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# Ealing Rocks



Once the cradle of British rock, the west London borough still enjoys a thriving music, culture and festival scene, says **Carla Passino**

Incorporated, with Cyril Davies in 1961. Having been booted out of their central London venue, the band eventually moved to the Ealing Club, where they held their first 'electric blues night' on March 17, 1962. "The Ealing Club is without doubt one of the most important places in the history of British rock 'n' roll," says music and film critic Anthony Thornton. "Through night-after-night of electrifying sessions, it birthed the sounds that would grip first London, then Britain and eventually the whole world. The influence of this club is practically immeasurable."

On a magical night in April 1962, three young men met at a dark, smoky basement club in a leafy west London neighbourhood. The place was the Ealing Club and the trio—Mick Jagger, Keith Richards and Brian Jones—became the Rolling Stones and went on to change the history of music.

It is perhaps surprising to discover that edgy 1960s rock was born in the Queen of the Suburbs— as Ealing was described by the late architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner, in his 1951 Buildings of England book series. But the borough—once a favourite with Victorian aesthetes looking for a retreat close to town—adds an unusually vibrant arts scene to the obligatory mix of 19th- and early 20th-century houses, gothic churches and tree-studded greens that you would expect in a pretty suburban area. "This is a creative hub," says June Martin, one of the organisers of local music festival, the

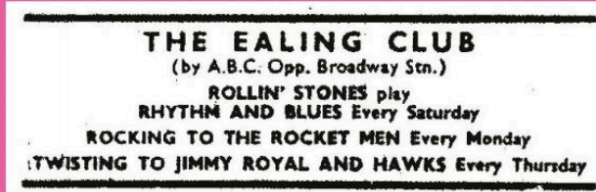
Hanwell Hootie. "It's heavily populated by talented, inspirational people—it overruns with creativity."

Music is one of Ealing's most famous exports and not just because of the Rolling Stones. American musicologist Dr Roberta Freund Schwartz, of Kansas University, once named the west London borough as one of the cradles of modern music, alongside Memphis and Liverpool. "Ealing is sitting on a very important musical heritage," explains Alistair Young, a director of the Ealing Club Community Interest Company, which highlights the local musical heritage and supports live music and artistic events.

Ealing, continues Young, sprang onto the British music scene in 1962 when the jazz venue that had opened in Ealing Broadway in 1959, by then rebranded as the Ealing Club, caught the attention of the father of British blues, Alexis Korner.

Korner had founded Britain's first rhythm and blues band, Blues

Top: Charlie Watts of the Rolling Stones at the unveiling of the Ealing Club blue plaque 2012  
Bottom: Ealing Club blue plaque



Rollin' Stones flyer for the Ealing Club – early 1960s



## "THE EALING CLUB IS WITHOUT DOUBT ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT PLACES IN THE HISTORY OF BRITISH ROCK 'N' ROLL."

FILM CRITIC ANTHONY THORNTON

Every Saturday, the small, dank basement room—so crude that rain came in and drenched the musicians until a tarpaulin sheet was fitted above the stage—drew extraordinary musicians from across the country. Over the years, Charlie Watts, Jack Bruce and Graham Bond all played with Blues Inc. at the Ealing Club, but the venue also offered young talents, such as Mick Jagger and Keith Richards, an opportunity to shine. It is perhaps fitting that more than 50 years after first meeting, the Stones latest album, 'Blue and Lonesome', released last December, sees the band return to their passion for rhythm and blues.

"The Ealing Club became the key venue to perform or just hangout for a roll-call of people who went on to shape British music for decades: Eric Clapton, Ginger Baker, Rod Stewart, Paul Jones, proto-Who band The Detours and The Animals," says Thornton. "Perhaps most importantly, one night in April 1962, Alexis Korner introduced Mick Jagger and Keith Richards to Brian Jones and so the nucleus of the Rolling Stones—arguably the most important rock 'n' roll band ever—was forged in Ealing."

A documentary film that is being made in the borough right now salutes Ealing's musical history. Directed by Italian-born, Ealing-based filmmaker Giorgio Guernier and featuring previously unseen photos and video footage of the Rolling Stones and The Who, among others, Suburban Steps to Rockland tells the story of the Ealing Club, the explosion of British R&B and the development of British rock. "It will help define the narrative of Ealing's music heritage," says Young.

And if the club put Ealing on Britain's



The Who, who once performed at Hanwell Community Centre, mid-1960s, London

musical map, many other local venues also helped shape the sounds of modern music. Dusty Springfield made her first recording in Uxbridge Road, while Deep Purple, Led Zeppelin and The Who all rehearsed at Hanwell Community Centre.

Although the Ealing Club has morphed into a bar and night club called the Red Room, their legacy—highlighted by a commemorative blue plaque—remains strong and keeps providing fresh inspiration for the musical renaissance that has been taking place across Ealing during the past 30 years. "Great things have happened here in the past and are still happening today," says Young. "There's no better place to make music than Ealing."

## "GREAT THINGS ARE STILL HAPPENING TODAY - THERE'S NO BETTER PLACE TO MAKE MUSIC THAN EALING."

ALISTAIR YOUNG, THE EALING CLUB

Bob Salmons is perhaps the man that has done the most to restore the borough's musical glory; harking back to the roots of the Ealing Club, he launched the Ealing Blues Festival in 1985. "When I founded the festival, Ealing's music heritage was being largely ignored," he explains. But what started as "little more than a picnic in a park" soon became a

cornerstone event drawing thousands of people. Held in Walpole Park, it is now one of the country's largest Blues festivals, where artists of the calibre of Earl Thomas, Paul Cox, Zoe Schwarz and Tom Ivey have all made an appearance.

These days, Ealing's music scene could hardly be more thriving. The Blues Festival and the Hootie are just two of a packed calendar of events that also includes a jazz festival—last year's was headlined by top American vibraphonist Roy Ayers—and two musical carnivals, one in Acton and one in Greenford. "Other local authorities in London look at us as a leader in terms of a successful culture offering: we are running a national-scale programme and we are really proud of that," says Alex Duncan, contract manager at festival organisers The Events Umbrella. "From the start of 2012 to the end of 2013, we launched three new festivals," adds Salmons. "We are starting to see young musicians beginning to say: 'I come from Ealing' in the same way as they'd have said: 'I come from Liverpool.'"

Alongside its rock star heritage, the borough can draw on an extraordinary pool of creative residents. In the area that schooled Peter Townshend, Ronnie Wood, Freddie Mercury and Roger Ruskin Spear (all of whom attended Ealing Art College), there's a fine tradition of harnessing talent from local universities and colleges, whose students often take part in local cultural events. Last year, for example, the Hanwell Hootie introduced a youth stage where musicians under 20 years of age could perform their own music.

## THE HANWELL HOOTIE

Many Ealing musicians in the early 60s—from Pete Townshend to Ronnie Wood, Eric Clapton and even American 'import' Jimi Hendrix—became customers of a music shop in Hanwell Broadway, a little more than a mile west of the Ealing Club. The store was run by former drummer Jim Marshall and it was to him that Pete Townshend once complained about needing a 'bigger, louder' amplifier than was available on the market. Marshall set to work



and eventually came up with a new amp, which, says Thornton, became an intrinsic ingredient in the sound of the sixties: "It's impossible to imagine rock 'n' roll without Ealing."

In 2013, a group of friends decided to approach Marshall Amp to create a festival in remembrance of Jim Marshall but also to support up and coming, original music in Ealing. The first Hootie, recalls organiser June Martin, saw 13 bands play free live music in three local pubs. Cut to 2016, and "the Hootie is London's largest independent free music festival," with more than 80 acts, ranging from funk to heavy metal, performing in 14 venues across Hanwell and drawing an audience of 16,000 people. "The directors have skills right across the board and this has allowed us to get music talent, financing and manage the event well,

all supported by Ealing businesses and the local council," says Martin, who adds that the team behind the Hootie is now helping get other music projects off the ground.



Top left: Headliner, Roy Ayers and his band at the 2016 Jazz Festival. Top right: Dur Dur Band International at the Soundbite Festival 2016. Bottom right: Earl Thomas at the 2016 Blues Festival. Bottom left: Acton Carnival





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*The Ealing Summer Festival in Walpole Park*

## “I DON’T SEE WHY EALING COULDN’T BE THE EDINBURGH OF LONDON.”

**BOB SALMONS -  
FOUNDER EALING BLUES FESTIVAL**

The many ethnic groups that have made Ealing their home also add a rich, multicultural twist to the local culture scene. “The Asian and Caribbean communities are among our greatest supporters,” explains Salmons. “There’s real potential and people are not shy in coming forward.”

In particular, Ealing’s global atmosphere comes deliciously alive in the Soundbite festival, a free one-day event held in September to celebrate the borough’s diversity through music, food and crafts. You can tuck into grilled ribeye steak scented with sesame and coriander, while perusing handmade gifts and listening to the deep, haunting notes of the oud or the vigorous beating of the drums. “When people think of Ealing, they think of the Rolling Stones and The Who, but there’s a strong link with African-American music so last year, we explored African sounds with Somali bands,” says Young. Complementing Soundbite is The Ealing Eclectic Project an initiative funded by The Arts Council of England that showcases Ealing’s music heritage via street performances.

Indeed, many exciting plans are afoot for the future. “We intend to build on our success and offer Ealing even more,” says Duncan. “This

year, we have extended the summer festivals’ operating hours, and we are now looking at growing the number of days and expanding the line up to include more international artists.”

For starters, 2017 sees the return of the London Mela—a lavish celebration of South Asian arts, music, food and entertainment—to Gunnersbury Park, which has hosted it for 13 years from 2002 to 2015.

“It will span two days and it will be a Mega Mela to mark the 75th anniversary of Indian and Pakistani independence,” Duncan explains.

Other plans potentially in the pipeline include expanding the festival fringe to involve local pubs and restaurants. “We need a fringe music and marketing manager to do that because landlords know about the food and drink industry, not the music industry,” says Salmons. “But if we could get someone to do that, I don’t see why Ealing couldn’t be the Edinburgh of London.” ■

## THE 2017 FESTIVAL LOW-DOWN WHAT’S ON WHEN & WHERE

**The Ealing Summer Festivals:**  
Blues festival - 22, 23 July - Walpole Park  
Jazz festival - 29, 30 July - Walpole Park  
Greenford Carnival - 8 July  
Acton Carnival - 15 July

[WWW.EALINGSUMMERFESTIVALS.COM](http://WWW.EALINGSUMMERFESTIVALS.COM)

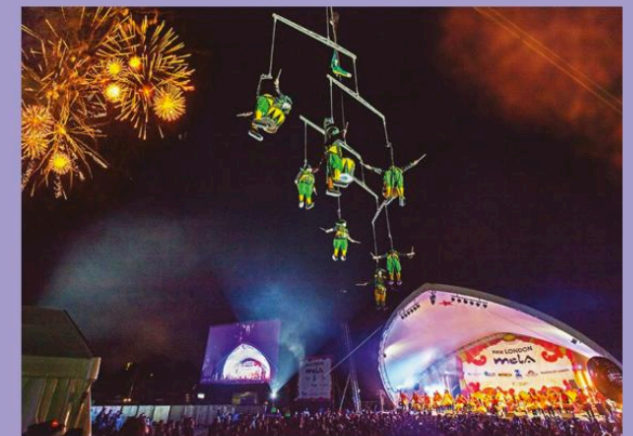
**The Hanwell Hootie** takes place this year on Saturday 6th May  
For more information visit:  
[www.hanwellhootie.co.uk](http://www.hanwellhootie.co.uk)

**The London Mela**  
Gunnersbury Park - September 2017

**2017 SoundBite Festival**  
Second week of September

To find out more about Ealing’s legendary music scene and the forthcoming film ‘Suburban Steps to Rockland’ contact Alistair Young  
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Carla Passino is a London-based freelance journalist specialising in culture, lifestyle and property. Carla has written for Forbes Real Estate and Country Life.



*The 2015 London Mela*