to create the special atmosphere of the evening. Zap paid us a fee, which we spent on the DJs, artists and décor, whilst the door and bar money went to the club.

Zap presented an innovative artistic programme and helped to develop many young artists. Speaking for myself, I was gainfully employed, and exposed to an eclectic programme, of which I was allowed to become a part. When I needed artistic stimulation, I found it in two arches on the seafront more readily than in my Art School environs. Jago Eliot put it to me that we grew up together, and much of that growing up was around the Zap Club. However, I am not sure that Zap knew what to do with its artists when they grew up. When we became the stimulators, the organisation seemed unable to make the transition to seeing and treating us as professionals. Possibly this is a question for arts organisations generally; is there a point where artist development can unwittingly become artist exploitation? The desire of the artist to create can become so urgent that when given

the opportunity, it is taken with gratitude and a sense of collaboration. Yet when financial gains are generated from the exchange, artist and enabler must be equally rewarded. Whilst my memories of the Zap Club and its innovations are full of fondness and admiration, they are always slightly tainted by a feeling that at some stage my naïveté was to my fiscal loss.

In its heyday, I would go to the club and dance for a few hours on most evenings. This was how I kept fit for dance work and extended my connection with the club. My 'life' membership ran out when the club was sold, though the connection with the organisation is still active. A childhood involvement with street theatre, a later love of site-specific performance, and a waning interest in the drive to perform myself culminated in my current work as an outside theatre programmer and Director of *Celebrations* for Winchester Hat Fair, a thirty-three-year-old festival of street theatre. I am now in regular collaboration with Zap Art, through its work in the street and site-specific performance sector.

It is true what they say: everything eventually comes full circle. A few years back, after having not seen Neil Butler for around ten years, I got on a plane and sat down. Neil appeared and sat in the seat next to me, and said, 'How utterly cosmic'. Of course!

### Sian Thomas

*Sian Thomas has long been motivated by the desire to place performance in a non-traditional venue setting. She worked as a performer with percussive theatre company Stomp and with dance theatre company Divas. During this time she choreographed dance for nightclubs, Paris catwalks, car parks and public squares. This led to her organising and programming street and field events and eventually to her current work as Director of Celebrations, Winchester Hat Fair. She also works as a freelance programmer of outside performance and is currently an associate programmer of Street Arts 2008 for The Anvil in Basingstoke. Sian sits on the boards of Independent Street Arts Network and British Arts Festival Association.*

‘People take risks here – and we think the audiences are very brave ... on any one night they don’t really know what they’re going to see and we have to hope they understand they are either going to enjoy it or hate it, but at least they will be experiencing something vital.’

Angie Goodchild, *Brighton Evening Argus*, March, 1987



**Opposite:** Zap Club listings flyer featuring Yes/No People, progenitors of global performance phenomenon Stomp, 1989  
**Main image:** Divas – ‘Lulu and the Strongman’ – Maria Burton and Sian Thomas in *Eleven Executions*, 1988 © Ginny Munden



# The Zap Club – A Personal (and Selective) Retrospective of an Era

**Richard Paul-Jones**

‘Somewhere between the short-term pragmatism of Thatcher and the nihilistic ‘no future’ of the Situationists, Neil [Butler] went about the business of creating myths. The original Zap Club looks destined to become one of them.’

In 1981 I moved to Brighton and was working at a fledgling advertising agency. We had invested in a photocopier and to recoup some of the outlay had advertised a photocopying service. One Friday afternoon there was an explosion in the studio in the form of Pat Nottage, teacher, scientist and some-time bass guitarist. She was brandishing artwork for a poster promoting a night of performance, comedy, dance, music and mayhem. Watching the copies emerge from the machine was my introduction to the Zap Club.

The advertising agency was something of a stopgap while I found my feet in this new town. I had come from London, which had given me a fairly comprehensive exposure to performance art and ‘alternative’ culture with hours wasted at The Roundhouse and days working at the Arts Lab. From there I had developed my brilliant career on the fringes of rock ‘n’ roll, touring the UK’s theatres, clubs, student unions and motorways. I became a Zap regular and it was in some senses like coming home; I felt increasingly drawn to the renegade band of performers and their friends who made up the Zap entourage. Over the next few years I was able to contribute time, technology and transport as the club made its peripatetic way through Brighton’s pubs, clubs and miscellaneous venues.

When the Zap opened in its own venue on Brighton beach I left the agency and became the club’s Technical Manager, a role dedicated to a never-ending battle with the elements and

the subterranean environment to keep the sound, lighting and video systems functioning.

The Zap Club was the first licensed club to open to the public on the beach. It was not easy getting the necessary permissions and all credit is due to the directors Neil and Pat Butler, and Dave Reeves for their tenacity in getting the club started – and later, with Angie Goodchild, for keeping it running for so long.

Neil was the driving force behind the club and its creative direction. He was apolitical, refused to vote and appeared unaffected by the hideous machinations of Thatcherism, which were in full flow at the time. He veered towards anarchy and in particular the International Situationists, a Franco-Italian post-surreal, anarchist philosophical movement who denied everything, including themselves, and thought we were all going to hell in a handcart. Somewhere between the short-term pragmatism of Thatcher and the nihilistic ‘no future’ of the Situationists, Neil went about the business of creating myths. The original Zap Club looks destined to become one of them.

At its best the Zap was brilliant. From two seafront arches it introduced a whole load of stuff to a new audience. Tony Allen, ‘the godfather of alternative comedy’, referred to the venue on the opening night as ‘like playing in a pair of nostrils’. These arches hosted an astonishing line-up of live music acts, many of whom are now household names. But

**Above:** Richard Paul-Jones  
**Opposite:** Screaming Sirens In Search of Utopia poster (another Neil Butler incarnation), 1986



the life-force of the early club was a kind of alternative cabaret: the newly emerging art of alternative stand-up; all sorts of dance from the ludicrously pompous to the downright peculiar; open 'talent' nights; a comic convention; a poetry festival; performance cooking; a whole host of 'performance art'; a busking festival – and more. It thrust this mixture of bizarre mayhem on the wider population of Brighton, whether they liked it or not, by taking it onto the streets, the beach, and on occasion, into the sea, with free public performances.

From time to time the club's aspirations became too big for the arches and spilled out into a more public arena, many pursuing the myth-creation theme. One of the earliest was the mystical cult of 'Performance Surfing'. Neil and a host of local artists produced a week of surf related events. The week culminated with a beach spectacular where this group of demi-god surfers arrived from the sea, brandishing red flares, flags, banners and drums and performed a primitive ritual on a stage built on the beach, before returning whence they came. All this myth-making became endemic, and as the detail fades in the memories of those who were there, recollections of a lot of weird shit that may or may not have happened remain, and so the myth endures.

Zap also planted the Zap Tent in a derelict town-centre car park during Brighton Festival for a couple of years. This big top, packed with an extremely accessible programme, was immensely popular with the great unwashed of Brighton who seldom attended 'official' festival events.

Although the Zap was principally the 'brainchild' of Neil Butler, it could never have happened without the enthusiastic work of many others. On the administrative, business and staggering-from-day-to-day side were the company directors who invested time and, more significantly, money.

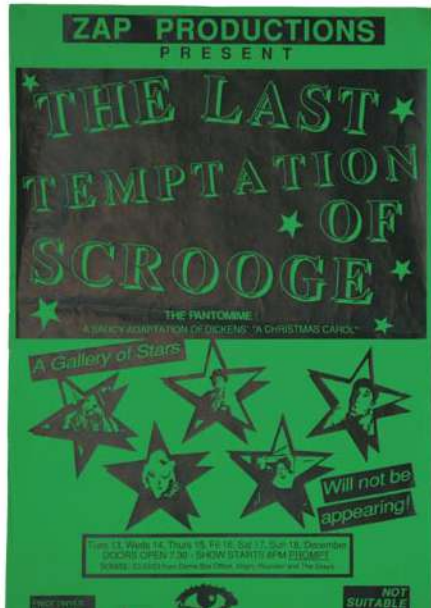
But there were others in the first rank whose contribution was indispensable. Ian Smith

was probably the best known 'face' at the club and a powerhouse of creativity. He produced a constant stream of ideas and silliness that (barely) justified the overuse of the word 'zany' by the press. His Tuesday night 'talent' show was open to all, some of it brilliant and inspired, some complete nonsense. But regardless of the awfulness of the act, Ian managed to ensure that everyone who took part in those nights left the stage with a *Tuesday Night Veteran* badge and a modicum of self-respect. It helped ensure that this otherwise dead mid-week night continued providing opportunities for wannabes, the occasional gem, ticket revenue and bar-take for several years. Not only that, but he cleaned the toilets and worked on the door and a thousand other things, helping to keep the club fresh and vibrant.

Then there was the bar. Bars make the money, and it is in cash. And because they deal in cash they are vulnerable to 'creative siphoning'. Heather Fry was the first bar manager at the club and probably ran the 'straightest' bar in Brighton, if not the UK. The stock control was extraordinary and seldom more than a pint or two out. I am not privy to the detail but it is probable that without the bar income being so effectively protected by Heather, the club would not have survived the first year or so.

But perhaps the most important contribution was that made by the army of local artists, performers and 'ordinary' people who threw themselves into the Zap project year-in and year-out. They included many established performers who liked the idea of the Zap and offered their services either free or for expenses, though there were always some who charged the going rate. And there was the weirdest array of hangers-on who found niches within the organisation and developed their own modes of expression. Before the club opened and was just a damp hole in the ground, they dug out the basement, brushed and scraped, sanded and painted every inch of the place and did a thousand





**Above:** *Last Temptation of Scrooge* Christmas panto, 1988 – an adaptation of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, by Mick Dwyer, Mike Lance, David Olrod et al.  
**Above:** Zap membership flyer

other things and then started again when the incessant damp broke through. The project would never have taken off had this work been paid for at commercial rates.

Some have become very successful artists, touring the world, earning plaudits and vast sums of money; some have got 'real jobs' both in and out of the entertainment industry; some are still chasing the illusive dream of stardom and some are dead. Without them and their boundless energy, goodwill, creativity and in some cases innocence of worldly affairs, the club would have been a much more prosaic place. They are the unsung work-horses of the Zap and history should pay them credit.

It couldn't last of course. Keeping up this bombardment of creative lunacy couldn't go on forever; it was expensive to produce and much of it was difficult to sell and needed subsidy from guaranteed income streams. The club already had the bar take and the only other thing that almost guaranteed cash flow was late night cheap entertainment – that is to say recorded music. Despite protestations from on-high that it would never become a dance club, that's exactly what happened – the range of activities was effectively reduced to one – dancing to music. The club was packed out most nights and eventually expanded into three neighbouring arches. When these also became packed out the directors took the only sensible decision and sold up.

It is significant that many of the Zap's innovatory ideas have since been successfully developed by others. Brighton has any number of dance clubs, many in arches on the seafront. Komedia has managed to thrive in the theatrical and comedy market. The rather tired Ladyboys of Bangkok and the Spiegelent attend every festival as mediocre ghosts of the original Zap Tent. Stand-up comedy has been and gone as the 'new rock n' roll' and is maturing both on TV and in Hollywood. And as for the incomparable banality of the talent nights, we need look no further than reality TV for shameless halfwits who will do anything to sate their desire to be

noticed. In 1995, just before the club finally changed hands, I started the Zap Cybercafé, which, while not the first to open (it was second to London's Cyberia), was the first to close, a pattern followed by countless others since.

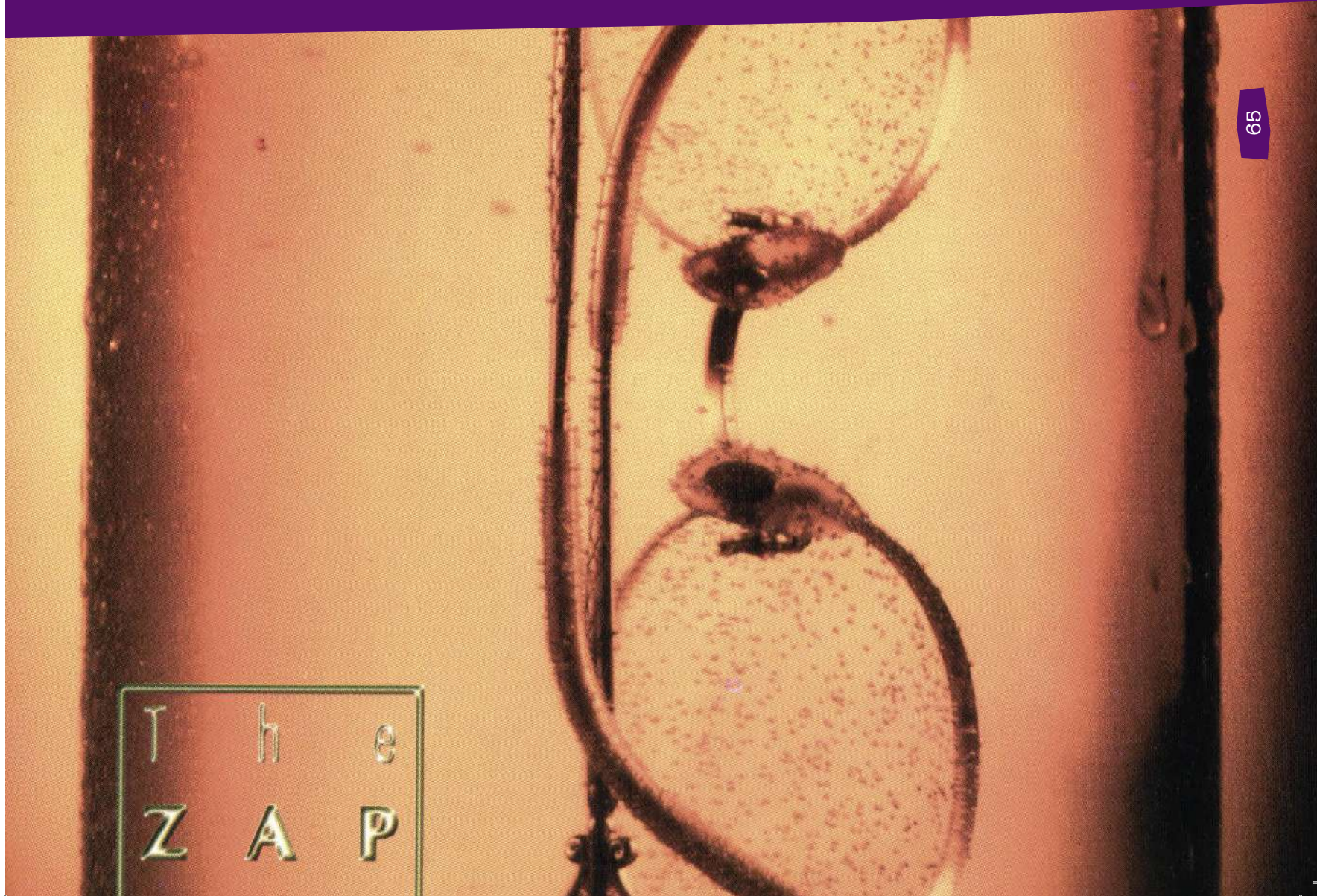
Looking back to its roots in Thatcher's Britain, and Neil's apolitical stance notwithstanding, there is a fanciful parallel between the Zap and New Labour. As with New Labour, many of the 'party members' involved in the early days feel some disappointment with the result, a deviation perhaps from what they understood to be the manifesto, somewhere between fair shares for all and jam tomorrow. But seen in context, this is simply a fleeting, if steep, section of the learning curve. The abiding memory is a time of guilty innocence, creative chaos and dancing till dawn with a strange collection of like-minded souls. In short, a real achievement for Brighton's creative community of the 1980s, a tribute to their skills, talents and enthusiasm, encapsulated in two sweaty arches, creating this most original of clubs.

### Richard Paul-Jones

*Richard Paul-Jones' first exposure to working in the performing arts was at the London Arts Lab as a student. He later road-crewed for various rock bands before moving to Brighton in 1981. He was Technical Manager at the Zap Club from 1984 until 1988. This role developed to Production Manager for Zap's outdoor events. He was Production Manager for the Primrose Hill Fireworks from 1996 to 2000 and other events for the London Borough of Camden. He attended 15 Glastonbury Festivals in various roles including Production Manager for French circus Archaos. Since 1999 he has specialised in event safety management on all types of public events.*

‘Anyone who hasn’t been to the Zap since its re-opening is in for a big surprise. Brighton’s brightest seafront club has doubled in size, acquiring lots of air, space, and atmosphere thanks to some dramatically imaginative architectural work. And since this transformation ... it is attracting the sort of acts which before would have meant a trip to London.’

*Brighton Evening Argus, June, 1989*



# Zap Facts

## Taboo Season (March 1986)

A week long programme of events entitled Taboo was held at the Zap Club in March 1986. It included acts by the late Kathy Acker, a regular and popular visitor to the club since the success of her inaugural Zap performance *Blood and Guts in High School* in April 1984.

## Zap Pantos

The first of a series of annual 'alternative' Zap pantos – produced, written and performed by Zap staff and other artists/performers – was *Aladdin: A Pantomime Soap Opera* in December 1985. It was scripted by *Brighton Evening Argus* journalist Tim Curran. Contributors to Zap pantos over the years include: J.J. Waller, James Poulter, Nick Dwyer, Liz Aggiss, Pete McCarthy, Robin Driscoll, Tony Haase, Becky Stevens, John Dowie, Andy Cunningham, Louise Rennison and John Cunningham.

## Live Art Developments (February 1987)

This festival of performance art marked a ten year collaboration between the Zap Club and Brighton Polytechnic. Co-directed by Neil Butler and Nikki Millican, the performers included: Women with Beards, Theatre of the Bleeding Obelisk, The Wild Wigglers, Steve Edgar, Ian Smith, Roy Hutchins, Open Secret, Roy Bayfield and Anne Seagrave.

## Zap Club Expansion (May 1989)

May 1989 saw the club's expansion to occupy four of the arches under the King's Road – doubling its capacity from 200 to 400. The re-opening was originally planned for 9 May when Moscow's leading underground rock band Zvuki Mu (produced by Brian Eno) were due to top the bill. Due to delays, however, the club actually opened on 15 May with a party for members.

## Cannibalism Performance (July 1989)

Using theatrical and visual story-telling techniques, ex-Zapper Ian Smith presented a moral investigation into the practice of cannibalism. This solo show aimed to educate, entertain and challenge. It also attracted inevitable tabloid column inches!

## Stomp at the Zap (May 1990)

Brighton-based Yes/No People performed a preview of Stomp – now an international phenomenon – at the Zap Club before its official premiere at Edinburgh Festival Fringe the following year.

an amazing, awesome, pumping, powerhouse of a panto.

ZAP ART presents THE 1993 ZAP PANTO

# reservoir dicks

THE PANTO! 18

BY ROY SMILES AND JAMES POULTER

**STARRING**

**STEVEN NORTH**  
"colin" in tv's london's burning

**JAMES POULTER**  
**JOHN CUNNINGHAM**  
and

**ROY SMILES**  
(of tv's frank stubbs promotes)  
last seen together in the ZAP panto '91 brighton rock.

**JANE BASSETT**  
a.k.a. anna peglover, queen of alternative  
miss brighton '92 as dick whittington

mr. dopoy

mr. bashful

mr. dick

**Left:** *Reservoir Dicks*, 1993 – one of the regular Zap alternative Christmas shows, written, directed, produced and starring Zap staff and associates

**Main image:** Eddie Izzard – one of many 'alternative' comedians introduced to the Brighton scene by Zap in the 1980s



# IZZARD

### Man Act, Slow Dancing (1991)

For this theatrical presentation of the 1970 film *They Shoot Horses, Don't They* starring Jane Fonda, Neil Butler perpetuated a hoax on the *Daily Mail* that the club was running a five-day, twenty-four-hour marathon to emulate the arduous Depression-era dance-offs of 1930s America. *The Mail* obliged with a double-page spread.

### Sex and Sin (October/December 1993)

The focus of the Sex and Sin season at the Zap Club was on artists' confrontation of issues surrounding HIV and AIDS. Provocative and entertaining in equal measure, it delivered comedy, theatre, dance and music whilst challenging prejudice and preconception.

**Below:** Part two of their controversial prostitution trilogy: AIDS Positive Underground Theatre presents *In One Take* at the Zap, 1994

**Main image:** Zap 10th anniversary season: Liz Aggiss, John Dowie, Billy Cowie, Women with Beards, Roy Bayfield and others celebrate ten years of Zap-inspired performance art, 1987

### Violence of the Imagination (February 1994)

This major festival of Live Art brought together established performers in an international collaboration. As well as activities on the streets, and in the Zap Club, it featured debates, installations and an Indian banquet. Many of the events investigated concerns about violent behaviour in society.

### Zap Club Sale

After thirteen years in its permanent home beneath King's Road, the original Zap Club was sold to Webb Kirby Ltd in November 1997. During that time it played host to an eclectic array of performers, artists and musicians including Julian Clary, Roger McGough, Rory Bremner, Edwin Collins, Marc Almond, Chemical Brothers, Sonic Youth, John Hegley, Forkbeard Fantasy, Blur, Paul Weller, Mark Steel, Stomp, Ali Farka Touré and Eddie Izzard to name but a few. (For more on music at the Zap Club and beyond see chapter 3).

AIDS POSITIVE UNDERGROUND THEATRE
Supported by the Sussex Aids Centre

# IN ONE TAKE

**BY JOHN ROMAN BAKER**

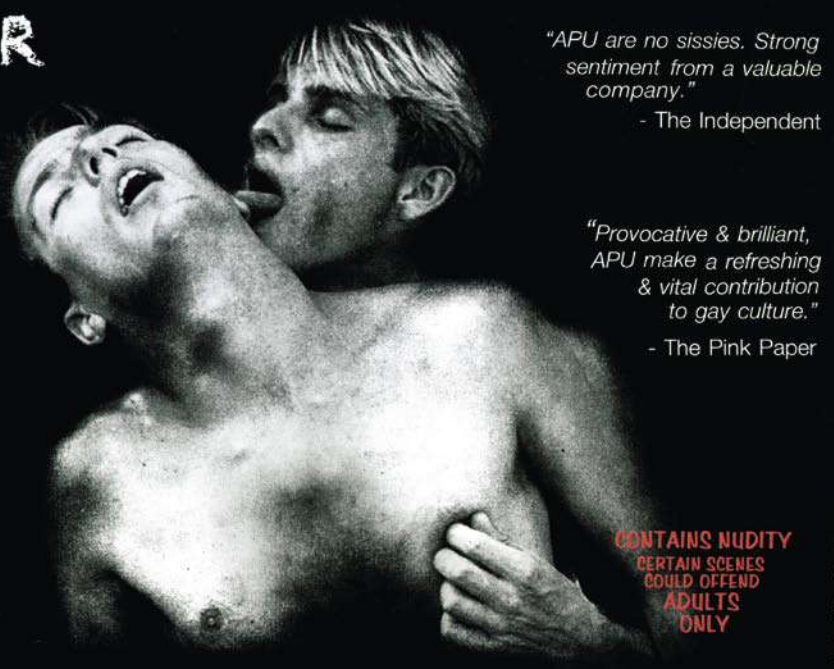
Part 2 of the controversial 'Prostitution Trilogy'  
Pornography, sado-masochism & AIDS

**Thurs 19 - Sun 22nd May**  
**Thurs 26 - Sat 28th May**

**8.00pm The ZAP**  
Kinge Road Arches, Old Ship Beach, Brighton

TICKETS £5 Advance (£6 on door)  
conc. £2.50 - 19th & 22nd May  
Dome Box Office (0273) 674 357

**1994 BRIGHTON FESTIVAL**




*"APU are no sissies. Strong sentiment from a valuable company."*  
- The Independent

*"Provocative & brilliant, APU make a refreshing & vital contribution to gay culture."*  
- The Pink Paper

**CONTAINS NUDITY  
CERTAIN SCENES  
COULD OFFEND  
ADULTS  
ONLY**

**1994 BRIGHTON FESTIVAL**

**T h e  
Z A P**



Design by Kevin Woodhouse



OCT  
NOV  
DEC

THE ZAP TEN YEARS ON THE EDGE





# Zap Memories

From a personal standpoint the Zap Club introduced me to a fantastically broad array of performance, music and people (some of whom are still friends), which probably still informs and impacts on my personal practice. The 1980s were an exciting time in Brighton when a lot of creative stuff was emerging. The Zap enabled some of it and offered a hub for a great deal of diversity, engendering the idea that any creative expression is valid (unlike my experience of Brighton Polytechnic in the early eighties). I remember: The Desperate Men performing with rubber gloves on their heads on the beach; Roland Miller walking into the sea; Frank Chickens' karaoke; Nick Cave's stage fright; Nico's dullness; Mark Almond's gentleness.

I also recall us all being sacked then re-employed at a lower rate of pay, but I guess money wasn't our only reason for being part of the 'family' business. Ian Smith's Tuesday nights – touches of genius as well as insanity, but always supportive. Throbbing Gristle/Genesis P. Orridge sonically experimenting with our ears and other bodily organs. Performing in all the staff pantos. Neil Butler's enthusiasm and vision; Angie Goodchild's glamour, humour and pragmatism ...

Essentially it was a continually transformative experience, where like minds found each other, durable creative connections were made and lifelong friends met.

**Jane Pitt, punter, Zap Awards co-ordinator, performer, barmaid etc.**

I worked for ZapArtreach, booking acts and taking them out into the community. From this I got into performing and occasionally compered at the comedy night.

Later I got involved in the Zap pantos. I co-wrote and appeared in *The Last Temptation of Scrooge* (as Scrooge). Later, I joined Stomp – which we premiered, in its original form, at the Zap.

The Zap Club gave a lot of people a springboard and a soapbox. Both the talented and the no-hopers. Probably created a lot of drunks too. For a short period it was a real hotbed of talent and a focus for local young artists of various types. It always encouraged new talent. Shame it's gone.

**David Olrod, former Zap attendee, performer, staff**

**Main image:** *James Bond – Licensed to Look III*, the panto: an ingeniously low-tech 007 homage from Cliffhanger Theatre (Pete McCarthy, John Dowie et al.) © Mark Power, 1987

# WHAT'S UP DOCTOR JEKYLL?

BY DAVID OLROD AND ANDY SMITH  
DIRECTED BY JOHN DOWIE

DATES: 5th, 6th, 8th, 12th, 14th, 15th  
19th, 20th, 21st and 22nd DECEMBER

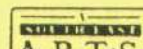
8pm AT THE ZAP CLUB  
Old Ship Beach, Brighton

TICKETS AVAILABLE FROM  
DOME BOX OFFICE, NEW ROAD,  
BRIGHTON, 674357  
PRICES £5, £4 Concs.

The  
ZAP



Funded by ZAP ART and PL PRODUCTIONS



*Aladdin* was the first Zap panto, commissioned by Neil Butler. In pioneering Zap spirit, it came together and, somehow, worked. The plot was a trad version of *Aladdin* bolted on to the then fashionable, trashy US TV soap *Dynasty* – and some shenanigans about us having to change it all as we went along to suit South East Arts (1985 was the era of high-Thatcherism) otherwise they'd pull the plug on funding.

The plot involved a CIA plan to take over Central America. Somehow Joan Collins (in the form of Nick Dwyer) arrived on the scene and it went gloriously downhill from there. A great cast included: Sarah Eddy, Helen Wells, Nick Nose, Mick Perrin, Roy Bayfield, Angie Goodchild, J.J. Waller, Ian Smith. And there were guest appearances from Pete McCarthy, Simon Fanshawe, Lynn Thomas, Becky Stevens, Dave Reeves, Linda Rickett, Roy Smiles and Neil Butler.

I think it was one of those times when Neil, on a hunch, got together different people he'd met (I was an *Evening Argus* journalist at the time), lit the touchpaper and hoped to set off a good firework display. It may not have been great art but we had a ball.

**Tim Curran, Sub-Editor on the *Daily Mirror***

When I first came to Brighton it was partly because of Zap! I was coming to do my MA, and I had a choice of places, but thought, 'Brighton's got the Zap Cub', and that was a good enough reason. I started just by going to gigs and club events, which made me much more open-minded about going to see arty stuff and theatre. I would never have done this before. I came from Birmingham where there were arts centres and gig venues and theatre venues, but nowhere doing what Zap were doing, mixing up art and entertainment like this. I started out going to gigs mainly and club nights and that way I got to see more radical and challenging things – Live Art etc. – that you would not normally see. It was a venue that you trusted, or felt comfortable with; you liked the space so you'd take risks to see other stuff.

**Sarah Heyworth, former Zap Club PR Manager**

# CLUBS AND PUBS SHOULD CLOSE DOWN



**A DRAIN ON POLICE MANPOWER?** The Zap club in Brighton, with director Neil Butler

**T**HE simplest answer to the problem of policing Brighton's night-life (Leader, April 16th) is to close 90% of the pubs and clubs.

There are far too many in this town and it is disgraceful to suggest that the local residents should pay for their policing if the individual establishments won't do so.

The community charge has already been wasted by the council, supporting so-called festivals and alternative entertainment. Closing the clubs will

reduce drunkenness and leave the police free for more important work.

I trust that our local MPs Andrew Bowden and Sir Derek Spencer will step in should any attempt be made by the licensing committee to put the cost of this on the public's bill.

**M.R. F. GILKS**  
Hallett Road  
Brighton

2-Brighton and Hove Leader.

**Main image:** Zap Club 'Crimes and Misdemeanours' - from illegal fly posting (89) to onstage flashing (Malcolm Hardy, 89) to bomb scares (Exploding Cinema, 96) to Lotto-funded drug den hysteria, Zap has attracted its fair share of controversy over the last quarter of a century.

# MURDERER USED FOR SICK ADVERTS

**HELTER SKELTER** presents  
*love ranch*



**A SICK poster campaign is being used to advertise a trendy night at a Brighton club.**

A photograph of crazed American mass murderer Charles Manson has been used to advertise Helter Skelter's Love Ranch club night at the Zap club.

But this week its promoters brushed off claims that it was in bad taste, and threatened that their advertising stunt would become even sicker. "You should have seen what we wanted to use!" boasted Helter Skelter promoter Martin Southon.

by **VERONICA CLARK**

## Drug-crazed

The promoters originally wanted to reproduce a controversial picture used during the 1970s by clothes designer Vivienne Westwood, which depicts two cowboys with no trousers on.

But the Zap solicitor wouldn't let them. So they came up with the Helter Skelter/Manson connection, something they say is just a sign of things to come.

In an extraordinary confession, Southon said: "We're considering using other mass murderers. The more drug-crazed, the better."

But Brighton restaurant and pub owners disagree. One

let them put the poster up, while others have been ripped down from walls. "He didn't like the idea of Charles Manson watching his customers while they ate," said Southon.

The Love Ranch club night, to be held on Mondays, is a dance-orientated event with DJs and a band.

Helter Skelter promoters say they were approached by the organisers of the London event of the same name to put it on in Brighton. They say their poster campaign is shrouded in secrecy, but they admit they are considering self-styled "great beast" Aleister Crowley as their next

SICK: the poster

DAILY MIRROR, Monday, November 27, 1995 PAGE 13

# LOTTO GIVES £150,000 TO RAVE NIGHTCLUB

The Zap Club Years

# LOTTERY-CASH CLUB EXPOSED AS DRUG DEN

# REVOLTING!

**Club's licence in danger after obscene show**

**EXCLUSIVE** by Veronica Clark

**NIGHTCLUB** goers watched in horror as a comedian unzipped his trousers and obscenely exposed himself to women in the audience.

And shocked police may now take action to prevent it happening again in Brighton.

The disgusting act took place at the Zap Club on Sunday night when comedian Malcolm Hardy - billed as more revolting than Bernard Manning - was in the middle of his harmonica routine.

Without warning he UNZIPPED

November 3, 1995  
THE WO

# Lotto loot for drug rave den

By **DAWN ALFORD**  
**A SEAFRONT** teenage rave club awash with drugs has picked up a £150,000 National Lottery handout.

The owners got the cash for an "arts programme." The club operates a drugs ban.

But News of the World reporters

Following my departure from the Zap I became active locally in the Lewes Labour Party and nationally with various Blairite networks in the run up to Tony Blair's election as Labour Party Leader in 1994. I then went to Millbank to help on the 1997 election campaign and came into Downing Street with the Blairs on 2 May, 1997. I have been at Number 10 ever since. Here is how life has come full circle: the Blairs will move to Connaught Square in London; one of their neighbours will be Paul Oakenfold who was our resident DJ on Saturday nights in the early days of house music – and who has had huge success ever since, including writing the signature *Big Brother* theme tune. Life has come full circle in another way – my eldest son James now works and parties in Brighton and he says the Zap, even under new management, has the best atmosphere in town. That makes me very proud.

In terms of life's rich experiences, ten years at the heart of Brighton club life and ten at the heart of British politics has been an absolutely fascinating combination. And even though I might be part of the 'establishment' these days every time I hear uplifting music it takes me straight back to the wonderful atmosphere of the Zap Club, and those amazing experimental times.

**Angie Goodchild, former Zap Director**

My work as a freelance choreographer has continuously brought me, over a twenty-year period, into contact with Zap. Over the years many things have changed about the Brighton theatre scene, but, to provide a context, when I first moved to Brighton in 1984, the Zap Club – old style; two damp arches on the seafront – presented performance work that was, to my young eyes, amazing, entertaining and inspiring.

Since then they have persisted, at the pinnacle of art production, in bringing cutting edge performance right to my doorstep.

Here, in true Julie Andrews style, are a few of my favourite memories, which exposed me to the great creative non-conformity of performance art: I recall *Birds with Ears*, the wonderful *Wild Wigglers*, the *Neo-Naturists* and *Women with Beards*. There was what must surely have been the first ever work by *Forced Entertainment* (quite strange and very intense), and the last by *Nico*. The *Blue Man Group*, *Ivor Cutler*, *Roger Ely*, *Jeff Keen*, *Rory Bremner*, *Anne Seagrave*, *Liz Aggiss* and many other beautiful creatures who braved the empty space at the end of the dark, damp tunnel.

There were hedonistic nights, like long haul flights; DJs, fancy-dress, day-glo, UV, water dripping down my neck, black and white checked lino, a cockroach in the sink, changing rooms that stink. They took us high and low. All night dance parties, class A drugs (nothing to do with the Zap of course!), sexiness, body paint, Post-structuralism in action (if that is possible), time warp loos, wild adventures and stories of far off shores – both real and imaginary.

**Virginia Farman, choreographer and director of outdoor dance performance**

▶ CLUB ◀  
SHAME

*big*



**Main image:** Shame Club flyer, 1989 – the blueprint for gay clubbing for the 90s



## Chapter Three

# Music and Club Culture

‘With probably the most idyllic setting going for a venue – built under the seafront arches, the front door is on the beach, looking out to sea – the recently expanded Zap hosts top of the range Indie bands and fills Brighton’s gap between pub gigs and major venues.’

*Sounds*, July 1989

As the arts and entertainment landscape has changed over the years, Zap has had to keep reinventing itself and adapt to circumstance. Just as it had been at the forefront of the alternative cabaret and performance art scene of the 1980s, it embraced the rise of an Indie music cult that defined the latter half of the decade, playing host to cutting-edge bands from Sonic Youth to Courtney Love and Hole. It also opened its doors to an eclectic array of music styles from jazz and world music to unadulterated pop.

As the eighties made way for the nineties, Zap was once again at the leading edge of a new cultural revolution: the burgeoning clubbing scene that spawned acid house, techno, trance and rave culture. Its club nights – from *Frenzy* and *Coco Club* to *Club Shame* and *Pro-Tection* – not only put Brighton on the clubbing map, but they also became a catalyst for a unique experiment in mixing club culture and performance art, which found its purest expression in Jago Eliot, Sian Thomas, Dawn Blake and Mark Waugh’s *Fundamental*, and influenced a generation of artists, DJs and performers.



## Club Shame

### Paul Kemp

‘It dismissed traditional sexual barriers and conventions and celebrated the pursuit of fun-loving hedonism in a thoroughly modern and open way...’

The story of *Club Shame* starts as far back as 1980. In those politically fraught times, with Margaret Thatcher at the country's helm and homophobia all around, I ran a club called *Subterfuge* in a small basement venue at the Apollo Hotel on Brighton's seafront.

*Subterfuge* was billed as ‘alternative’; it was a melting pot of youth cultures and boasted a hugely diverse crowd of punks, skinheads, Goths, rockabilies, students, drag queens, new romantics, arty types and everything in between, all crowding the dance floor and all sharing some kind of common value despite their differing ‘tribes’. It had an exciting, dangerous and dynamic atmosphere.

Gay clubs in Brighton at that time retained a rather underground and exclusively gay feel: clubs like The Beacon Royal and *Bolts* at Sherry's (monthly) were on offer but there seemed to be no real mixing of sexualities, except on the rather exotic and bohemian dance floor of *Subterfuge*. *Subterfuge* was not intended as a gay night and it's only with the benefit of hindsight that the gay content of the club can be fully appreciated, especially remembering the ‘cross-dressing’ theme nights, which saw some of Brighton's butchiest straight guys fully dragged up for the occasion along with genuine drag queens and transvestites. After six years of *Subterfuge* madness it was time to turn the lights back up, wash off the eyeliner and shut the doors on one of the city's most colourful and affectionately remembered club nights. However, the seeds of the later *Club Shame* had been sown.

After the closure of *Subterfuge*, I found myself at a creative loose end. It was at

this time that I met Angie Goodchild, one of the four directors of the Zap Club.

The Zap at that time was a far smaller affair than it would later become. It was an instantly credible venue with live acts from artists, both obscure and legendary, and small parties making up most of the entertainment on offer. The Zap was making a name for itself across the country as a centre for art and artists of all kinds.

Angie and I struck up a firm friendship, culminating in a special one-off *Subterfuge* New Year's Eve party in the Zap incorporating the very first *Alternative Miss Brighton* pageant as a special feature of the evening's entertainment. (This would become a Brighton favourite in later years.) The night proved to be a great success.

During this exciting time, the Zap transformed itself into a far larger venue, taking on two new arches, and extending its capacity to stage much more ambitious and larger scale shows/parties.

Angie offered me the role of Assistant Technician at the Zap, and soon afterwards I suggested a fresh new gay night for Brighton. Wednesday nights at the Zap would become its home. With little idea how this new gay night would work, except that it should be unashamedly ‘in your face’, and out-and-proud gay, I went to work planning what would become a groundbreaking gay night that would eventually lead the way for similar gay clubs nationally.

The name ‘*Shame*’ was chosen for its obvious irony; it also indicated a new trend towards gay people reclaiming negative stereotypes and turning them around to their advantage. The

**Above:** Paul Kemp © RealBrighton  
**Opposite:** *Club Shame* flyer, 1989



new night would incorporate risqué artwork for its flyers, advertising and in-house imagery, with works by the likes of Tom of Finland projected on the huge screens above the dance floor. Special attention was paid to lighting, sound, décor and the whole production ethos. The music would be a flamboyant and modern mix of dance, vocals and Italia house, a far cry from the now dated hi-energy music on offer at traditional gay clubs.

*Shame's* first night saw the venue packed as soon as the doors were flung open. The club policy would be to embrace a mixed gay crowd that truly reflected Brighton's eclectic clubbing population. It dismissed traditional sexual barriers and conventions and celebrated the pursuit of fun-loving hedonism in a thoroughly modern and open way.

The cutting-edge dance crowd were ecstatic at being offered something entirely new. Up until now, Brighton's gay scene had been a rather low-key affair – the main gay club (The Beacon Royal) only catered for around 200 capacity – so *Shame* immediately became the big gay night out in the city.

However, not all of Brighton's gay community fully understood *Shame's* intentions: the opening night saw a lesbian 'sit-in', so incensed were certain members of the lesbian community that homosexuality should be associated with the word 'Shame'. The irony was apparently lost on them. Nevertheless, *Shame* would soon coax Brighton's fledgling gay club scene into a bold, fresh and more open world of dance-orientated gay clubbing nineties style. *Shame* soon gained national notoriety and saw clubbers travelling from across the UK to Brighton in unprecedented numbers to sample its infamous delights. There were even special coaches laid on for London visitors.

In its heyday, the club was packed to the rafters with colourful drag divas, gays, lesbians and their equally eccentric and bohemian friends, transforming not only the dance floor but even the queue into a visual feast. The atmosphere was always electric, with partygoers dressed to the nines, all vying for attention.

*Gay Times* said: 'We put *Club Shame* forward as a blueprint for gay clubbing in the nineties!'

Other celebrated club nights at the Zap, such as *Frenzy* and *Coco Club*, helped build the Zap's national reputation as a centre of arts and clubbing, a reputation that has stood the test of time. *Club Shame* played host to a vast array of special performers including Boy George, Darryl Pandy, Lonnie Gordon, Wee Papa Girl Rappers, Soho ('Hippy Chick'), 49ers, D-Influence, MC Kinky and Nomad & Felix ('Don't You Want Me?').

Memorable nights worthy of special mention are designer Jean-Yves Alban's *Plastic Passion* (outrageous fashion shows featuring the city's newly emerging celebrity contingent and fellow freaks), plus performances from Brighton's infamous *Liquorice Allsorts* cabaret show, whose tongue-in-cheek take on the decade's pop stars made them an award-winning international act.

It wasn't until a full two years later that other successful brands such as *Trade* (London) and *Flesh* (Manchester) opened to hugely receptive, enlightened and enthusiastic young gay crowds in the UK. Gay clubs had come a long way in a very short period of time and the Zap had played an essential part in a new and exciting revolution in gay clubbing that has since swept the country and helped break down sexual barriers.

*Club Shame* closed in 1992 and spawned the hugely popular *Wild Fruit*.

### Paul Kemp

*Paul Kemp opened his first club night (Revelations) aged seventeen. Since then he has organised and promoted a diverse range of club nights and events such as the Alternative Miss Brighton Show, Gothic Party, Subterfuge and the hugely popular Wild Fruit, which continues to be one of the UK's most successful club nights. His company Aeon Events operates several of Brighton's most popular clubs including Wild Fruit, Sundae Sundae, Monkey, Cash Queen and Rebel as well as operating the 5,000 capacity Wild Fruit dance tent at Brighton Pride for the last seven years.*



SLEAZE AND LUST - LIVE LIFE AND GIVE

CLUB

# STAVING

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4 11-15 with this flyer-£3 members-£3.50 non

Special Christmas party featuring NOM

BEVEN 01.30 - STELLA DRY £1.10 bottle

Full live show & their brilliant single '24 hours

Music & Club Culture

‘Recently I have taken on the role of Friday night DJ in arch one, the alternative, ambient chill-out room of the Zap Club ... The Zap Club ‘happens’ in these arches under the seafront at Brighton where once seafarin’ folk smoked pipes and spun yarns in angling and sailing clubs. The Zap changed all that, along with the Hacienda in Manchester, and the Milk Bar et al. in London, which are the core of clubland. And they perpetuate the rituals, which go with it.’

Annie Nightingale, *Punch*, August, 1991



# The Art of Clubbing

Mark Waugh

'The Zap was a city of nomads much like Glastonbury. It allowed a synergy of cultures one rarely finds in more traditional institutions.'

## Mixed metaphors and remixed culture

*'His laughter, all his utterances happened to him like external events.'*

Walter Benjamin *On Hashish*

Writing is said to be a form of dying, externalising ideas and forcing them into the spotlight of a dimly haunted stage. Can there be more ambiguously luminous stages than clubs?

Whether it's the Groucho or the Club des Hachichins, the nocturnal locutions and desires of our cultures are always treated with trepidation. This scenic resistance is not surprisingly translated into a mainstream parlance that has suppressed these cultures or marginalised them. In our time the culture that exploded out of acid house in the late 1980s and early 90s is often remembered in terms of criminality, repetitive beats and the triumph of smiley culture.

There is at best a freak-show of literature such as *Disco Biscuits* and *Disco 2000*, some fantastic cultural archaeology such as *Energy Flash* by Simon Reynolds, which traces the cultural emergence of clubbing as a way of life, a new economics and a new ethics. But excepting the acute perspicacity of a few writers bound in the style press, little is said about how a profound cultural osmosis is still influencing the creative economy. As club culture continues to thrive and mutate this is a living legacy ... anyone remember nu rave?

Elsewhere in this tome you will read the Zap Club's history. It was an institution predicated

on risk, entrepreneurialism and hybridity. Outside of London it was a fecund space and allowed many cultures to thrive and acid house to prosper. Its mixed up and arty crowd were already taking in the best of sonic history, through club nights like *Heretics*. This paved the way for *Frenzy* and later Coco Steele & Lovebomb, as did the performance and cabaret nights. From the Swans to *Sweat Sound System* and *Tonka* is only an issue of BPMs. From Andre Stitt to *Shoom* may seem an incongruous path but both play with shamanic imagery and influences. The Zap was a city of nomads much like Glastonbury. It allowed a synergy of cultures one rarely finds in more traditional institutions. It was eventually its downfall as the city became overrun by those seeking to create corporate clubbing experiences but this is the story of what happened before that. It is not even a story; it is a few sketches drawn on the back of an imaginary flyer. You should have been there. Perhaps you were.

I was part of this cultural laboratory during the golden years of the Zap and was invited to share a few speculations on the connections between the club culture of the eighties and nineties, and its influence on the cultural landscape of Brighton. Why has club life become so important to artists? I last presented anything at the Zap in 1997. Since then I have worked nationally and internationally, most recently for Arts Council England, intentionally promoting and supporting art characterised by ephemerality, intensity, participation and subversion. This is not a coincidence but the legacy of a life in clubs.

In a publication *Performance and Place*, I quoted Vicente Todoli, Tate Modern Director, who said

**Main image:** *Club Shame* flyer, 1990  
**Above:** Mark Waugh © Julia Waugh



**Above:** Frenzy organises a bank holiday spectacular at the Pink Coconut: billed as the summer's biggest acid house party, August 1988

**Opposite bottom:** *Fundamental*, Mark Waugh's innovative, art meets club culture Zap night.

of *The Weather Project* by Olafur Eliasson, in the Tate's enormous Turbine Hall: it had a 'curious hallucinogenic quality. It's very trippy but we have put nothing more illegal than sugar and water in the air.'

As someone who has experienced a lot of dry ice I appreciate this candid revelation. It speaks eloquently about the total suffusion of our culture in the language of the post-rave culture. Some might remember the Turbine Hall was first used for illegal warehouse parties. The Zap Club like the Hacienda in Manchester showed that post-industrial spaces were the future of urban regeneration.

So where do we locate this history? We can see it in the non-linear map of Jeremy Deller's *Acid Brass* project. An Art History student of University of Sussex and a self-confessed clubber, the Turner Prize-winning artist has said that he was more influenced by club culture than the 'art scene'. His *Folk Archive* project continues this line of eccentric connections between culture and ritual. Often artists are not so confident in their positions and will occlude their influences. Personally I pick traces and decaying scents of club culture in unexpected spaces. In the languages of peer-to-peer networks, a remix of the symbiosis of the DJ and the crowd.

### Welcome to our world

*'To feel like a humongous implosion, sucking you into deep and profound chaos, instability, joy and pure wonder. It offers visitors a chance to relax, paddle and freak out. Fresh clean waterfalls, slimy sofa islands, bridges of fear and beauty, all these miracles are made from leftovers of living and provide the terrain of the "Sweatwat".'* Austrian Artists, Gellitin, 2005, Gagosian Gallery, London.

I walked around this exhibition before the performance with staff from the gallery. It was uncanny and suffused with a sense of *déjà vu*. This sensation was experienced as intangible ideas manifesting in the perception of a collection of debris arranged to seduce and entertain. Soon it would be animated by the chance collision of an audience and a group of artists. This group was familiar to us as we had experienced them in 2002 during the Liverpool Biennial when they hosted a party in a pile of old carpets and broken sofas. The finale that night was half a ton of fresh bananas. But more profoundly we knew them as we had explored the same illusionary geography, a dream terrain of collective flight and inspiration, back in the Zap Club during one of the insane nights of cultural sedition and seduction we hosted with our crews under the monikers of *Fundamental* and *Pow Wow*.

Those nights were about an inclusive fluid aesthetic – created as much by the audience as us. What was unique about working in club culture between acid house and its diffusion and transmutation into myriad scenes was that it was a lifestyle. You lived in a world that was parallel but elsewhere to the death spasms of Thatcherism. It was a world of *bricolage*, promiscuous aesthetics, transcultural influences and niche cultural clusters. When one of the founder members of *Fundamental*, Dawn Blake, gave birth to Ella, I remember half of the Zap Club passed through the hospital. The after-party crew from Manchester Street all moved into the waiting-room.

To map the topography of influences from these scenes into the mainstream culture is madness. It would be like mapping a life and tracing, *à la mode* of rock family trees, the tangled roots of a culture that is plagued by amnesia. Suffice to say that when New Labour came to power and used the ugly tune, 'Things Can Only Get Better' as its theme song you knew the truth would be slightly more complex. Another way to imagine such a tracing is as a chalk line around a dead body. It should be easy to track back and make connections, illuminate the scene through

testimony and research, forensics even, make informed conclusions as to the life of the absent soul. Instead, tracking back reveals only the most material of evidence. I have a collection of flyers. The logo of *Fundamental*. It is the Joker's smile. It tells us that ours was a culture that could play with the signifiers of the mainstream, intensify them, detour them. In the promotional literature we are described as 'Futuristic Guest Hipsters'. We were not: we were a loose ensemble of people who were hedonistic and playful, liked things loud and strange; we built our nights as organic installations or happenings. Our maxim: Destroy Perspective!

At this time our audience included: Glen Luchford, the photographer; Bobby Gillespie, musician; Gary Clail, musician; Alexander Stuart, author; and thousands who I have no idea what they did. They just turned up to marvel at the weirdness of acts such as Sian Thomas' hypnotic dancing – she also wove ethereal webs inspired by Duchamp; the cellophane clad Sidonia and Helene offering kisses to everyone; full body painting with Atlanta; or *Ideal* writer Graham Duff doing an extract from his one man portrait of William Burroughs. Some became regulars like Marq B who never lost the word, Xavier, the most charming man in Brighton, and those whose names are lost in the ether. Mostly of course they came to dance to the sweet sounds of Craig Woodrow or the twisted tunes of Andy Crock or any of the amazing guests we brought in from Bristol. Or the free party scene. Some I guess might have been or would become artists in the traditional taxonomy but most were creative in other realms: hairdressing, banking, dealing, computing, car sales, teaching and all the other working lives we lead. What we did created a window on a world beyond the mediated platitudes of TV.

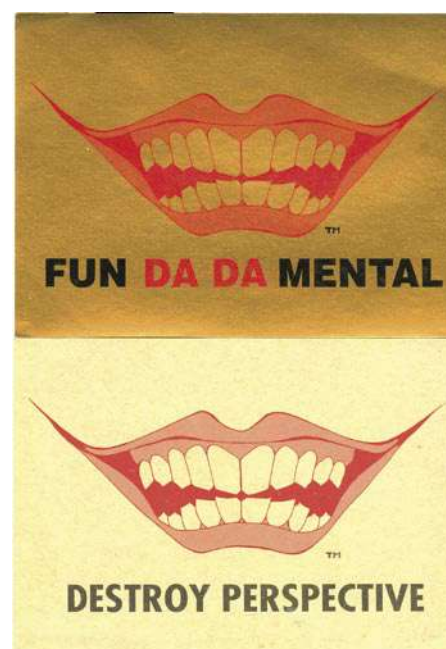
When I hosted *Pharmakon*, the first International Symposium on Drugs, the Zap funded that event, which, given the hysteria in the press about drugs and culture, was radical. What is significant is that it took culture seriously and that has helped create an ecology in Brighton that is thriving. Artists living here whose work



for me would be impossible without club culture include: Semi Conductor who work with acoustics and animation and come out of an experimental music scene that has its roots in the post-jungle cultures of the nineties; and Phil Collins whose works such as *They Shoot Horses*, in which he filmed young Palestinians taking part in a disco-dancing competition in Ramallah, paint a picture of ordinary folk enjoying their daily lives in a dangerous world.

But there are so many others who have passed through who you only find out about through chance. For example Matt Stokes won the 2006 Beck's Futures prize. I commissioned him for *Power of Art* with the BBC and Arts Council England and found that he was based in Brighton and had indeed been to *Tonka* nights at the Zap and the various free parties at Blackrock and Portslade. When you look at work he did such as research into defunct rave organisations at Grizedale, the connection is clear. Indeed the 16mm film, *Long After Tonight*, which documented the gathering of a group of northern soul fans from around the country in St Salvador's Church, Dundee, contained all of the emotional legacy we have been contemplating.

The most comprehensive exhibition I have seen to date on the impact of club culture was sadly not in Brighton, which still struggles, I would argue, to take its culture seriously. It was at the leading edge Beaconsfield Gallery in London, called simply CLUB and was presented by Wilken Schade, Eva Stenram and Simon Wood. It featured almost seventy artists. How many of these had passed through the Zap? I would bet a few.





**Above:** Pow Wow Helen © Mark Bailey  
**Main image:** Brighton's *Pussycat Club* began life at the Zap before transferring to the Honey Club and beyond

This exhibition, alongside performances by artists such as Uninvited Guests, These Horses and Gob Squad, continue to influence the mainstream. There is a growing sense that gallery culture must increasingly open itself to a wider spectrum of ideas. In a now notorious feature 'Taking the Tate into the Future', Charlotte Higgins, Arts Correspondent for *The Guardian*, interviewed Nicholas Serota in September, 2005. 'The big idea,' he said, 'is that the old hierarchies between painting and sculpture and other forms of expression have evaporated ... Artists are reflecting on the culture around them – club culture, or whatever it is – and the institution needs to reflect that in the way it shows, presents and buys art.'

### It's not over – notes on cultural amnesia and a life underground

Where were we? Our club was a remix of your club. We were already under the narcotic influence of a memory, the seductive idea of spaces made intimate and special, not so much by their architecture as by the bodies that found stimulation and escape in these salons.

When I graduated with a degree in Philosophy there was only one place to go. Down to the beach. There, with a head full of post-modernity and a pharmacopea of situations, there was a club called the Zap. It spawned a wild Indie scene in the mid eighties and brought the world of exquisite sonics to the south coast: Live Skull, That Petrol Emotion, The Swans, Wayne County & The Electric Chairs, The Happy Mondays, Laibach, Stereo MCs, Queen Latifah, Spacemen 3, A Guy Called Gerald and The Shaman. This and that as you might say. It was intense and personal and scene-driven by artistic passions rather than fiscal obsession. In the same dark arches beneath the road were also regular cabaret nights and festivals of performance. It was not long before I found myself live and naked on stage with the Neo-Naturalists at a festival called Taboo. That was fun.

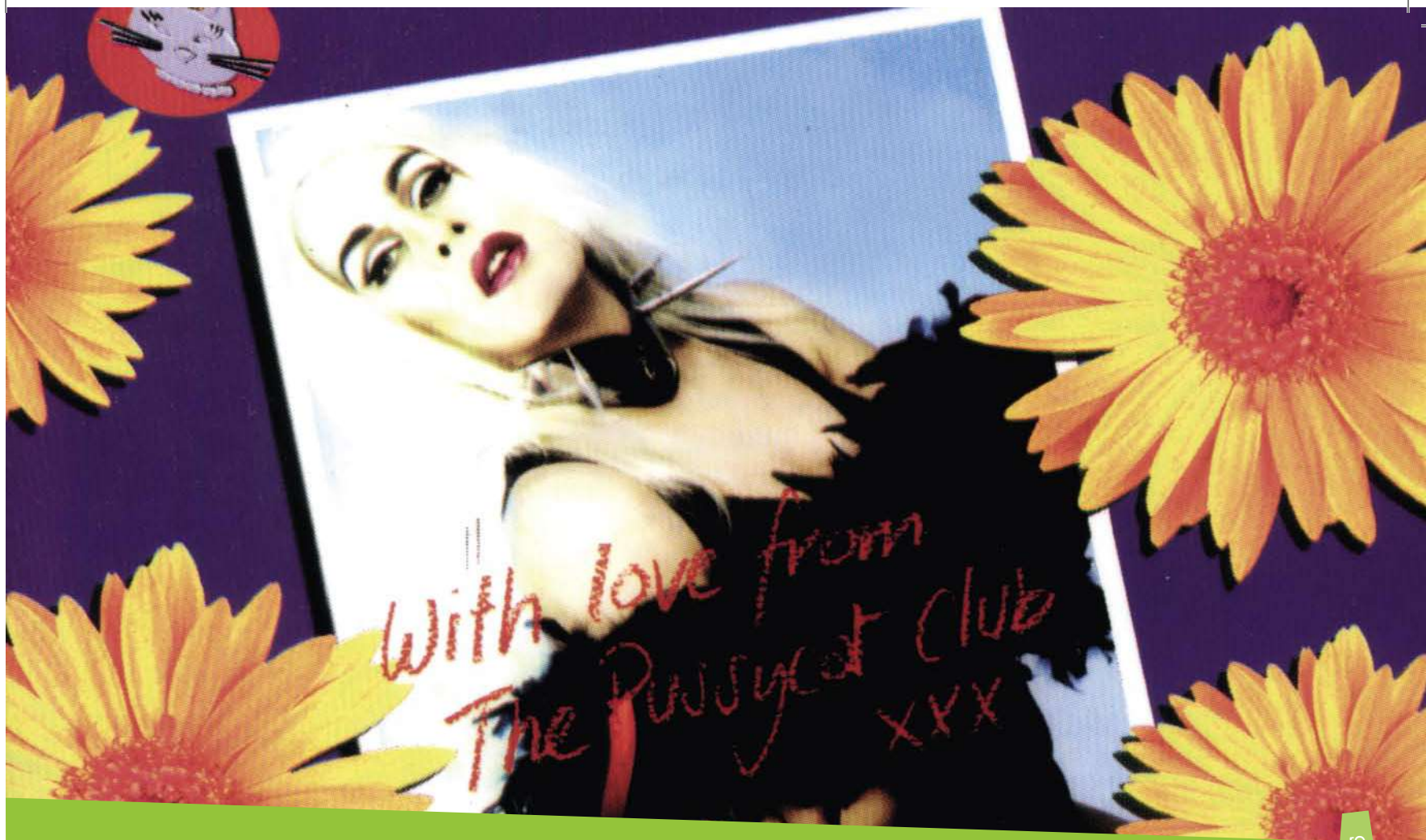
Not only did I play at the Zap with my band SN Ensemble and dance with *Fundamental* and *Pow Wow*, I also curated video seasons, directed and produced performances such as *Oral* and *PZ092* and worked with Roger Ely on a series of club nights: *Die Lieber Rausch*, featuring Live Artists as diverse as Marisa Carnesky, Bruce Gilchrist, Boris Nieslony and Tatsumi Orimoto. With Julian Weaver we got hooked into the cyber revolution, casting extracts from these nights to the Whole Wide World. These artists are still flourishing today and it is nice to think that the Zap offered them a little love in a world sometimes hostile to new experiences.

These nights have influenced my life in a profound way. Always led by hedonistic interests with a healthy appetite for the complexities of subjectivity, I found this nocturnal economy fascinating in its speculative approach to what might be a legitimate cultural pursuit. If there was a factory creating ideas designed to exploit the Pleasure Principle in all its Freudian trajectories – this way! Perhaps this is an adult space not suitable for the very young or those of an impressionable disposition, but if you want to explore the human condition there is no more fitting geography than the blurred architecture of clubs. Bodies bleed into sounds and sex oozes into everything, ideas are unstable and meaning phases between lucidity and madness. What results is inspiration.

Dedicated to the memory of Jago Eliot.

### Mark Waugh

*Mark Waugh is Director of 13Strand, specialising in the development of ephemeral and live media. Current clients include: Scottish Arts Council, A Foundation, David A. Bailey and Channel 4. He is a board member of Chelsea Theatre and Spacex Gallery, Exeter and is a founding Chair of the Jago Eliot Foundation. Previously, Mark was employed by Arts Council England, leading the national development of Live Art 2000-06. He is co-editor of We Love You, published by Revolver (2005), and has contributed chapters to various journals and publications.*



‘Our attitude has been to try and think where people want to go, and encourage artists to work there ... in the early eighties it was cabaret. People were treating cabaret like punk – the audience was very receptive to new ideas, so it was an ideal vehicle for new work ... At the beginning of the nineties we feel the dominant young culture is working through nightclubs. We’re interested in experimenting with the relationship between artist and audience.’

Neil Butler, *The Independent*, May, 1990



## Remember Where You Saw Them First! Indie Music at the Zap – 1984-94

**Polly Marshall**

‘In the early days, the grim and angry mid-eighties – when Thatcherism had seemed to last a lifetime and south coast youth was rebelling in full eyeliner – the Zap saved our lives.’

Indie rock, music with the real independent stance, was always at the heart of the Zap and perhaps, alongside edgy performance art, best exemplified the free spirit of the whole enterprise.

Their names are legend. An early visitation from Sonic Youth in November 1985 as part of their *Bad Moon Rising* tour saw the New York noiseniks ranking out on the beach, number one on the entire audience's best-ever gig list. Their free-form experimentation and New York post-punk avant-garde aesthetic was perfect for the Zap crowd.

In the early days, the grim and angry mid-eighties – when Thatcherism had seemed to last a lifetime and south coast youth was rebelling in full eyeliner – the Zap saved our lives by playing host not only to mega-stars like Marc Almond, but also to the *Hairy Dog Club* on Saturday at lunchtime. Hangover o'clock indeed. Here were to be seen an endless succession of wannabes having their fifteen minutes in the subterranean spotlight.

But the *Hairy Dog* threw up the odd star as it lay in the gutter. Indie shoe-gazers Frazier Chorus played repeated weekend lunchtimes in 1985 under a variety of *noms de guitare*, until they finally got the big weekday evening slot and managed to tempt record label 4AD down to snap them up, later moving to Virgin for a two album deal. Flute player Kate Holmes, who went on to marry Alan McGee, label daddy of Oasis and the Libertines, said: ‘We first started at the

Zap, playing to friends, hippies and children. It all started there one rainy Wednesday night. A myriad of Sunday lunchtimes at the Zap cured my stage fright. It's a good venue.’

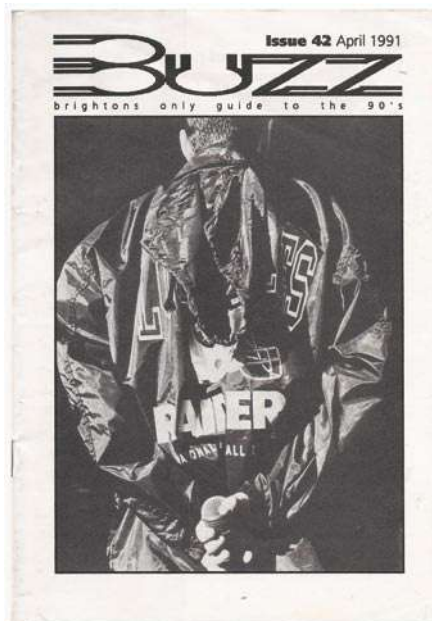
Whatever artistic policy may have existed under the arches was nothing to do with the box-ticking zeal of the arts administrator at council-run venues. No. The Zap had soul. It offered a uniquely creative, arty space for musicians of all shades of the Indie spectrum, the music itself not always the be-all-and-end-all, but — perhaps it was the sea air, or the sigh of the shingle to the rhythm of the waves – it freed artists to do their own thing. The Zap acted as a magnet for the poets of rock. The great performance artist and poet Aaron Williamson, inspired as much by Johnny Cash as Baudelaire, said: ‘I was in Derby. I came to Brighton because I thought the Zap was the centre of performance. It has a big reputation up north.’ Aaron talked about ‘the shaman, going out of the tribe, and coming back all dressed up, in touch with the spirits.’

So attired and communing came Nick Cave on 2 June 1989, reading from his book of verse *King Ink*. And now he lives in Hove.

If the Zap had anything as self-important as a ‘policy’ it was to put the music squarely in the hands of passionate, independent music promoters who booked according to gut instinct, and put on fantastic shows

**Above:** Polly Marshall, © Paul Ostrer  
**Opposite:** Brighton *Buzz* magazine front covers (left, October 91 featuring Primal Scream's Bobby Gillespie; middle, April 91 featuring Gary Clail; right, June 89 featuring Frazier Chorus)





with threadbare budgets. Because these unsung heroes of rock loved the bands, they believed the crowds would too.

The promoters, chief among them Josh Dean of Helter Skelter – ‘featuring the best of contemporary live bands’ – provided a full spectrum of Indie rockers from the hoary indigo of grizzled psychedelic warriors like Gong and Hawkwind, to the fiery red of dance-crossover valiants like The Prodigy and the Chemical Brothers.

Many a brand-new hopeful trod the Zap stage, the tiny one with rats underneath (up until 1988 – they sometimes used to appear in the cabaret). Or the bigger one in the posh new arch (thereafter till demise). Some of the hopefuls went on to household name status. In December 1988, long before reality TV took the lovely Bez, *Celebrity Big Brother* winner 2005, to its dysfunctional bosom, Happy Mondays — prime movers in the Manchester acid scene — played the Zap. ‘One of the hottest properties at the moment, obviously destined for success,’ proclaimed the now-defunct *Buzz* magazine (editor one J. Dean), sending a reporter to discover ‘What caused Bez to go mad?’ Shaun Ryder lightly quipped, ‘You don’t want to fight when you’re on E or acid.’ As if to prove a point,

the *Buzz* made Charles Manson the issue’s cover star. Shaun embraced Brighton with open arms: ‘Let’s face it, we’re down here on expenses and we’re having a ball.’ The *Buzz*’s reporter went home with a free gift from Bez ‘for the trip’ and concluded: ‘refreshing, honest and hungry. You’d be double daft to miss it.’

Blur (16 October 1990) were noted in the *Buzz* as ‘comparatively new, but already with a reputation for having the hottest live act around. Their double A side single “I Know/She’s So High” is wicked – like the Stone Roses at their groovy best. This band is going to be huge, HUGE and remember where you saw them first!’

As befits those shallow, grasping times, true soul rebels flaunted the Indie spirit of rebellion on the platform kindly lent them by the Zap, inspiring us in the audience to defy, refuse, disobey. A band with buckets of this against-it attitude, mostly in their exuberant absurdity, was Dr & The Crippens (19 September 1989). Halfway through a blistering set, their singer unleashed live explosives on stage and blew up the giant *papier mâché* head he had been wearing, littering the audience with the fall out from a cabbage bomb, wet and brain-like. The good doctor shared the bill with Extreme Noise Terror. A night to remember, it is indeed branded on my cortex.

As repetitive beats, smiley faces and hands in the air swept the nation, a tide flowing largely from the Zap, Indie rockers drew inspiration from the new bleepy sound, krautrock times a billion and no returns. In particular, Bobby Gillespie, dark star of Primal Scream and Zap devotee, drew inspiration from the music there and at *Shoom* in London, where he befriended producer and DJ Andy Weatherall. He’d hardly set foot in a studio before, but Andy took ‘Loaded’, stripped and mixed and sampled in Peter Fonda:

‘We want to be free to do what we want to do

And we want to get loaded.’

They had so hit the spot that the track sold 100,000 copies and Primal Scream fronted the ‘Indie/dance crossover’.

The same cross-wind, with added grit of West Country dub, brought the ineffable Gary Clail (dub-funk godfather) and his earth-moving equipment. You had never heard anything as loud as his first gig on the tiny stage. Your body became a living part of the sound system, the bass replacing your heartbeat. He left, hiring as

his manager the Zap promoter Bobby Marshall (my brother), going on to short-circuit the National Grid with a top ten hit 'Human Nature'.

The nineties rolled in and along came Psychic TV, aglow with triumph after securing the release of the Aquarium dolphins Missy and Silver, through a doughty campaign on the streets and in the pages of *The Leader*.

Remember where you saw them first – 1991 was the year to catch Hole, Blur, the Manic Street Preachers, The Cranberries on the way up. November brought rock royalty when Paul Weller chose the humble Zap arches for a special warm-up show.

And the saints kept marching in. On 9 February, 1992, the Zap played host to Velvet Underground drummer Mo Tucker and band. They truly rocked the rafters.

Of course the beat from the Zap was activating the jungle telegraph of the nation's mainstream media, conveniently located quite near Victoria Station. In 1989, *Company* magazine had noted 'Great British Places: The Zap Club — lively,

varied entertainment.' And my, how the word had spread. Of course, the Zap was always a favoured haunt of Those In The Know. Record company types had long been flocking to our shores, any excuse really, busily powdering their noses in the loos and sometimes lost, later, on the beach or drinking long into the night in their hotel rooms. Like greedy gulls after the trawler. The BBC announced in September 1994:

### Brighton Rocks 'For The Musically Starved'

Five days of 'geetar histrionics, tough rapping and frenetic beats at the Zap in association with Radio One.' From 5 to 9 September, shows were broadcast live on the BBC Radio One FM evening session with Steve Lamacq and Jo Wiley. The line-up was quite something, a roll-call of knights of the New Wave of New Wave. Echobelly, Shed Seven, Brighton's own Blubber, Transglobal Underground, The Auteurs and The Prodigy.

And Elastica. Back in the spring of 1994, Indie rock had a near-death experience when Kurt Cobain blew out his brains. These babes of

NWoNW were here to give Indie the kiss of life. Elastica's anthem 'Annie' was all about a day in Brighton, birthplace and still home of the charming and beautiful Chrissie Hyndelike, their bassist Annie Holland. Blown away by stardom, Annie stepped off the Elastica merry-go-round on the eve of their stint at behemoth US tour *Lollapalooza*, fed up with touring and missing her mates and family. 'I remember when I was on the dole in Brighton,' she said. 'I used to speak of my dreams of being in a rock band. Who'd have thought it would end this way?'

### Polly Marshall

*Polly will always remember where she saw them first, as she ran away to join the circus with Chris Taplin, who she first met when he was playing with Frazier Chorus on Sunday lunchtimes at the Zap. Now a writer living in Somerset, Polly's play Phoebe debuted at the newly managed Zap in 1999. She was the venue's publicist from 1988-89 throughout its expansion, and played the Ghost of Christmas Past in the Zap panto The Temptation of Scrooge, a part which obliged her to do the cancan in platforms and a tutu.*

**Right:** Zap's Friday night *Fru Fru* club night (from 1990) offered 'dance and decadence; fashion and funk; style and soul all summer long.'

**Main image:** *The Zap Pow!* A dedicated dance night for under-18 club-goers, August, 1989



‘In an unspeakably vile act of terrorism, that noisy American death disco group, Sonic Youth, last week kidnapped the cream of British music journalism, including Jaws’ own psycho-kidders Skin and Savage Wax, and whisked them down to Brighton to gawp at the band’s beach party in front of the Zap Club. Sonic Youth were last seen flying to Scandinavia, and we don’t mean by plane...’

*Sounds*, November, 1985



# Zap Facts

## Zap Bands

Over the years the Zap hosted an eclectic array of bands and musicians including: Mark Almond, Sique Sique Sputnik, James, Wet Wet Wet, Sonic Youth (1985); Swans (1986); Hank Wangford, Blow Monkeys (1987), The Soup Dragons, Fugazi, Green on Red (1989), Teenage Fanclub, Manic Street Preachers, Wedding Present, Paul Weller (1991), Credit to the Nation, Moby, Blur (1994), The Chemical Brothers (1996).

## Jazz at the Zap

Jazz featured regularly in the Zap listings over the years – from Lol Coxhill (1984) and Andy Shepherd (1989) to John Scofield, Steve Williamson and Pinski Zoo (1990 – for the latter event, London's Jazz Café laid on coaches from the capital).

## Club Nights

The Zap's love affair with club culture kicked off in 1988. Resident Zap Club DJs and club nights included: *Coco Club*, Chris Coco; *Shoom*, Danny Rampling; Carl Cox; Paul Oakenfold, *Acid House*; *Fundamental*; and *Frenzy* (Craig Woodrow et al.), which secured its place in Brighton's collective club memory with a bank holiday spectacular at the Pink Coconut on 29 August, 1988.

## Club Shame

*Gay Times* covered the opening night of Brighton's highly influential gay club night *Club Shame* on 12 July 1989. It later christened Paul Kemp's Wednesday night slot 'the blueprint of gay clubbing for the 90s'. *Club Shame* combined performance art and acid house in a unique, cutting-edge clubbing experience.

## BBC Radio One and Zap

Legendary BBC Radio One DJ Annie Nightingale kick-started a long-term relationship with the Zap and Britain's premier radio station when she first DJ'd live from the club in 1990. In August 1992, Zap organised Radio One's 25th birthday celebrations for an audience of over 100,000; and in September 1994 five nights of live music – entitled Brighton Rocks – were broadcast direct from the Zap Club. Bands included: Echobelly, Shed Seven, Elastica, Fugees, Transglobal Underground, The Auteurs and The Prodigy.

Left: Sheffield Zap Tent jazz lineup, 1990

Centre: Zap Club nights across the city, summer 1988

Right: *Coco Club* summer special flyer featuring Gary Clail, summer 1993

Main image: BBC Radio One's 25th Anniversary Party: 100,000 revellers gathered in Birmingham for Zap's biggest event to date, featuring The Farm, Status Quo and French street art, summer 1992

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11th - BOARDING ZAP TERMINAL WITH SPECIAL co-pilot - PAUL OAKENFOLD

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with your captain - CHRIS COCO

25th - BOARDING ZAP TERMINAL 10pm  
Your pilots Captain CHRIS COCO and PAUL OAKENFOLD

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## Zap Memories

In the late 1980s the Zap Club changed in the space of a few weeks. I started working in the club behind the bar, doing the weekend lunchtime shifts, and one night, when the DJ failed to turn up, graduated to the booth. I figured this was a good move as the DJ got paid a fiver more than the bar staff. As house music began to filter into the country and our DJ collective consciousness, I tried to slip in the odd tune, but mostly the musical diet was funky classics – James Brown, Talking Heads, Soft Cell, Nina Simone.

Then we started a Thursday night [and later Saturdays] acid house club called *Frenzy*. We booked a few (to us) big names like Paul Oakenfold, Danny Rampling, Trevor Fung and Johnny Walker, cranked up the strobe, filled the whole dancing arch with smoke and watched the queues snake up the slope from the door to the road. It goes without saying that practically everybody in the place was on ecstasy. We thought like generations of kids before us that by taking drugs, dancing to loud music and being nice to each other we could change the world. Of course we didn't, it was mostly just a heady cocktail of great new music and great new drugs and youthful enthusiasm that had us so heated up. But we were there at the start of a profound cultural revolution that did change the way a generation thought; that turned me and thousands of others from miserable slackers into happy, smiley slackers; that defined a generation; that is still resonating and pumping (four to the floor) today.

**Chris Coco, DJ, broadcaster, producer, critic**

The Zap was like a time machine. It was at least a year ahead of other clubs and a test ground for fashion and music. It's impossible to overstate the importance of the Zap Club in that it helped to create the club/rave scene which took hold of Britain at the turn of the 1990s. And *Club Shame!* What a place! Quite simply the best club experience of the time, gay or straight. I simply can't find the words to describe how important *Club Shame* was to the gay scene at that time, nor how much it contributed to the club scene in general. It was, certainly on this side of the Atlantic, very unusual at that time to find a gay club that attracted straight clubbers as well. Its importance and legacy stems from the fact that it wasn't just a breakthrough in gay liberation, but a standard bearer for the whole nineties rave/clubbing scene. It smashed through the glass ceiling, which had limited the British gay scene.

**Simon, regular Zap clubber, late eighties and early nineties**

My best ever gig moment was Mudhoney supported by Hole with Courtney Love. They completely blew me away, she totally rocked, and I blagged my way backstage and got her autograph in pink lipstick on a piece of corrugated card that I found on the floor. I've still got it!

**Sarah Heyworth, former Zap Club regular and PR Manager**

**Main image:** *Frenzy* meets *Bliss* flyer, 1988: New Year's Eve club spectacular with built-in warning: 'This Will Be Wild!'

**FRENZY**

**MEETS**

**BUSS**

NEW

YEARS

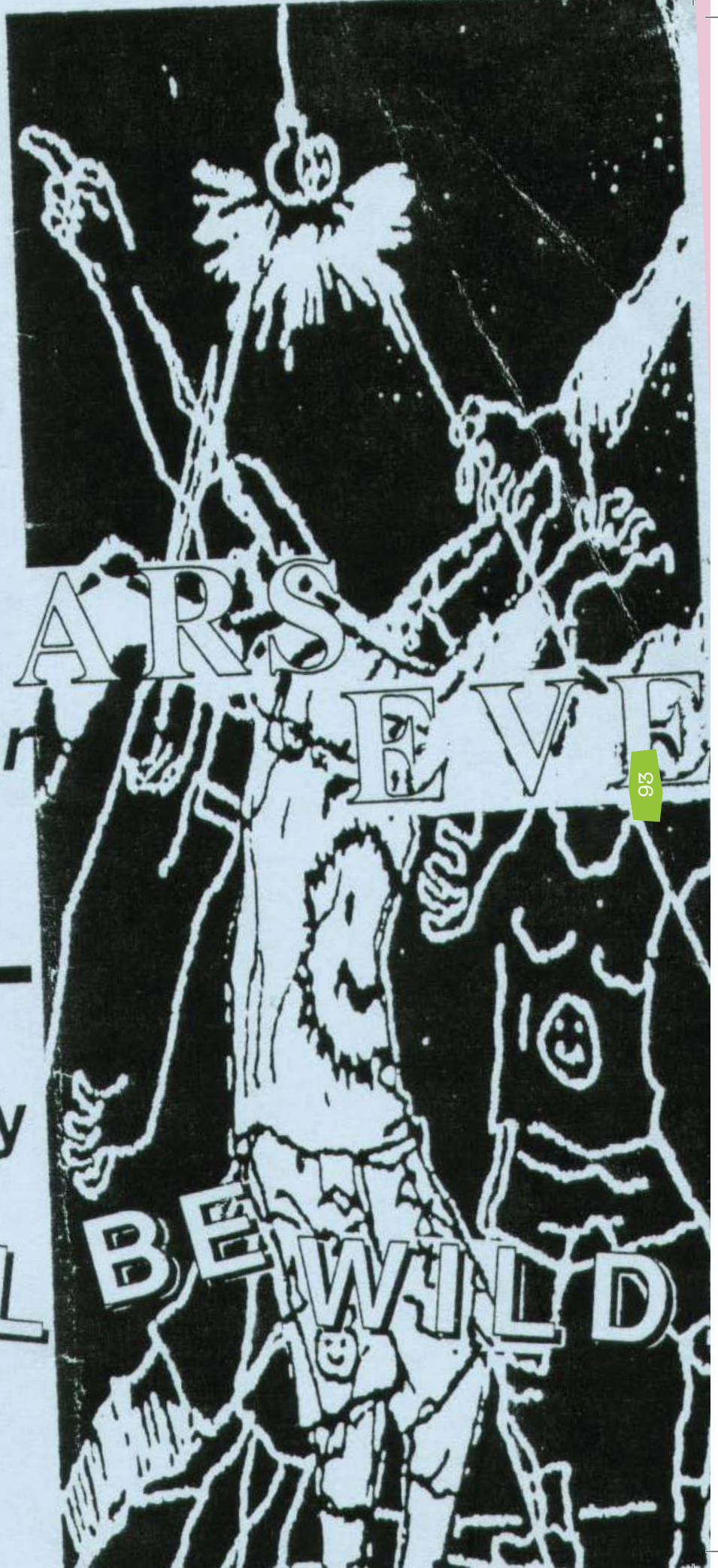
EVE

*(See the old year  
and the old  
club out)*

A night of  
unspeakable joy

THIS WILL

BE WILD



tue  
20th

DEC at 10PM



TACKHEAD

SOUND SYSTEM



Zap's founders were always interested in the arts and a venue for cabaret, but it is the club which made the Zap's name and went on to influence Brighton as the social party capital that it is today. I remember: Angie Goodchild trying to let me know that Kylie was dancing in front of me and me not bothered at all because I was off my head programming my set (not on drugs, just in my mindset!) ... Being given a test of 'Chime' by Orbital (young boys) at *Fundamental* before they were known ... and 'Loaded' by Primal Scream ... DJ-ing at *Shame* and seeing people have sex in the flooded toilets out of it on ecstasy!

**Craig Woodrow, Zap DJ at *Frenzy*,  
*Fundamental*, *Coco*, *Shame* club nights**

The *Coco Club* had a really special vibe; it was like a big clubbing family. The promoters fought hard to keep it that way. As well as Chris setting the mood on the decks, often starting the night with chilled out film soundtracks and allowing it to build as everyone arrived, Lene was on the door to make sure that the cool people came in and the rowdys stayed out. She was tough! The *Coco Club* was full of lovely people and lovely music. Any time I hear John Paul Young's 'Love is in The Air' I remember a club full of happy people waving their arms in the air and singing at the top of their voices.

**Michele, *Coco Club* regular**

I remember going to the *Hairy Dog Club* at the Zap when it was still just two arches. This was held on Saturday lunchtimes so ideal for us 'out of towners' coming down to Brighton for the day as teenagers. This must have been at some point between 1985 and 1988. There was always some form of entertainment organised, from bands to I'm sure what must have been the early days of Stomp or similar. I just remember pieces of corrugated iron etc. on the ground, which were used as percussion.

**Katja, *Hairy Dog Club* regular**

**Main image:** Gary Clail's Tackhead Sound System (poster by Jamie Freeman): an extreme aural experience introducing the 'occult technology of power', 1988

Before the Zap there wasn't really anywhere in Brighton for performers who didn't fit into usual categories. There were bands in pubs of course, being ignored while playing endless Eric Clapton covers. There were also venues for punk bands like The New Regent and the Resources Centre (before it burnt down) but for more unusual off-the-wall acts that didn't fit these moulds there was nothing. Years ago I sent a tape to Kate Bush and she kindly wrote back encouraging me to play live in local clubs. When I heard of the Zap I knew it was the place!

**Monty Oxymoron, former Zap regular and current keyboard player with The Damned**

The Zap was the centre of independent music in Brighton in the mid eighties. It was a meeting of a wide cross-section of Brighton youth cultures, dissolving barriers and allowing all to participate. I remember: sweat dripping on audiences' heads from the arches ... close and cramped (the Brighton 'cavern') ... walking onto the stage from the right and going straight into it ... no time for introductions! ... the band kicking into the first number while a 'performance' artist was finishing their act (sorry performers) ... Wow, what a crowd! A sea of pogoing heads ... falling onto the small stage in a surge from the back ... all good fun, loud-sweaty-immediate! Wow... I miss it!

**Simon Tourle, member of The Four Guns, eighties Brighton band and Zap regulars**

I remember first going to the Zap in 1988. Coming from Worthing, this really opened my eyes! The Zap was just two arches and acid music was starting to get big. The music and the people were just amazing. I remember dancing into the early hours in my bandana, dungarees and smiley T-shirt! That's what I liked about the Zap – you could wear what you liked, dance how you liked, nobody judged you. And I also met some really cool people. Like Andy Crock. It will always hold great memories.

**Mark, Zap Club regular**

I remember *Club Shame*. I was in my late teens, and it was a great baptism into clubbing and the gay scene. The acoustics in the Zap were great: it really suited the style of music and DJ-ing at that time. Likewise, there were no other gay clubs in Brighton quite like it. Mmm, fond memories indeed!

**Jason, Zap Club regular**

*Fundamental* was a lot of fun. I particularly remember the Christmas party with 'Strawberry Additions'! But you can't beat some of the *Tonka* nights for classic and best club night.

**Ben, Zap Club regular**

**Main image:** Pro-Techtion, another classic Zap club night

**PRO-TECHTION**



**INFECTIOUS SOUNDS  
DANGER OF FATIGUE  
SATURATION NOISE LEVELS**



Main image: *The Wind People* by Rin Tin Tin, the Big Day Out on Clacton Pier, July 2006 © Ray Gibson



## Chapter Four

# Beyond the Zap Club

## Festivals, Street Arts and the Great Outdoors

‘The Zap Tent is the brainchild of a group of art lovers in Brighton who wanted to cut through some of the snobbery and elitism associated with the arts and make them more accessible ... it proved such a soaraway success that the organisers decided to expand and take the same mix of entertainment on the road.’

*Yorkshire Post* on York Festival 1988

As early as 1984, as Zap took possession of its first permanent home beneath Brighton’s Kings Road arches, it was already expanding its horizons and seeking out new audiences for its cultural endeavours. From the outset Zap developed reciprocal links with other similarly minded arts organisations and venues from Sheffield’s Leadmill and The Chapter in Cardiff to London’s Diorama and Manchester’s Green Room. Brighton’s Zap Club opening was also promoted through a week-long residency at the ICA in London. As its reputation grew and likewise the demand for its unique brand of art and entertainment, Zap responded in 1985 with the creation of Zap Productions, formed with new director Robin Morley to deliver an ever-growing roster of large-scale outdoor work and festivals across the country.

# Continued...

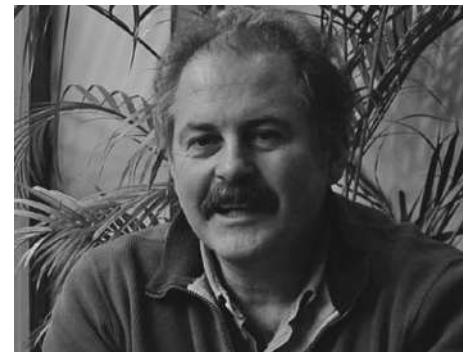
One of Zap's earliest successes in moving beyond the confines of the club was the rise of the Zap Tent as an integral part of the annual Brighton Festival, a programming model that was later rolled out across the country. The mid to late 1980s saw a frenetic period of Zap growth, with the creation of the Rose Street Carnival in Edinburgh (1987), the ICA's 40th anniversary for BBC2 (1988), a ten-day dance festival *Let's Dance* on London's South Bank and the creation of the StreetBiz festival in Glasgow in the same year. The latter kick-started a long-term relationship with the city of Glasgow as it looked forward to its tenure as European Capital of Culture in 1990. It also led to the creation of Zap affiliate UZ Events (1994), a major producer of large-scale outdoor work.

Other Zap milestones in the outdoor arena from this period include Archaos, the progenitor of a new European movement towards a maverick brand of 'alternative' circus (1989-92) and *Matsuri in the Park*, a celebration of Japanese culture in Hyde Park that attracted an audience of over a quarter of a million. While broadening its reach into Europe by presenting Zap commission *The Coming* at the Eclat Festival in Aurillac, France (1992), Zap also developed a highly successful model of UK street art provision. Streets of London (1993) was the first, and

became the template for a massive expansion into regional festivals, first throughout the capital and then to all parts of the country including Zap's flagship festival Streets of Brighton, which this year celebrated its thirteenth anniversary and hosts the annual National Street Arts Meeting. This expansive 'Streets of' concept was later brought under one banner (in 1998) with the launch of the National Street Arts Festival programme.

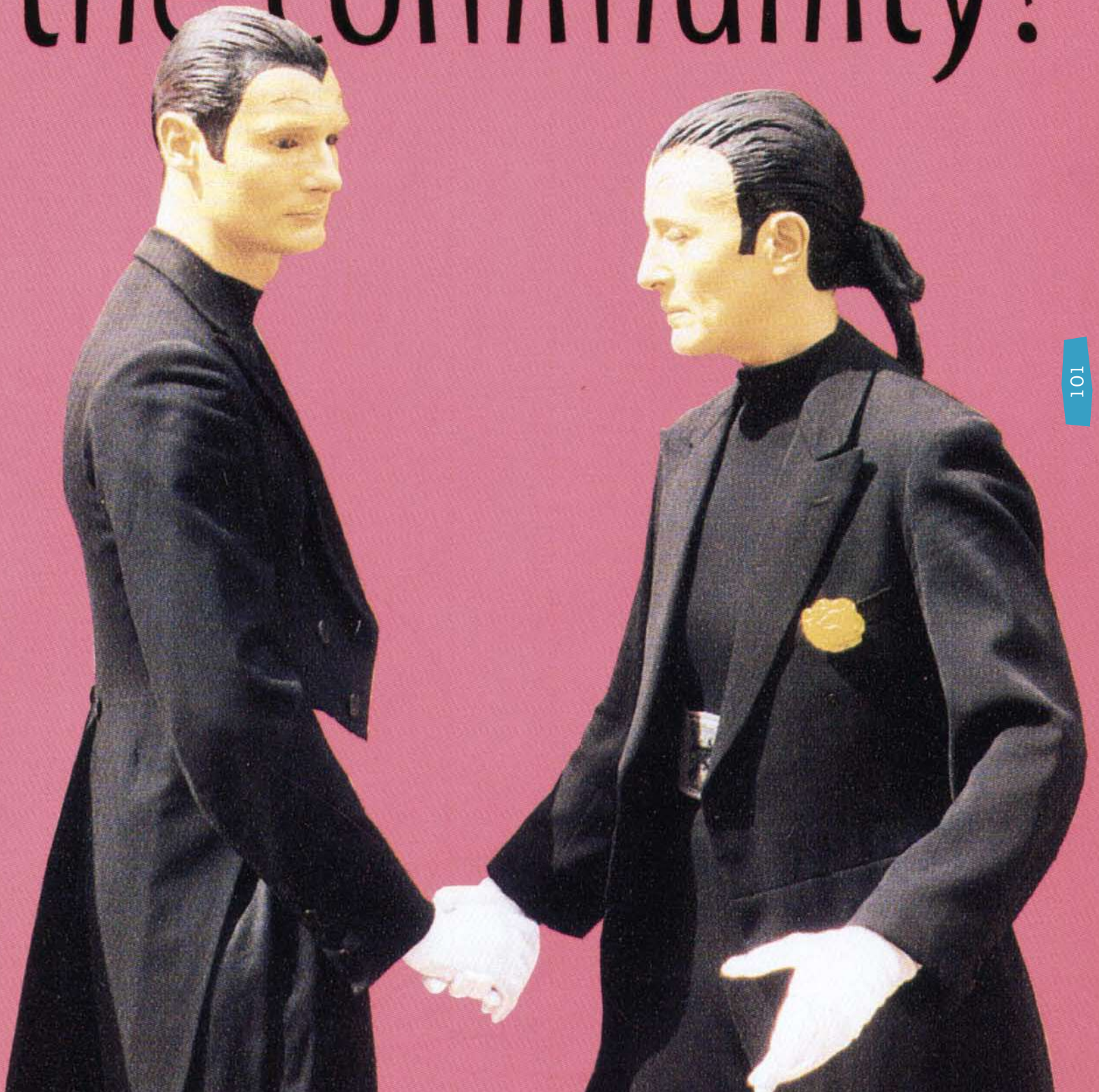
From the Channel Tunnel inauguration (1994) to Center Parcs anniversary celebrations (1997), the nineties saw Zap's reputation for ever larger outdoor events grow exponentially, culminating in a triple whammy of millennium eve celebrations in 1999 in Aberdeen, Glasgow and Brighton.

If the nineties saw Zap map out the UK street art landscape, then the noughties have witnessed a more international perspective: UZ Events has expanded its post-millennial remit into North America, India, Sri Lanka and beyond. At the same time Zap Art has rigorously pursued trans-national partnerships with European street art consortiums to bring works by major European companies like Groupe F, Transe Express and most recently KompleXKapharnaüm to these shores.



**Left:** 'Sans Frontiers, a cross-Channel community festival to celebrate the opening of the Channel Tunnel, 1994  
**Centre:** Streetfeast, 1998, bringing the 'Streets of' formula to the West Midlands  
**Right:** Robin Morley, former Zap director  
**Main image:** Second National Street Arts Meeting, Brighton, 1998

# an invasion of the community?





## The Zap and Brighton Festival 1984-94

**Gavin Henderson**

‘Zap worked as our production company for [Carbone 14’s *Le Rail*] and together we made something, which changed the perceptions of new theatre and an appetite for international/foreign language work in Brighton for ever.’

The 1980s in Brighton had a force and vibrancy that recalls the spirit of Liverpool in the 1960s. The Zap Club was central to this pulse, just as Brighton Festival became an annual fountainhead. What is it about a particular time and place? Brighton had its own false start in the sixties: the coming of the Festival in 1967; the establishment of University of Sussex – and in due course the Gardner Arts Centre; the ‘Art School’s’ new premises in Grand Parade as part of Brighton Polytechnic; the Film Theatre on North Street; the off-beat Gallery 185 in a beach-side archway close to where the Zap would emerge some twenty years later.

For a short while there was a ‘producing’ fringe theatre – The Combination in West Street, established by Ruth Marks and Jenny Harris as Brighton’s answer to Edinburgh’s Traverse; it was here that Howard Brenton and Richard Crane would cut their teeth, and here I sat on a rough wooden bench for a new play by Günther Grass and later realised that the man with the big bushy moustache, sitting next to me, was none other than the author. The sixties closed with Richard Attenborough shooting *Oh What a Lovely War* in Brighton – with half the town and its students as extras, and the two piers as locations. Soon thereafter, the West Pier was closed and so too the glorious theatre at the end of the Palace Pier – in which Maggie Smith had sung the recruiting song: a call to arms, with death just over the horizon. It was somehow prophetic.

It had all seemed so unstoppable. Brighton was centre stage in the erupting tensions and battles of popular culture; mods and rockers would clash on the beaches – to be immortalised in the film *Quadrophenia*, vanquished by a police force that was itself embroiled in a scandal of sleet and corruption. The seventies crept up as a blanket of chloroform, and the rough and tumble of artistic endeavour was stifled by the anaesthetic of a municipal push towards the conference trade. The Brighton Centre, a basilica of convention, would bring much needed business to the hotels, bars and restaurants – indeed the meat and drink of a resort town.

But, Brighton isn’t just a resort town; it is a quirky, creative and rebellious sort of place. Where had all the artists gone? The Festival continued to receive local authority grant in aid, but was still run from the offices of a classical concert agency in London, and had lost its original bite. The Film Theatre closed and The Combination was frozen out, to find a cheerier welcome at The Albany in Deptford. A modest flame of protest was kept glowing with the ‘underground’ journal *Brighton Voice*. The ‘Brighton Belle’ locomotive stopped running in 1972 and so came to an end the elegant rail-born artery, which connected Brighton’s illustrious thespians to the West End stage. It was an iconic moment, a turn in the tide, which would incubate a determination that Brighton should be itself, and not be beholden to the hand-me-downs from the cultural banquet that is life in London. A new artistic generation was taking stock.

**Above:** Gavin Henderson

**Main image:** The Zap Tent became a major feature of Brighton’s annual May Festival




The Thatcher government ushered in the eighties, and with it a chilly message for education and the arts. Bottom line was all, accountancy culture was the order of the day – or was it? Repression, however benign, brings with it reaction. Art is a mineral that forms under pressure. The artists began to reappear and did so in abundance.

Brighton's shoreline was to become a metaphor for work 'at the edge': Cliffhanger Theatre emerged at much the same time as Neil Butler's Contemporary Festival of Arts (detailed earlier in this book), making new shows for the small scale touring circuit. Pete McCarthy, Tony Haase, Rebecca Stevens and Robin Driscoll wrote and performed, whilst in parallel another group of Brighton-originated buskers took to the streets as Pookiesnackenburg, led by the Busby Berkeley of fringe performance, Luke Cresswell.

I had my first encounter with what was becoming the Zap Club in a hotel function room in Oriental Place. I was on a project committee for the Gulbenkian Foundation called AIM ('Arts, Initiative and Money'). Various off-beat programmes were being advanced, and this Zap endeavour seemed to fit the bill.

This heady and hedonistic mix of largely Brighton-made artistry all came to the boil at much the same time. I was asked to succeed Ian Hunter as Director of Brighton Festival in 1984, just as the Zappers, now joined by Dave Reeves, had acquired a couple of arches, between the piers, as a permanent home for what was becoming a 'new vaudeville' crossing of cabaret with performance art. This was a fortuitous conjunction of time and place – with a newly sympathetic Regional Arts Board directed by the open-minded ex-Butlins Red Coat Chris Cooper (who was also as open-handed as he could be in times of official constraint).

The brief of the Festival Director was that of absentee producer. As Hunter had run the event from his office in London, I was expected to do so from the Arts Centre I ran in Bracknell. This had to change, and just as the Festival



# ZAP TENT



## FESTIVAL BIG TOP



TENT SITE - Dome Car Park

### The Flying Fruit Fly Circus

- EUROPEAN PREMIERE -

Saturday, 14th May - 7pm  
 Sunday 15th - 2pm & 7pm  
 Monday 16th - 7pm  
 Tuesday 17th - 2pm  
 Wednesday 18th - 7pm  
 Adults £3.00 - Children (over 10) £2.00

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**FRIDAY 20TH MAY**

1st Show - 8pm, Doors open 7pm  
**Roger McGaugh & Pete McCarthy** £3.50/£2.00 Concs  
 2nd Show - 10pm  
**Happy End** £3.50/£2.00 Concs

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**SATURDAY 21ST MAY**

Matinee - 1pm, Doors open at noon  
**Bright Red Theatre** £3.50/£2.00 Concs, Children £2.50  
 1st Show - 8pm, Doors open 7pm  
**Joan Collins Fan Club** £3.50/£2.00 Concs  
 2nd Show - 10pm  
**John Martyn** £3.50/£2.00 Concs

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**SUNDAY 22ND MAY**

Matinee 1pm, Doors open at noon  
**Bright Red Theatre** £3.50/£2.00 Concs, Children £2.50  
 Evening - 8pm, Doors open 7pm  
**Alarmist Theatre** £3.50/£2.00 Concs

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**MONDAY 23RD MAY**

All evening show 8pm, Doors open 7pm  
**Alarmist Theatre** £3.50/£2.00 Concs

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**TUESDAY 24TH MAY**

1st Show - 8pm, Doors open 7pm  
**Simon Fanshawe & Jenny Lecoat** £3.50/£2.00 Concs  
 2nd Show - 10pm  
**Amampondo** £3.50/£2.00 Concs

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**WEDNESDAY 25TH MAY**

1st show - 8pm, Doors open 7pm  
**Morris Minor and The Majors** £3.50/£2.00 Concs  
 2nd Show - 10pm  
**Amampondo** £3.50/£2.00 Concs

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**THURSDAY 26TH MAY**

1st show - 8pm, Doors open 7pm  
**Carousel** £3.00/£1.50 Concs  
**NatWest** £3.00/£1.50 Concs  
 2nd Show - 10pm  
**Amampondo** £3.50/£2.00 Concs

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**FRIDAY 27TH MAY**

Matinee - 1pm, Doors open at noon  
**Carousel** £3.00/£1.50 Concs  
**NatWest** £3.00/£1.50 Concs  
 Evening show - 8pm, Doors open 7pm  
**Tiny Tim - World Celebrity Status Non Stop Singing Record** £5.00/£3.50 Concs

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**SATURDAY 28TH MAY**

1st show - 8pm, Doors open 7pm  
**Salif Keita** £5.00/£4.50 Concs  
 2nd Show - 10pm  
**Blues Review** £3.50/£2.00 Concs

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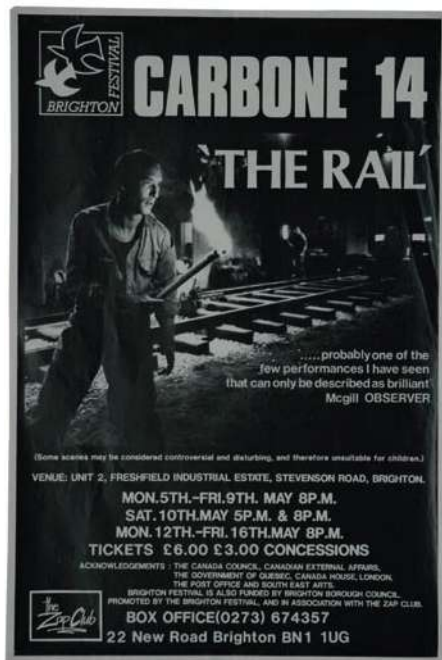
**SUNDAY 29TH MAY**

1st show - Doors open 7pm  
**ARTREACH** present for ITV TELETHON 88 a FASHION SHOW for charity  
 Evening - 10pm  
**The Zap Awards** £3.00/£4.00 Concs  
 Sponsored by The Evening Argus

## 14th~29th MAY 1988

TICKET SALES

Dome Box Office, 29 New Road, Brighton BN1 1UE (0273) 674357



**Above:** Poster for *The Rail* by Canadian theatre group Carbone 14: a major UK production staged at the old Kemptown Railway Station, Brighton, 1986

**Main image:** Bev Miller's poster for The Zap Club at Edinburgh's Elephant Fayre, featuring Georgie Fame, Lindisfarne and Red Wedge, 1986

programme had hitherto been a concoction (essentially musical) of visiting orchestras, ensembles and soloists, the challenge was also to recognise that in Brighton we had an emergent galaxy of, to say the least, unusual artists who could easily hold their own in an internationally focused festival. Furthermore with a programme that could and should do more to embrace a wider range of arts disciplines.

I was determined to create an indigenous production team for the Festival – and indeed to support year round arts promotion. I also wanted to see the Festival break loose from the assumption that the Dome/Royal Pavilion estate was its only base. Other venues would shift the axis, and the prospect of a Zap Club based in its own premises was to be crucial in implementing new priorities of programming. Their building was not open for my first Festival in 1984, but the Zap did produce events at the Pavilion Theatre and the Sallis Benney Hall at the Polytechnic.

By 1985 the Zap Club was getting established in its own home. For three Festival weeks we collaborated in a range of acts at the club, with artists in residence (such as Roland Miller and Rose English) making installations and living sculpture. The Zap helped us to produce the Industrial and Domestic Theatre Contractors in a work around and about and under the West Pier. They also collaborated in bringing a tented season to what was then the Dome car park (the site on which the new Jubilee Library now stands). A series of Zap Awards featured different art forms each week, and a performance art platform was open to all by application – underlining Brighton's place as a national centre for "time-based" art, much of it indigenous to the town.

A year later, and the Zap was in full swing, functioning as a nightly social centre and alternative Festival club. Large-scale international theatre work was still scarce in the UK. LIFT had done much to redress the balance in London – and together with LIFT's organisers, I had gone to a showcase conference of

new theatre and performance in Montreal – CINARS. Here we saw Robert Lepage for the first time, and La La La Human Steps, and a company called Carbone 14 based in an old fire station. Hitherto, Canadian arts had been viewed rather patronisingly – suddenly it was a major force. Lepage brought his Dragons' Trilogy to LIFT; Dance Umbrella presented La La La Human Steps, and I was determined to bring Carbone 14's show – based on D.M. Thomas' *The White Hotel – Le Rail* to Brighton. It was a major undertaking – a site-specific construction requiring a stretch of rail track. It took much time to marshal the resources, and the location – eventually a commercial warehouse in the old Kemp Town Railway Station site. It was too late for inclusion in the 1986 Festival brochure, but we pressed ahead nonetheless. Zap worked as our production company for this project, and together we made something, which changed the perceptions of new theatre, and an appetite for international/foreign language work, in Brighton, for ever.

The Festival gave the Zap a means of working on larger scale projects outside of its own venue. The Big Top became a focal point, using the 'Elephant Tent' (from the Elephant Fayre), and ultimately being re-christened the Zap Tent. The Festival also acted as a lobbying force to establish a more enlightened policy for arts support with Brighton's local authority (until 1986, a Conservative-run council). We created the Arts Unit, in a shop opposite The Corn Exchange, to function as a year-round promotional centre for all the various artistic endeavours, galleries, pub theatre and jazz clubs. With it came a budget for grant aid, which in turn allocated funding to the Zap, and also established the basis for recruiting a new community arts initiative. This came to life as Same Sky, and kick-started a theatre company called Bright Red out of which grew the busking troupe The Pierrotters.

The Arts Unit was a means of finally developing a Brighton-based production and promotional team for the Festival, as well as being a focus for year-round creative activity. It was

LYDIA LUNC



UCHE



8 → 31 AUG

1986

WEDGE

ELEPHANT FAYRE.

PRESENTS...

# The Zap Club

LIMEOUT



LINDISFARNE

+ MANY MORE!! +

BOX OFFICE: 226 6746

HOLE IN THE GROUND  
CASTLE TERRACE, EDINBURGH

CLUB TENT BY  
DRYBROUGH -  
FREE CABARET

BARAZOO





**Above:** Zap Club poster featuring one of Yes/No People's first Stomp outings, 1991  
**Main image:** M. Culbuto, Streets of Brighton, 1995 © Karen Poley

a crucial foundation at a time when the arts began to blossom in Brighton. A host of studio collectives, with their own gallery spaces, had emerged: North Star, Red Herring, Maze, and eventually Phoenix, not to mention the 'open houses' of the Fiveways consortium.

Theatre work was burgeoning with Bill Smith and Tony Miller's presentations at 'The Pav' – notable for a first production of Nick Hornby's *Fever Pitch*. They were also publishers of a vital alternative arts and entertainment newspaper – *The Punter*. The Nightingale and Marlborough gave the town's huge community of actors a basis of work experience, and from The Nightingale, Dave Lavender would, in time, help to conceive what has become Brighton's post-Zap mainstream fringe venue – Komedia. To the Zap, the Festival brought international work, such as P.S. 122's *Field Trips* from New York – with a Zap-style bill of fare that included the UK premiere of The Blue Man Group (New York's answer to *Stomp*). Zap re-styled its awards into an end of Festival Oscar-style ceremony at various lavish locations; Simon Rattle received his award for classical music in the glorious old Hippodrome, and The Blue Man Group won the award for Comedy Theatre.

The mid eighties to mid nineties was an extraordinary period to be working in Brighton – and many who were, are now in prominent positions beyond the confines of Brighton. From Pookiesnackenberg via Yes/No People grew *Stomp* – a worldwide phenomenon, which grew out of Brighton. From Cliffhanger, Pete McCarthy went on to become a best-selling author and TV presenter, whilst Robin Driscoll co-authored *Mr Bean*. Stand-up comic Simon Fanshawe is now a celebrated author and broadcaster and was a political advocate/campaigner for Brighton & Hove's city status. The one time squatter and 'agent provocateur' of Brighton's new Labour underground, Steve Bassam, is now Barron Bassam of Brighton. All of them were *habitués* of the Zap.

For a while, the underground became the frontline attraction. It was important for Brighton's fringe society to blaze a trail for recognition of the town's creative DNA. From time to time people would talk of Brighton as a 'second Edinburgh'. I would insist otherwise. Brighton is Brighton and from it comes some of the most inspiring and challenging work to hit the Edinburgh Fringe. But, when officialdom embraces the cultural agenda, something inevitably goes out of the rebellious spirit.

In a sense we won the battle for the arts to be acknowledged as a pivotal means of repositioning Brighton, and leading its regeneration as a place in which to live and work, as well as being a post 'bucket and spade' resort. The onset of a new Labour controlled council, the merger of Brighton and Hove, and the bestowal of city status found public manifestation in a commitment to cultural enhancement. 'The Place To Be' campaign, the Dome Concert Hall, Pavilion Theatre, Corn Exchange, Museum and Art Gallery were all blessed with lottery millions – and who could possibly object to such enrichment? But with it came a sense of sanitisation, and one has yet to see a new wave of Brighton-produced subversives out to zap the status quo.

Two former Edinburgh Festival administrators have followed as Brighton Festival Directors. They have taken forward Zap's involvement with a niche programme of 'Streets of Brighton'. But it has also grown so much that now we do indeed look like a second Edinburgh, with the Fringe very much in its place and quite separately convened and organised. And Zap has put down new roots away from Brighton – in Glasgow and Edinburgh no less.

### Gavin Henderson

*Gavin Henderson was Director of Brighton Festival 1984-94. He is Artistic Director at Dartington, and for The International Summer School. In 2006 he resigned as Principal of Trinity Laban and is now Principal of The Central School of Speech and Drama.*



‘The annual Streets of Brighton Festival, organised by the brilliant Zap Art, is always a great pleasure and a chance to see some of the brightest companies from the UK and abroad in action.’

*The Guardian*



## Stepping Outside – Zap and the Art of Reinvention

**Paul Collard**

**‘I tend to associate Zap now with what they’ve done with outdoor spaces. I think they have brought into the outdoor arena far more interesting work than would have existed if they hadn’t been operating in this sphere.’**

### Where does your relationship with Zap begin?

I first met Zap when I was General Manager of the ICA. Chris Cooper was Director of South East Arts. He had previously been the arts officer responsible for the ICA at the Arts Council so knew us well. One day Chris came to the ICA and said, ‘Look there are these guys called Zap and they want money and I think they are great but they don’t seem to have any systems or structures. Would you be prepared to spend some time with them, because you’re mad and they’re mad and you’d probably get on!’ I said, ‘Okay let’s get together and meet them.’

Anyway, we met and chatted and then this turned into regular meetings. I really liked the four of them together: the dynamic between them was wonderful; they were four such different people with terrific complementary skills. So I went down and we had a number of conversations and it was obvious that some systems were needed. Our auditors at ICA were PricewaterhouseCoopers and we had very blue chip systems in place. That year we had this very bright, enthusiastic young auditor junior. He and I went down to Brighton for a weekend and sat down with the team as they produced all sorts of bundles of till receipts and invoices and so on. We sorted out the bundles, created income codes and expenditure codes and the rest. They thought this was magic and completely embraced it and I remember saying, ‘Have you got any questions?’ At which point Dave Reeves leant across the table and opened this drawer and took out a sock stuffed full of money and said, ‘Where does this go?’

So we got all those systems going and Chris asked me to stay on in this process. For a while I became Zap’s board in an informal way. I would turn up once every month or two and we would meet at the club and look at the management accounts and discuss the relevant issues. At this point, they began to see new ways of working and to take on more external project work. The accounting system showed very clearly that this was highly profitable. This encouraged them to employ more staff and to delegate more. It was all obvious to them; I just provoked discussion about what they could do and the direction they could go in. This relationship came to an end in a formal way when they took on the bigger site. It was a natural take-off point into a different scale of operating and a very successful leap too.

### How important do you think it has been for Zap to reinvent itself over the years and adapt to changing circumstances?

One of the challenges in the Zap business model is this: Zap arrives at a particular point in the development of a local authority arts programme. The local authority says, ‘We should be organising more community or celebratory events – parades, carnival, festivals – and that is how we give expression to our sense of community and identity.’ When they start that process Zap provides a package to them, an all-inclusive service – they come in and sort out the licences, the permissions, book the acts, organise it all. But there’s always a point when the local authority says, ‘That’s fantastic. We now need to develop the

**Above:** Paul Collard  
**Opposite:** Desperate Men, Bears Heart, Streets of Brighton, 2005 © Ray Gibson



capacity to do it ourselves.’ And Zap has to move on to some other area of operation.

The impetus for this process of reinvention is complex. There was a dynamic between them which blurred the boundaries, and I think it was most interesting when those distinctions were blurred. Neil Butler tended to be more purist in the sense that he really cared about what the project was and whether it was right for his artistic development. Dave perhaps tends to be less purist. They were very interesting when they were sparking off each other because of wanting to exist in a quite challenging area. They had different motivations, but it worked best when it came together. They actually invented new ways of working in the process and achieved interesting artistic results out of commercially successful operations. They have inhabited that world very well: when they started doing it it was almost unheard of and now most places you go to you find organisations like that.

**What has been the long-term influence of Zap? Do you think of them as innovators, and if so why?**

When I left the ICA I wrote a report on arts in the inner cities, and I met lots of people using arts to regenerate these urban spaces. They all tended to be like militant members – ‘public sector is the answer to everything; give us the money; don’t ask us what we did with it!’ Now with Creative Partnerships I go out there and meet people and they are much more like Zap. They are organised, professional, they deliver, and yet they are interested in the product in a creative and different way. Now, there is this growth of the creative industries and a sense that there isn’t a distinction between public and private sector. I think this was very much modelled by Zap: it was very innovative when they were doing that for the first time. I think they pioneered that way of thinking.

I tend to associate Zap now with what they’ve done with outdoor spaces. I think they have brought into the outdoor arena far more interesting work than would have existed if they hadn’t been operating in this sphere. There are elements of risk in that – sometimes physical risk; and then there’s stuff that is more culturally risky and challenging to people, and they have occupied that area very successfully.

**How pioneering do you think this sort of work was and where do producers like Zap fit into the wider context of outdoor work and festivals in the UK and internationally?**

Obviously a huge amount is owed to Welfare State and there are a handful of others who were involved with this: Frank Wilson from Stockton International Riverside Festival, Dodgy Clutch, Walk the Plank – each had a different starting point but they were all moving into taking over these big public spaces and doing



**Above:** Streets of London Flyer, 1997  
**Main image:** During Street Biz 1988 Festival, Zap took over the Brigait Club in Glasgow for a week of maverick cabaret hosted by Art Gangster, Ian Smith

spectacular and quite challenging work. But I'm not conscious of another generation who has come after and taken it somewhere else. The second thing about this is that the really successful work in this field was either delivered or performed or inspired by big European companies – French, Basque, Catalan, German, Spanish – who provided the cultural vision from where most of that activity is derived. The driving force is a European concept of spectacular visual outdoor theatre – it's abstract, it's visual, it's very emotional, it's challenging.

All these things have existed on the margins of funding in the UK and it just isn't like this in Europe where it gets huge support. Of course, you have all the people bringing it in and making it the centrepiece of work in the UK. It's just hard to see that there was a driving internal English culture that was shaping this. People like Zap hooked into it, of course, and it needs good producers/presenters to make it happen.

There is a lot of this sort of work about now; there is a big appetite for it here. It is spinning off into other works as well: last year the Pet Shop Boys performed live in North Tyneside with the Northern Sinfonia doing the soundtrack of one of Eisenstein's silent movies; that's coming out of this tradition and maybe that's the beginning of it Anglo-phying itself!

**Do you think that commissioning is the key here? Is this what Zap's role should be? Is this where the future lies?**

The trouble is that commissioning is very high risk and yet there is a commitment to this as a manifestation of popular culture in France and Spain. We like it when we see it but it just doesn't exist here in the same way. It's not in our bloodstream. For all the work and enthusiasm that is generated about it, it never really became British culture, and if it had there would be a new generation coming up and we would all be saying, 'Come on, where's the next big thing and why does all the National Theatre's money just go into producing plays that go on in their building; why aren't they using £10 million a year for commissioning this type of thing?' But we aren't!

Michael Morris of Artangel is a good example of how this can evolve. He was Director of Performing Arts at the ICA when I was there. He had a very distinctive vision and when he moved off into doing his own thing he was still only interested in the artist's perspective. He has evolved this world into a separate, very well-financed product that is entirely driven by finding the money to allow artists to deliver particular visions. He has stuck with doing the commissions thing and done it very successfully.



# The Zap Club



**THE BRIGGAIT**

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**Above:** Archaos' 1991 BX-91 compilation show was described as 'a fun-packed potpourri of diesel, dynamite, crazed clowns and mutant machines.'  
**Main image:** Julian Clary's Joan Collins Fan Club at the Rose Street Festival, Edinburgh, 1987

There's a question within all this about Zap's own direction and where they are now. Is that where they should have gone? Were they not purist enough to stick to that and instead allowed too much of the energy to be dissipated on delivering £50,000 festivals? They certainly had the skill-set between them to do it. On the other hand, perhaps they would see that that work is marginal, and minority interest, and they were much more committed to bigger audiences and engaging a much more populist and popular audience with what they do. That would, of course, make them position themselves somewhere differently on the spectrum. Was it conscious, unconscious, a dissipation of energy, or was it a deliberate act? These are interesting questions.

**How important is it that government and public funding bodies should continue to support this sort of work and how difficult is it for producers like Zap to continue to survive in today's cultural economy?**

The reality of raising funds to commission work in a liberal democracy is that it is governed by rules. First it has to be new – you have to continually reinvent yourself. The fact that it could be just doing what you've always done is neither here nor there. Second, the turnaround time has to be quick; you have to be able to turn it around in a couple of years and show the results, prove that it has had a demonstrable impact. You have to be able to explain to politicians why if they give you the money now, in two years they'll have their results. People come into power and they want something in their city and they want it to happen quickly. And then there is someone like Zap and they can do it and provide the whole package. They will do it well and it will happen and it will be professional, but you have to rebrand what you do to fit the new agenda. That's the reality of working in the arts in a liberal democracy.

What you should always avoid doing, however, is stuff you don't believe in. Of course, if you think this work is really great and lots of people should have the opportunity to see it and work with it, you have to be able to play that game and respond to people in that way in order to deliver. This year it's regeneration; the next it's social cohesion; the next it's educational outcomes: all those things vary and you've got to be canny enough to keep hold of what you believe in in that process and use those as opportunities to deliver. And it is a very fine line. I think particularly with cultural organisations. The ones who stay very focused and actually come out with ever larger, more expensive, outrageously challenging work and end up condemned on the front page of the *Daily Mail* have managed to hang onto that. And they lever more and more money into something which is artistically very pure.

Of course you need to temper this. The trouble is that if you are too pure – and no matter that you have been on the front page of the *Daily Mail* – you lose your audience and then what's the point? I think Zap could counter that and say that we didn't want to be that pure because then we would have lost the people and actually we cared about really reaching out.

**Paul Collard**

*Paul Collard is National Director of Creative Partnerships. Until December 2004 he was Creative Director of Culture 10, a high-profile programme of cultural events and projects based in NewcastleGateshead. He has been involved in the arts and regeneration strategies since 1983, working at the Institute of Contemporary Arts and British Film Institute in London, as Director of the UK Year of Visual Arts in the north-east of England (1993-97) and Director of the International Festival of Arts and Ideas in Connecticut, USA (1997-2001).*

‘Regulars at five pubs in Rose Street can take in a free show with every pint courtesy of the Brighton-based Zap Club, who are currently camped along the thoroughfare. “We won’t do what’s been done before,” contends director Neil Butler, darting between what he calls the “weirdo things” that are happening in watering holes hitherto untouched by the tentacles of the Fringe.’

*The Independent*, August 1987 on  
Rose Street Festival, Edinburgh Fringe.





## Zap and Streets of Brighton 2002-07

**Jane McMorrow**

‘The outdoor art of Streets of Brighton has changed ordinary streets and parklands into extraordinary places; these are experiences that reshape our city, and live on in us.’

It is 12 May, 2006 and I am tearing along to get to a production meeting at the Brighton Festival offices. I am on my way through Pavilion Gardens and am stopped dead in my tracks by a large maze that overnight has appeared in the middle of the Gardens. A maze? It looks like it has always been there! I am not the only person who is stopping to take a look: there are many curious people around. It’s not open yet. When will I be able to take a look inside? It is the second weekend of Brighton Festival and this is Streets of Brighton, a weekend when residents of Brighton & Hove have come to expect the unexpected but it still catches you out!

A few hours later I return to Pavilion Gardens to see a queue of people waiting to get the opportunity. The dotmaze ‘Get Lost’ is created by street art supremos dotComedy and represents just one of the many varied and thrilling companies that Zap Art has brought to Brighton Festival for Streets of Brighton over the years. And dotComedy has once again done the thing they do so well: they have transformed a familiar space into something totally magical.

My first Brighton Festival as Manager was in 2002 – the eighth Streets of Brighton. It was also my first experience of French pyrotechnic magicians Groupe F and their amazing show *A Little More Light*, brought to the Festival in conjunction with Zap Art. Four years later I was lucky enough to be in the VIP area for Groupe F’s *Light Players*, another Zap/Brighton Festival co-production. Like everyone, I was astounded by the pyrotechnic beauty and, well,

*looniness*, of this piece. I remember looking down the hill as the fireworks lit up the darkness to see the delighted faces of thousands of people who had turned out to see the show.

This is what it’s all about. The outdoor art of Streets of Brighton has changed ordinary streets and parklands into extraordinary places; these are experiences that reshape our city, and live on in us. Streets of Brighton has helped to define the month of May, and the Brighton Festival, as a time and place where art can be thrilling, transformational and unique.

So how did we get here? I think part of it is that Brighton has a particular spirit of place that comes from its people and its history. People come here to change, to experience something different, whether they move here, or whether they’re just visiting for the weekend.

It’s not just people that Brighton changes. What started as a highly reputable but fairly conventional arts festival has changed remarkably in the last few years into something more unexpected, more daring and, I think, more dangerous. That’s the reason why the Festival has acquired the international reputation it has in recent years.

Though we’ve got a world-class performance space in the Brighton Dome, the Festival has also been pushing the boundaries not just of what art should be, but *where* it should be. Streets of Brighton has been a key part of this. Zap Art has helped street arts come

**Above:** Jane McMorrow

**Main image:** Groupe F, *A Little More Light*, Preston Park, produced by Zap Art, Brighton, 2002 © Matthew Andrews





a long way, evolving from a disparate group of performers and enthusiasts including musicians, circus and variety acts, street artists and actors. By giving them a stage, Streets of Brighton has helped the genre evolve into something greater than its parts.

It's now a given to say that Brighton Festival doesn't just happen indoors, in places where you expect art to be; it happens just about everywhere, on pavements, in squares, on the beach, on hillsides, on its estates, at the Marina ...it's extraordinary how quickly the Festival's ever-hungry audience has grown to expect ever more daring performances.

One key example of this pioneering spirit at work, this ability to transform an environment

through art, is *PlayRec* by French company KompleXKarpornaüM, produced by Zap Art at Brighton Station for Brighton Festival 2007. They call themselves architects of the twenty-first century. They identify a space within a city and explore the stories behind that place and use those stories to make a performance piece with music, film, theatre and installations. Again, it's about reimagining an ordinary place we all know well – adding a whole new experience to the city we live in.

People are now so used to each year being better, bigger than the last, that the audience and the critics have barely noticed the biggest change that's taken place. Brighton is no longer the place that just hosts the Festival. Brighton itself is now the stage.

### Jane McMorow

*Jane McMorow is Festival Producer at Brighton Festival. Before joining the Festival she ran her own arts management company Writer's Republic, which developed scripts by talents like Linda Smith, Arnold Brown and the playwright Gupreet Bhatti, as well as working on developing the arts with local authorities in Tower Hamlets and Hackney. Before this she was an in-house radio producer for the BBC in London, and an administrator and house manager with the teams who reopened The Hackney Empire and The Electric Cinema in Portobello Road.*

**Above:** DotComedy, the Dotmaze, Streets of Brighton, 2006 © Matthew Andrews

**Main image:** World Record Attempt at Apathy, Comic Character Creations, Streets of Brighton, 2006 © Ray Gibson

‘I have countless memories of Streets of Brighton over the years; at its best it is a celebration of the unexpected, the surreal and the magical.’

Donna Close, Arts Development Manager,  
Brighton & Hove City Council



# Zap Facts

## Zap Tent (1985)

The Zap Tent made its first appearance at Brighton Festival in 1985. It soon developed into a vital entertainment space and an integral part of the Festival, complete with annual Oscar-style Zap Awards (former winners included Sir Simon Rattle, The Blue Man Group and even Czech President Vaclav Havel). The model was so successful that the Zap Tent was subsequently rolled out to festivals and events across the country.

## Rose Street Carnival (August 1987)

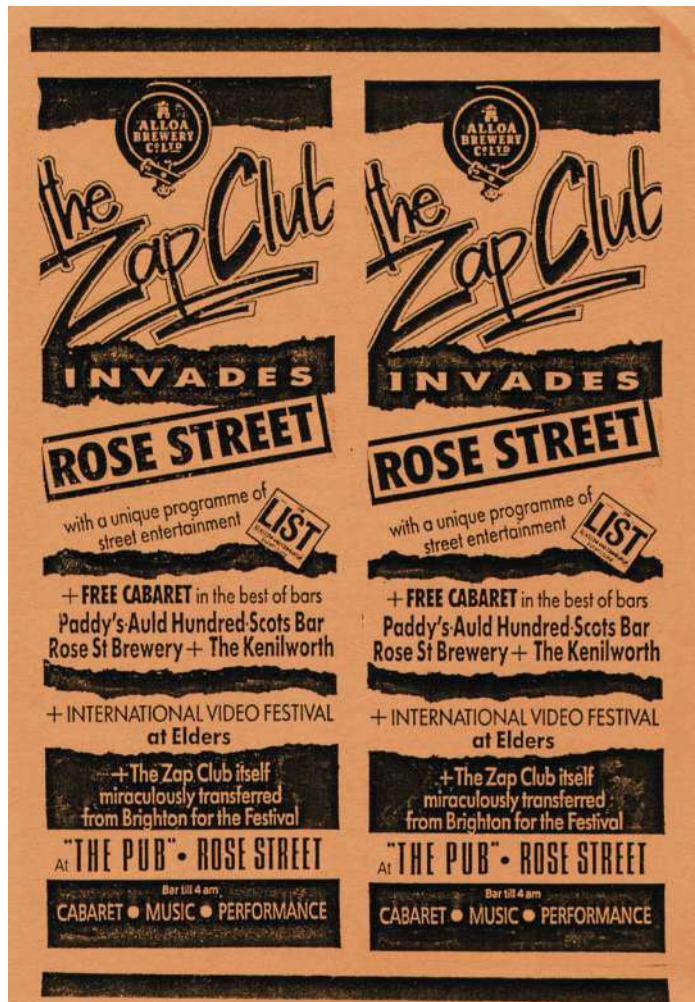
Following 1986's Elephant Fayre success, Zap was invited to organise the first of many events to coincide with Edinburgh Festival. As well as taking over the popular Basement Pub, which served as a temporary home for the Zap Club, the performers colonised Rose Street with a daily carnival of buskers, bands and comedians.

## StreetBiz (August 1988)

Under the StreetBiz name ('Feats on the Streets in and around Glasgow'), Zap presented the first of a series of international programmes of cabaret, street theatre and club culture. It also featured a Busking Open, which culminated in a large outdoor event billed as The Night of a Hundred Drums, produced by J.J. Waller and Yes/No People, and a precursor to Stomp. For one week during the festival Zap took over the Briggait Club in Glasgow, featuring the likes of Magritte the Mind-Reading Rat, The Utterly Astonishing Three Headed Man, Julian Clary, Jerry Sadowitz and legendary Glasgow clubsters Slam.

## The Tell-Tale Heart (September 1988)

Zap's *The Tell Tale Heart* – a South Bank residency under the co-direction of Neil Butler and Ian Smith – featured the late Kathy Acker (writer), Captain Sensible (narrator), Peter Sinclair (mechanical orchestra), Liz Aggiss (choreographer/dancer), Roger Ely (film-maker/poet), Grand Theatre of Lemmings (cabaret theatre), and Holly Warburton (images).



**Left:** Rose Street Carnival poster, Edinburgh 1987  
**Above:** Zap at the Briggait Club, StreetBiz, Glasgow 1988  
**Main image:** Peter Sinclair, *The Tell-Tale Heart*, Purcell Rooms, South Bank, 1988 © Francois Lagarde





### Archaos (September 1989)

Maverick French human circus Archaos (created by Pierrot Bidon in 1984) made its UK debut courtesy of Zap at Edinburgh Festival Fringe 1989. Described as 'a mix of art, anarchy and chaos', the show was a huge hit, and Archaos began a successful three-year international tour before imploding in 1992. Its first Brighton visit (November, 1990) – billed as 'The Last Show on Earth' – almost lived up to its name when it was banned from its original venue on the Level before relocating to Stanmer Park.

### Matsuri – Japan in the Park (September 1991)

In front of an audience of 250,000, Zap turned Hyde Park into an open-air festival of all things Japanese. An enormous float (*Nebuta*), borne aloft by costumed carriers, dancers and drummers, became a huge lantern by night, only eclipsed by a vast firework display (*Hanabi*). This event was mirrored a decade later with Matsuri 2001, a weekend celebration of Japanese culture, attended by Prince Charles and the Emperor (or Crown Prince) of Japan.

### First Streets of London (1993)

Following the Malabar spectacular in Highbury Fields, Islington in 1992, events under the 'Streets of London' banner took off across various London boroughs. The Streets of London format became the template for a series of 'Streets of' festivals across the country, finally consolidated in 1998 under the National Street Arts Festival umbrella.

### First Streets of Brighton (May 1995)

Streets of Brighton was launched during Brighton Festival 1995. It has since become one of the largest and most vibrant of all street festivals in the UK and also a key component of the Brighton Festival programme. Since 1997, it has hosted the annual National Street Arts Meeting, a platform for artists, producers, arts officers, programmers and funders to meet and debate current street arts issues.

### Millennium Celebrations (December 1999)

At the height of its outdoor productivity, Zap and its affiliates north of the border conceived and orchestrated a hat-trick of explosive millennium celebrations in Brighton, Aberdeen and Glasgow.



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**Left:** Glasgow New Year's Eve celebrations, 1999: one of three Zap millennium extravaganzas produced alongside Brighton and Aberdeen © Alan McAteer  
**Above left:** Glasgow's Beat the Clyde, 1988  
**Above right:** Japan 2001, Zap's ten-year follow up to the original Hyde Park Matsuri

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19  
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fun with  
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singers,  
dancers and  
drummers,  
160 art,  
craft and  
food stalls,  
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horseback  
archery  
tournament  
and NO  
admission  
charge

Beyond the Zap Club

# Zap Memories

The first time we discovered Streets of Brighton was in May 1997, ten years ago. It was a revelation – this young street arts festival closely associated with Brighton Festival. At the forefront of this exciting initiative was Zap Art, a company passionate about street arts and a pioneer in this country for the creation of artistic exchanges between British and French companies. Those first street arts festivals in Brighton enabled us to meet numerous British artists with whom we consequently collaborated by presenting their shows in Amiens or by co-producing some of their projects.

This relationship between Streets of Brighton and the French festivals in Amiens, Sotteville-lès-Rouen and Loos-en-Gohelle, has enabled the achievement of a unique European project, The European Polycentre of Artistic Creation (PECA). The plan to have a permanent creation centre for street arts in the Rother area [UK] arises from this new dynamic, and will be one of the objectives in our collaboration for the next phase of our project (2008-13). I am convinced that what we have created with Zap Art, Culture Commune and Atelier 231, will stay in the history of European street arts as an exceptional adventure.

**Jean-Pierre Marcos, Amiens Metropole, France**

Science, as can be clearly measured, can improve lives: swelling goes down, broken bones heal, and with a 'plink-plink fizz' those post-party headaches disappear. Art can be a little more subtle in its effects but much longer lasting.

My first taste of this working at Zap was at BigFest, a street arts festival in a concrete shopping centre in Uxbridge, a south-western borough of London. The borough is a real melting pot of age, class, income and ethnicity. Zap's job was to reflect this diversity through this event.

The piece was going to be a traditional dance from Eritrea performed by local people who had moved to London in the 1990s to flee the thirty-year war with Ethiopia that had ravaged their land and their lives. As the dance continued, members of the audience stepped forward and joined in, unprompted but in time.

After the dance, one of the Eritreans came over to me, face glowing with elation. 'You have given me the chance to show people my culture and to celebrate with them, thank you.' She had been given a voice and a presence in a city that can so often favour anonymity.

I like to think she took something away with her that day (as I did) that a thousand scientists would never be able to package, something that would have no negative side effects and might, in the smallest, most incalculable way, have helped improve her life.

**Rob Eagles, Zap Art Project Manager**

**Main image:** Over 250,000 people caught Zap's Japanese Matsuri extravaganza at Hyde Park, September 1991

Consider the following questions: Can you identify a single thing that has changed your life? What was the best performance you have seen? When have you been most exhausted? What's the biggest trouble you have managed to successfully shoot? What's your biggest regret? Where did you meet the most exciting, wild, interesting and creative people imaginable? What has been your greatest achievement? What's the strangest conversation you have had with a police officer?

The answers to these and a hundred other questions lie in 'Streets of Brighton', Zap's annual festival of street arts during Brighton Festival in May of each year.

So where did it all start? After a year working on a voluntary basis for Zap Productions, I was taken on as Project Manager and Project Producer for Streets of Brighton from 1997 to 2003. It was long hours, hard work and rubbish money, but was undoubtedly the best possible comprehensive arts development and project management training available and I remain deeply thankful for the opportunity.

The single most inspiring performance I saw at Streets of Brighton was the first show from Cie Jo Bithume in 1995: *Oceano Satanas*. A young boy enacted his epic quest high above our heads, suspended on ropes and floating platforms, while a crowd of stilt-wearing, flag-bearing creatures came rushing recklessly through the crowd and we all became aware, *en masse*, that we had become the *oceano satanas* – the satanic ocean. The people of Brighton had genuinely never seen anything like this, and the performance set many of Brighton's artists and other arts professionals on their current street arts paths.

2002 was one of the great years for new commissions with Blagart's *A Life in a Day*: an edgy and explosive response to the emerging political situation in Iraq. The same year saw the new collaboration between Martinez & Fabrega and Cie Provisoire from France. This wonderful show took part appropriately enough on the *petanque* pitch and was the culmination of five years Interreg supported work with our festival partners in Sotteville-lès-Rouen and Amiens: a French partnership that continues to this day.

Other highlights include: the sheer anarchy of *Cie Cacahuète* where one of our poor stewards had to run down North Street chasing a seventy-year-old male performer in a wheelchair who had stolen one of the scantily clad mannequins from Ann Summers; or wrestling a fifty-foot long inflatable dragon to the floor to prevent it from taking off on the seafront; or even chasing giant Elvis Presleys through the shopping centre.

There were amazing crowds for performances from the cream of UK street arts over the years: the Invisible Men, Stickleback Plasticus, Desperate Men, Circo Rum Ba Ba, Roxy's Tools Box, Dream Engine, Chameleon, The Strangelings, Flick Ferdinando, and many, many others...

I have countless memories of Streets of Brighton over the years; at its best it is a celebration of the unexpected, the surreal and the magical ranging from one-handers to huge spectacles.

**Donna Close, Arts Development Manager,  
Brighton & Hove City Council**

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Ah yes, Zap. What was it then? Twenty-five years ago: an evening in a pub somewhere in Brighton – it was a different place every time we came, and then it settled down. Or did it? I can't remember. Zap and its ethos will never 'settle down'. Zap happenings and shows and clubs and festivals and events and ventings and the arts of Zapdom were meant to rattle cages and sound alarm bells. We did 'cabaret' shows in the early days of Zap clubdom – we were a bit weird. But everyone was. We were considered to be 'Live Art' for a while, and then we collided with 'narrative' and got dropped from that hallowed ivory tower. Zap never let us go though – or let us down. We got repeat bookings, maybe because we were funny, or stupid, or perhaps for being insanely ridiculous and stunningly original. Whatever the reason, twenty-five years later we still get gigs from various Zap affiliates and subsidiaries.

For us, Zap gave us a chance to perform – live, intimate, in your face, on the street, on the beach, in France, in your lap, up your alley, round your bend and down the pub/club/bar/theatre/cabaret/disco/dancehall/cellar/hole-in-the-ground-place. We were welcomed for just 'doing it'. We were given free rein to do whatever took our fancy. So we did. And it was good. And the Zap Lord said it was good. And the people were happy and celebrated joyously. And we got paid.

We've been privileged to have had an ongoing and fruitful relationship with Zap in its many mutating forms, and have always been encouraged and supported in our work. Zap has had its fair share of criticism over the years – some of it justified – but all institutions tend to ossify over time, so there are bound to be challenging times.

Over twenty-five years Zap has given a huge amount of performers good opportunities to show and create work, and we should vibrantly celebrate that fact.

The Streets of Brighton festival has ineluctably become rather a cumbersome beast and has now to justify itself to performers, funders, producers, councils, stakeholders, in an endless round of consultations, strategy documents, labyrinthine funding bids, ecological sign-postings and infrastructural re-workings. It used to be simply a great social event on the calendar – a place to go and do a bit of work, strut your stuff; a new show, a mad invention; meet your mates, natter on about art and theatre and street stuff, have a few drinks, fall in love if you were lucky ... and then beetle off into the summer of gigs and shopping centre shows and muddy festivals.

Now it's like some kind of themed, self-reverential marketplace, full of people who seem to think that street performing is some kind of career path and the Arts Council and Zap and the world owes them a living.

I jest...

Streets of Brighton has persevered with the original Zap-framed vision of openness and being ready to accept all comers, whatever flavour, whatever pigeon-hole – trying to showcase the best and the rest of street arts in all its woes, wiggles and wonder. But things change, the *Zeitgeist* runs ahead of us ... we keep playing and provoking and taking the piss ... And we all do it because we love it!

**Jon Beedell, Co-Artistic Director, Desperate Men**

I was Head of Theatres, Arts and Festivals for Bradford Council when Zap took over Bradford International Festival. Zap didn't have it easy in Bradford, due to some Luddite sections of the 'arts' community who were determined to wreck Zap's hard work, no matter what the cost. I was very impressed with the range, quality and diversity of Zap's work. From the large scale set pieces, to the smallest scale street artist, it was clear that Zap's programmers understood the audiences they were programming for, and delivered appropriate and stretching shows and events.

**John Bottley, former Head of Theatres, Arts and Festivals for Bradford Council**

We performed our plays *Veles e Vents* (Sails and Wind) and *Nit Màgica* (Magic Night) [produced by Zap] in several sites in London in the mid-1990s. These two performances made me think of the conditions street promoters have to work in the UK and the huge merit they have in getting financial support for street projects and in succeeding to solve the safety requirements. I've always thought that these regulations have been made for the economic benefits of big industries, and outdoor festivities are treated as immoral and dangerous. That's why Zap's work is so important for us, the artists, and for British society. It helps to broaden people's minds and to enjoy the freedom of sharing outdoor spaces for artistic and festive reasons. I really admire those British organisers who fight bureaucracy to organise innovative artistic and social projects in public spaces.

**Manuel V. Vilanova, Founding Director of Xarxa Teatre**

My first encounter with Zap would have been in 1988 in the ground-breaking StreetBiz Festival in Glasgow. I was then part of a double act, myself and the wondrous Lucy Wisdom of Mutoid Waste Company fame. We performed on the streets with the likes of Chris Lynham, Tim Batt, and Andy Cunningham (the man with three heads). By night in the Briggait Centre there were shows by Chris, Julian Clary (Joan Collins Fan Club), Wayne Sleep and Jerry Sadowitz.

Next I went solo, and 'did my time' at the Gateshead Garden Festival. In the preceding years I enhanced my reputation by jumping off the pyramid stage at Glastonbury and performing as 'Stompy the Bastard Clown for Children's Funerals'.

Then in 1999 I co-founded dotComedy with William Wilding and Heather Angel and we went to Streets of Brighton for the first time. Over the following years we created new shows: *Car Boot Sale*, *MisInformation Tent*, *Newsdesk*, *Changing Streets* and *Why!* We had developed our dotComedy style.

The 'Get Lost' maze, directed by myself and Helen Kane, and designed by Graeme Gilmour was presented at Streets of Brighton 2006. It had a massive impact and interest leading to new gigs through the showcase element of Streets of Brighton. In 2007 we were back again, presenting new work. As the company continues to grow and develop, we hope to carry on performing in Streets of Brighton. As my career evolves so does Zap, taking our relationship into its nineteenth year. Thanks to all the like-minded souls!

**Richard Stamp (a.k.a. Stompy), dotComedy**

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**Main image:** *Light Players*, Groupe F,  
Preston Park, Streets of Brighton, 2006  
© Karen Poley

## Chapter Five

# Zap Today

‘Zap Art, the powerhouse behind British street arts.’

Lyn Gardner, *The Guardian*

Zap Art was formed as a registered charity in 1990. After the closure of Zap Productions in 2003, Zap Art became the contemporary face of the Zap brand. Over the last decade, it has become an internationally renowned creative producer of large-scale festivals, street theatre, community initiatives and trans-national partnership brokering. As well as its flagship festival Streets of Brighton, it has a national portfolio of large and midscale events from Hillingdon BigFest and Hastings Coastal Currents to one-off outdoor events such as 2001’s Matsuri – Japan in the Park. It has also been instrumental in bringing some of Europe’s most fêted street arts companies to the UK including Transe Express (*Lazy Kings*, 2004), Christophe Berthonneau’s Groupe F (*A Little More Light*, 2002; *Light Players*, 2006), and maverick French company KompleXKapharnaüm (*PlayRec*, 2007). At the same time it continues to work with major UK artists and companies such as Bill Mitchell’s WildWorks (*Souterrain*, 2006).

It has been a key proponent of developing trans-European street arts consortiums including PECA (Polycentre Européen de Création Artistique) with Sotteville-lès-Rouen, Culture Commune, Loos-en-Gohelle, and Amiens Metropole; and InSitu, a European network of street arts festivals, companies and associations. It has also pioneered and developed NSAF (National Street Arts Festival) and NSAM (National Street Arts Meeting), and is a founder member of ISAN (Independent Street Art Network). It continues to campaign for the establishment of the first UK street art creation centre in Robertsbridge, based on the French model.

Three current perspectives on Zap’s twenty-first-century output – from Dave Reeves (Artistic Director), Karen Poley (Zap Producer), Rebecca Ball (Head of Combined Arts, Arts Council England, South East) – bring this twenty-five year retrospective up-to-date, examining Zap’s contemporary role in national and international street arts, and looking forward to the future for the ever evolving Zap story.



## Zap Art and the Future

**Dave Reeves**

**‘Whichever way you look at it, it is about new artists working with new ideas for new audiences. That’s been the concurrent theme with Zap for the last twenty-five years.’**

**How has Zap Art’s outdoor work developed over the last few years? What is your focus today in this area and how has it changed?**

The question is how do you make the work have real resonance? These days the kind of work we do with people like WildWorks and KompleXKapharnaüm is not just about spectacle for the sake of it: the work has to have real depth and resonance across the community.

This is similar to the work we’re doing in Clacton on a brand new project about Butlins. This Heritage Lottery funded project with Creative Partnerships is part archiving (working with people like Ragroof Theatre and the local historical society), and part performance. We are doing a project contingent to this with Creative Partnerships, where all the schools in the area are finding out about their history

and location. And then the whole thing comes together with a site-specific show. There will be a certain amount of street theatre involved, but as you can see, it’s moved a million miles from just a bit of spectacle for a targeted audience.

**What do you think is the scope for outdoor work in today’s cultural economy? Have the horizons expanded?**

There is a change in attitude about how people want to engage with their arts I think: it’s about how people want to have a cultural experience. So whether it’s a bit of Live Art, or whether it’s comic acts on the street or a sculptor creating an ambient street installation, there’s a whole plethora of ways you can work with artists in this realm. Whichever way you look at it, it is about new artists working with new ideas for new audiences. That’s been the concurrent theme with Zap for the last twenty-five years.



**Above:** Dave Reeves © Matthew Andrews

**Right:** *PlayRec* by KompleXKapharnaüm, commissioned by Zap Art, UZ and InSitu, Streets of Brighton, 2007 © Ray Gibson

**Opposite:** *Sticky* by Improbable Theatre, commissioned by UZ Events, presented at Streets of Brighton, 2002 © Alan McAteer

We recently received major Arts Council funding for a UK street arts consortium Without Walls – ourselves, Stockton, Greenwich & Docklands, Xtrax Manchester and Winchester Hat Fair – to present and tour new work. We are looking to this to bring new artists and new opportunities to new audiences. For example we commissioned new work from deaf company The Alexandras for Streets of Brighton 2007 and we will be working with dance companies and Live Artists and a new piece of ambient sculpture by Thor McIntyre-Burnie.

The nature of the work and the direction I want to go in now is to collaborate with all kinds of acts: to completely diversify; I would love to work with Banksy, I'd like to expand into new areas and work with a whole variety of pieces that would not normally be considered street arts. It would be great to work with someone like Michael Clark in this environment; great to have a fantastic choreographer like that working in this way.

**How has this environment changed? Is it driven by economics or is it because this is the sort of work you want to do?**

You have to look at the bigger picture. I now have to be a broker of artistic endeavour, of community participation, of financial partnerships. And out of that there are some fantastically exciting artists you get to work with and who want to have that engagement. And if you do that, you tell a fantastically more powerful story than if you tell a story that stands alone. The stuff that we are interested in has that kind of engagement.

**Zap Art today seems to be as much about brokering partnerships as programming work. Is that key to Zap's current *raison d'être*?**

I now firmly believe that you can achieve a lot more by partnership than you can on your own: hence the Without Walls partnership, InSitu, PECA etc.

The Arts Council had a meeting a couple of years ago about what was going to happen

with street arts; it was, and in some ways still is, a very fragile marketplace. But there was consensus that something had to be done. Since then a whole series of things have happened. One is the *Sultan's Elephant* in London last year, which certainly added to the momentum. It wasn't the only factor, but it was a transformative moment and made a big impact, helping to change attitudes and perception. So ISAN (Independent Street Art Network) and NSAF (National Street Arts Festival) wrote to the Arts Council and said, 'What are we going to do about this?' And the Arts Council came back and were very positive about it. And it has become more of a priority. This has been a significant change in attitude and it is not just about the money; it's about new ways of working in partnership. It's about getting together, about sharing ideas and about co-producing arts.

PECA has been essential to this [a ten-year-old partnership that started up with French Street Art Festival Viva Cite in Sotteville-les-Rouen (with Interreg funding) to build a series of creation centres in Europe.] These creation centres are spaces where artists make work, but it's more than this: it's all about co-production and that is how they work in France so well. You have a whole series of organisations and venues who work together in the development of artists, in the development of an idea. One artist might research a piece in one place, write it in another, build their sets in another space, and then develop it elsewhere. It's all about sharing resources to create exciting work and that network is essential. I fully believe that the only way for an art form to work is that you have artists for the idea, you have audiences, and you have the people who bring them together. It's not rocket science.

This move towards partnership and networks marks a significant change: InSitu (a Culture 2000 partnership) is another example. This is a trans-European partnership so we've got partners in Poland and Greece and Portugal and Spain and that makes a whole difference to the attitude of how you think about what you're doing. I think sometimes in the UK it's





**Above:** Hillingdon BigFest, Community Carnival in Uxbridge, 2005 © Ray Gibson  
**Opposite:** Musical Ruth, Streets of Brighton, 2006 © Ray Gibson

been so much about just working to survive. That lack of support (that core support) is the base concern of a lot of organisations (particularly in street art), so that sometimes you cannot think beyond the week ahead. Whereas these trans-national partnerships are thinking about, 'Well that company wants to develop a piece of work for 2010 and they need to spend a year researching in Africa' or whatever. And it's just a different perspective. This has opened out a lot of new possibilities.

*PlayRec* by KompleXKapharnaüm [UK premiere at Brighton Festival 2007] was commissioned

by both InSitu and PECA, so it had a huge amount of support. And because it has developed as a trans-national project, it has resonance for each of the partners involved. It is a good example of this new way of working.

It was the same with WildWorks: in order to make it happen in one spot you have to go through a big process and do all the other things. Peter Boyden, who had facilitated our organisational review with Zap Productions before it closed in 2003, was going through a similar process with Bill Mitchell of Kneehigh. And he suggested that the two of us should get together. So we did and we got on very well. At this time Bill was leaving Kneehigh to set up WildWorks, and I went out to Cyprus to see their work, which was fantastic. Just before that I had gone down to see *Tristan and Isolde* by Kneehigh in Cornwall. And I knew I wanted to work with this guy. At this point I had to convince my French partners, who didn't know Kneehigh from Adam, to invest a considerable amount of money. They had to trust me artistically, and that's not an easy thing to ask, because to be honest UK companies are not always held in the highest regard in Europe. But we discussed and negotiated, and Bill started delivering the idea, and from that cauldron eventually came *Southern*.

### **What is the secret to making this work, to changing perceptions and to attracting new audiences?**

We need to recognise what audiences want and how audiences engage in a completely different way than they would do in a theatre or a conventional space. We need to be able to react to this. It's about finding what people really want and then informing the politicians and the funders. I think things move on and change all the time and people's expectations change; at the moment people like the idea of seeing stuff in an unconventional way for a multitude of reasons. A big proportion of people don't go to the theatre at all. Let's say it's only ten per cent who do. Well what happens to the other ninety per cent? I think they still like to engage with some sort of cultural experience,



and they like the idea of the Brighton's Children's Parade or Pride or Streets of Brighton or Fatboy Slim or New Year's Eve celebrations. Overall people like to feel that they are getting something out of their cultural engagement, and obviously street art has to be engaging. If it's not engaging, people simply walk away. So the number one thing has to be to entertain. This is what Zap has tried to do for the last twenty-five years: to mix entertainment and art.

I think fundamentally this means working with artists who want to think outside the box and think differently about what they want to do and think differently about engaging with audiences. I'm not interested in working with artists who are not interested in their audience. The audiences can sometimes be forgotten in all of this.

This is all an extension of what we were doing in the early days, when Neil [Butler] and I and the others wanted to work with exciting artists who wanted to engage with audiences in whatever way. At the moment those artists and those audiences like to be outside. A few years ago it was in nightclubs.

### **Has that whole extension of the Zap Club into Zap Productions and then Zap Art been some sort of linear progression then?**

The Zap started as a commercial entity, but from day one we had to continually find new ways of working and reinvent ourselves to keep afloat. Zap Productions came out of that because we needed to do other things; and because we were doing good things, people kept asking us to do more, and eventually it just grew into this kind of ugly beast; this unmanageable thing, where we were continually chasing our tail. You get more work so you need more staff and then you need more work to keep those staff. We had enough credibility, so that if there was a bid we would usually get it. And then we did our organisational audit and what came out of that was, 'Well what do you want to do?' I decided I didn't want to be another Imagination; I wanted to get back to doing the art, and the logical step was to take on the mantle of just

operating as a charity. This made everything a lot clearer: Zap Art had a clear message, which we spent a lot of time with our board defining, so that we knew exactly what we wanted to do and where we wanted to go.

### **So is this a better way of working now?**

Absolutely. For me. Certainly at the moment. Whether it is for ever and ever remains to be seen, but at the moment for the kind of work we are talking about and funding, it is right. If you're doing things that are fundamentally not profitable – and street art is free to its audience – then this is the only way.

### **And has the work of Zap Art fundamentally changed in this process?**

Yes, because we made a big decision to be more focused with a smaller team of people and not to go for every bid. One of the priorities was to spend a lot of time making Streets of Brighton into an internationally successful festival. And it is – for audiences, professionals and artists. And then there's a whole series of new projects in the pipeline. So we are broadening what we are doing, but always within our remit, working with the wider community, which is a very different approach because that takes time.





It's not like when we would just be called up by Luton Council and they'd say, 'Programme us a street arts event.' Things have moved on from those days. I think it's not just about having a programmer. A really good festival has a strong artistic direction: it's got development strands; it's got links to the community. Any good event has got a lot of other things other than just programming 'A' and programming 'B', and that's what we have spent our time on.

In all, we have been through quite a transformational process from being a programming, project-based provider to a strategic, commissioning, curatorial producer.

### So where to from here? Where does the future lie for Zap Art?

Of course, I want us to be working with exciting artists, to be creating all sorts of exciting work, which will inevitably be challenging: financially, culturally, artistically or physically.

This reputation of UK street art is slowly changing, partly through partnership, partly through the improvement of the work. The final line in the letter that we sent to Peter Hewitt at the Arts Council was that it would be great if in a few years time, just as Royal de Luxe brought *The Sultan's Elephant* to London, a UK company would one of these days be performing down the Champs Élysées. That's not going to happen yet, but for there to be that level of quality and interest is a great ambition to have.

It goes without saying that I want Zap to be at the cutting edge, where audiences and artists want to meet. I strongly believe, in my own personal politics, that culture can be a fantastic part of the solution to issues in society. I've got five kids and, without sounding crass, I would like to help make the world a safer and better place, and I think the arts, used in the right way, can help. Working with young people, working with people who feel disenfranchised from mainstream society. The more culture can be used as a tool for engaging with people who feel left out, the better. So without being too boring about it, local authorities and government should see culture not just as an add on, but essential to the health of the nation. I'd like Zap to play a part in convincing people about that.

### Dave Reeves

*Dave Reeves is Chief Executive/Artistic Director of Zap Art. He was a founding director of the original Zap Club, and with Neil Butler, artistically directed the venue. He has produced two Matsuris in Hyde Park, BBC Radio One's 25th Anniversary Party and Brighton's millennium celebrations for Zap Productions, for which he was also a director. He set up the National Street Arts Festival and is Artistic Director of Streets of Brighton.*

**Above:** *Crackers* by The World Famous, Streets of Brighton, 2005 © Ray Gibson

**Main image:** *Light Players*, Groupe F, Preston Park, Streets of Brighton, 2006 © Karen Poley

‘A *tour de force* of technical wizardry, the show had more than 50,000 spectators standing with their eyes and mouths wide open, as it made the night sky spread and shrink. Inspired by visions of the earth from above, this could have been a firework display with arty pretensions, but long stretches of it went beyond an awe-inspiring spectacle, and sent your imagination flitting around in the dusk. It was about people as much as big bangs.’

*The Guardian on Light Players,  
Groupe F, Brighton Festival 2006*





## Zap Art – Producer *Southern*, 2006

**Rebecca Ball**

‘Like a number of extraordinary producers working across the arts, Zap has managed to work in an integrated way with artists, funders and an audience, to develop and present work of real depth.’

On a September evening in 2006 I bumped into Dave Reeves in the car park outside a large secondary school in Hastings. Dave – in typical style – immediately started promoting his latest project. After a few minutes of hard sell, he paused, sensing my unease at being urged to give a definitive answer about a grant in a car park. ‘Sorry,’ he said, ‘I am always pitching something aren’t I? I can’t help it,’ he added, ‘I do it to everyone.’ I laughed. It occurred to me that the only reason I was there, stood in that chilly car park on the outskirts of Hastings, was out of a desire to see the latest outcomes of Dave’s seemingly indefatigable energy for ‘pitching’. ‘That’s OK,’ I said. ‘It’s your job.’

In 2006, through pitching, persuading, cajoling, inspiring and brokering, Zap Art brought together a remarkable set of partnerships to support and promote WildWorks’ production *Southern*.

*Southern* was a reworking of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice – a story about love, loss and memory. Retold by Bill Mitchell’s WildWorks, it also became a site-specific exploration of landscape and a celebration of community resilience. A piece that was simultaneously tragic and life-affirmingly joyous.

It premiered at Brighton Festival in May 2006.

The piece captured the imagination of audiences, selling out completely just one day into the run. Over 4,000 people followed the story through the village of Stanmer; engrossed by the performances of the international cast, admiring the sunsets, listening to the community choir, writing down

their memories, intrigued by the shrines created by the residents of the local village, eating cake.

But it didn’t stop in Brighton. Through partnerships brokered by Zap the piece went on to an ancient citadel in Amiens, a closed coalmine in Loos-en-Gohelle, a large comprehensive in Hastings, and was shown in a geriatric hospital in Sotteville-les-Rouens in June 2007. In each place the piece drew fresh inspiration from its surroundings and a new insight into the themes of the piece. Twenty minutes after being ‘pitched to’ by Dave in the car park, I was lining up ‘two by two’ outside the Academy of Hades – a.k.a. The Grove College – holding hands with a complete stranger about to see the culmination of a term’s worth of collaboration between students at the school, Creative Partnerships and the international cast of *Southern*. The fields around Stanmer transformed into classrooms and playgrounds. The bunting from the village fête reconfigured as school corridor displays.

The piece showed the potential of theatre, particularly outdoor theatre, to connect with and unite communities. Its universal themes were rendered all the more powerful by being interpreted through the realities of the places where it was being presented.

The content, style and design of the piece is, of course, testament to the artistic vision of WildWorks. But how and where it was realised was a credit to Zap’s work to build partnerships – PECA, Brighton Festival, Hastings Creative Partnerships to name a few.

**Above top:** Rebecca Ball  
**Above bottom:** *Southern* by WildWorks, Stanmer Park, Streets of Brighton, 2006 © Ray Gibson  
**Main image:** *Southern* by WildWorks, Stanmer Park, Streets of Brighton, 2006 © Ray Gibson

Like a number of extraordinary producers working across the arts, Zap has managed to work in an integrated way with artists, funders and an audience to develop and present work of real depth. Zap has combined strengths in working with artists, budgeting, audience development, people management and contracting to create a formidable presence in outdoor performance. But being a producer is not just about the job you do, it's also about how you do it. Those, like Zap, who do it best, uniquely combine genuine zeal, artistic judgement, a driving sense of purpose, business acumen and sheer bloody mindedness to create the best links between artist and audience possible.

### **Rebecca Ball**

*Rebecca Ball is Head of Combined Arts at Arts Council England, South East. She lives and works in Brighton and has been an annual audience member at Streets of Brighton over the last seven years.*

*'Souterrain is a promenade production, by the landscape-theatre company WildWorks, set in Stanmer Park, a charming but declining village a couple of miles out of Brighton. The story is loosely based on the myth of Orpheus' journey to the Underworld in search of his dead wife, Eurydice. Souterrain is a visual and musical feast but also a moving testament to the resilience of a small community under threat.' \*\*\*\**

*The Independent on WildWorks'  
Souterrain, Brighton Festival 2006*





## Zap Art – Producing the Goods!

**Karen Poley**

'I'm very interested in this area of participation and involving people in the work. It enables the realisation of a much larger scale of work. It also offers participants an unparalleled experience of involvement, ownership and pride.'

I was working as a volunteer for Brighton Festival when I saw the first Streets of Brighton in 1995. Amongst the performances, *Oceanos Satanas* by Cie Jo Bithume is still one of the best and most inspiring shows I've ever seen. The scale and ambition of this production, its fabulous realisation and the size of the audience still astound me.

About a year after this, I found myself working as a volunteer for Zap Productions on Streets of Brighton 1996. Eleven years later, I'm still working for Zap, although the wages are better now, and I've seen and worked on a few shows which come close to the *Oceanos* epic.

Weirdly, it's only me who ever asks why I'm still 'here'. It's a crazy, stressful, dream job (well mostly), which changes all the time. Things sometimes work out exactly as you've planned with everyone saying 'Yes' to even the most bizarre requests for help and support. Other times it's like wading through treacle backwards and blindfolded, and very occasionally there's a legendary gig where absolutely everything implodes and goes completely wrong.

I've helped to create and deliver over a hundred street arts festivals and events; commissioned, presented and toured new work; created educational and large scale participatory projects. I'm still inspired by the work, the potential for the work, the artists, the audiences and the people who make it all happen.

Of all the events, my favourite was Streets of Lewisham, for a wonderfully mixed, huge and appreciative audience, and a great working team within the local authority. Coldest was seven years of the Tunbridge Wells Winter Street Festival, between Christmas and New Year. Most bizarre: Streets of Guildford, dealing with police who were called to the event to investigate a report of a tortoise in the High Street carrying a gun. Most difficult: with an organisation called TS2K in Shadwell, in the midst of a blow up in gang rivalry between two estates – also the hottest event ever. This last was also one of the most rewarding. On the back of the work we did, local young people set up a stewarding company and a short lived street art company was formed.

Commissioning new work has been a key theme, with something like sixty new works commissioned under the banner of NSAF. Some were experimental, some aimed at encouraging cultural diversity, some gave companies a springboard to develop and create larger scale work; some were a nightmare. They included many fantastic successes though, like *The Elvii* by Pearshaped, *Tango Peligroso* by Lighthouse Theatre Co., *The Crowd* by Strangelings and *The Gorillas* by Creature Feature to name just a few.

Another major theme has been educational activity and we've created many projects with street artists working in schools, colleges and community groups. The culmination of these for me was an amazing event

**Above top:** Karen Poley © Ray Gibson  
**Above bottom:** Transe Express, *The Lazy Kings*, rehearsal, Streets of Brighton, 2004 © Ray Gibson  
**Opposite:** Transe Express, *The Lazy Kings*, Streets of Brighton, 2004 © Matthew Andrews

with Creative Partnerships in Slough in 2003 where, amongst others, Pearshaped created performing works of art (Munch's *The Scream*, Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* and Magritte's bowler-hatted characters) with an art class from a local school, and Desperate Men created an astonishing version of their 'Rubbish Heads' with a school drama group.

The participatory work, which has subsequently become a major feature of Zap's artistic direction, began, at least for me, during the millennium celebrations, working with Claire Halstead and Virginia Farman on the *Millennium Love Parade* and *Midwinter Madness* community parade performances in Tunbridge Wells.

My work in this area has continued to develop under the auspices of the Virtual Creation Centre with, for instance, *The Lazy Kings* by Transe Express: a giant performance in Preston Park where six parades met for an aerial finale on a sixty-foot tall coconut tree. Three of the parades were created in Brighton with two hundred local participants plus fifty volunteer performers from France. Inspiring, stressful and very hard work.

Other similar participatory projects have included *Souterrain* by WildWorks, *The Big House* by Desperate Men and *Entangled Lives* by Le Cercle de la Litote in collaboration with Ragroof Theatre. There have been many more.

I'm very interested in this area of participation and involving people in the work. It enables the realisation of a much larger scale of work. It also offers participants an unparalleled experience of involvement, ownership and pride.

Virginia Farman and I have recently been working together on a venture outside of Zap, but which has very much developed out of this work. *Bicycle Ballet* is a spectacular dance of bicycles. We aimed for it to be political, to make a 'Car Free' day event happen in Brighton, and to involve as many local people as possible. The response and commitment was overwhelming with sixty-five people who rehearsed in driving wind and rain and cycled

up Brighton's biggest hill for rehearsals. The two shows were seen by over 3,000 people and we're re-developing it for touring.

### **Karen Poley**

*Karen Poley is a Producer for Zap Art.*



## Zap Facts

### Transe Express – *The Lazy Kings* (Streets of Brighton 2004)

*The Lazy Kings* was premiered at Streets of Brighton 2004 before embarking on tour. It was a major PECA co-production. Three of the parades (six Lazy Kings and their entourages paraded through the streets towards a giant mechanical coconut tree and firework finale) were created in each of the four partner locations with local participants. In Brighton, this included a circus school, drama students, a group of transvestites, samba bands and local artists and performers.

### WildWorks – *Souterrain* (Streets of Brighton 2006)

*Souterrain* – a large-scale promenade production based on the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice – was brought to life by Zap Art and Bill Mitchell's WildWorks at its world premiere performance as part of Streets of Brighton 2006. Through the PECA partnership, the piece was subsequently toured to a number of site-specific locations including a comprehensive school in Hastings and a coalmine in Loos-en-Gohelle, France.

### KompleXXKapharnaüm – *PlayRec* (Streets of Brighton 2007)

Jointly produced by Zap Art, PECA and InSitu as part of one of Europe's largest co-productions, this site-specific, multi-media performance made its UK premiere at Streets of Brighton 2007. An investigation into the way our lives and work have changed, *PlayRec* played with the stories and history of Brighton's former Isetta Bubble Car factory (1957-64), mixing high-tech computerised projections, graffiti art, intricate mechanical machines and 1950s office equipment.

### *It's Another World* (Clacton 2007)

This Heritage Lottery funded project with Creative Partnerships revisits the golden days of Clacton, when its Butlins holiday camp attracted thousands of annual holiday-makers. This multi-collaboration combines a major education and community outreach programme, an archive research strand and an ambitious street theatre finale courtesy of Brighton-based Ragroof Theatre Company.







**Opposite:** Transe Express, *The Lazy Kings*, Streets of Brighton, 2004 © unknown  
**Main image:** PlayRec by KompleXKapharnaüm, Streets of Brighton, 2007 © Matthew Andrews



Zap Today

# Zap Memories

To understand Zap Art's role in a production you have to understand a little about Dave Reeves.

Dave has a number of vital qualities as a producer. He's optimistic, trusting, energetic and when he's passionate about the work, he's absolutely tenacious and, most importantly, he knows a good thing when he sees it.

He flew all the way to Cyprus to see our work in action before flying back to the UK next day. He liked what he saw. He trusted his instincts and us. He convinced his French colleagues in PECA that it would be a good thing to give a chance to this unknown British company and then convinced us that we should perform a new show in five residencies in two countries as part of five festivals in one year and it would be a good thing.

New relationships aren't easy. The project had many partners, all with issues and demands. Sometimes it looked as if the project had stalled, but Dave ploughed on, brokering deals, giving timely advice, holding our hands through tricky negotiations and smoothing a few ruffled feathers.

Dave has a great ability to find a way through. It took three years to give birth to *Souterrain*. It was accomplished with passion and more than a little bravery; he didn't know what was going to emerge, he trusted us to make a wonderful thing. The production finally came together and in the spring of 2006 we opened *Souterrain* in Brighton in the presence of over 500 people, including press and with all the partners watching for the first time. Dave was probably a bit nervous. We were.

But you know what, he was right: in the end the whole project was a really good thing.

**Bill Mitchell, former Artistic Director of Kneehigh Theatre and current Artistic Director of WildWorks**

I first met Dave Reeves in 1994. He was then conceiving, with Neil Butler, the creation and production of *Streets of Brighton*. I remember that both of them were very passionate about the ambience and quality of artists working in the French festival programme. In May 1995, street theatre landed on the beach and in the streets of Brighton and has never left since. It was, for us, the most natural thing to bring together the festivals of Viva Cité from Sotteville-lès-Rouen, La Fête dans la Ville from Amiens, and *Streets of Brighton* in a trans-border partnership supported by the European Union. This harmonious partnership has already seen exceptional artistic ventures: *The Lazy Kings* from Transe Express, *PlayRec* from KompleXKapharnaüm and *Souterrain* from WildWorks based in Cornwall.

**Daniel Andrieu, Atelier 231 in Sotteville-lès-Rouen**

**Main image:** *Souterrain* by WildWorks, Stanmer Park, Streets of Brighton, 2006 © Matthew Andrews

I cut my street arts teeth on one of Zap's biggest events to date: Matsuri – Japan in the Park – a large scale festival celebrating Japanese culture and arts in Hyde Park, which attracted over 200,000 people, and was visited by the Emperor and Prince Charles. It had the highest number of portaloos I'd ever come across (the measure of a quality event I was told!).

Since that first gig in Hyde Park I have been involved in many exciting events and projects. In 2001 and 2002 I helped develop an International Circus Festival in Preston Park, Brighton, featuring companies such as Giffords Circus, Circus Baobab, Stereophonic Circus and others. The Streets of Brighton showcase, which I 'inherited' from Donna Close and Bec Brittain, has become one of my greatest passions. I have witnessed some truly memorable shows over the years ranging from the surreal to the sublime; the absurd to the divine.

Much of the work I do at Zap also has a community outreach or educational aspect to it. In 2006 I worked with Bill Mitchell and WildWorks on the production of *Souterrain* with Creative Partnership schools and community groups from Hastings. I am currently producing another community-specific theatre project in Clacton with Ragroof Theatre who have been commissioned to devise a piece of work that will be based on local people's memories and will look at the huge impact Butlins had on the lives of local people from 1938 to its closure in 1986 and beyond.

The power of street arts is great – it is accessible, inclusive and a great democratiser. It also has an amazing transformational quality and reinvigorates the places where people experience their day-to-day lives. Familiar sites take on a magical quality and become full of surprises. I like to think that through our work on the streets or within communities, people take something special away with them that makes a difference to their lives.

**Main image:** Playrec by KompleXKapharnaüm  
© Ray Gibson

But making great things happen is never easy. Zap as an organisation is still clinging to the edge of the unknown financially, and the future is never clear. However, just as it was twenty-five years ago, Zap is still driven by the same ethos and desire to be uncompromising and cutting-edge in its creative ambitions and artistic visions. Transformation is a natural process, and one to which we must respond. Our lives change, society around us changes; this keeps us fresh, on our toes, forward thinking, vital and ready for innovation.

**Veronica Stephens, Producer, Zap Art**

Zap Art's success in taking creativity to the heart of communities is recognised at a national and European level. It is highly respected for its work with government, cultural partners and leading artistic talents to widen participation, stimulate artistic risk-taking and lever major funding and resources.

**Jerry Le Sueur, Zap Art Board Member**

Zap Art are creative producers able to work as comfortably at a grassroots level as they are at an international level. Both audiences and artists are at the heart of their work, as they are for Arts Council England. The number and depth of involvement of those audiences and the quality and innovation of the artists delivering large and small scale work are a testimony to Zap Art's commitment and ability as an internationally respected arts organisation.

**Felicity Harvest, Regional Executive Director, Arts Council England, South East**

The arts can play a unique role in increasing levels of creativity and innovation, while positively impacting on our communities. Zap Art has done much to help enrich society through providing exciting art to new audiences.

**Colin Tweedy, Chief Executive, Arts and Business**



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