

## An Open Letter, 6th October 2018

In 1973, Liverpool based sculptor Arthur Dooley and architect Jim Hunter were commissioned by the Transport & General Workers Union to design an iron podium at the Pier Head, Liverpool's centre-point of maritime activity, which would be intended for public speaking. It was used by protesters and trade unionists for 20 years until it was quietly removed by the City Council in 93/94, and never replaced.

I felt this was a very suppressive, symbolic gesture - like taking away the focal point of the city's voice. The disappearance and subsequent lack of a current 'Speakers' Corner' in the city left me concerned, so I invented one of my own. I created twelve characters to stand on it and talk, brought them alive through song and made them into a record.

Personally, I felt the Summer of 2017 was the most uncertain, turbulent time I've ever witnessed in Britain. A tipping point that had been boiling for the last eight years.

The Manchester Arena bombing; the formation of a coalition government between a flailing, minority Conservative party and an ethically-dubious DUP; the Grenfell Tower disaster and the cold, inhumane handling of it by Prime Minister Theresa May and the public reactions that followed.

The storming of Kensington Town Hall by protesters and the march on Downing Street; the disturbing rise of far-right, neo-fascist politics; extreme violence allegedly carried out in the name of religion; a nationwide homeless problem beyond breaking point.

All this, witnessed by a society numbed by social-media, caught in the throng of a psychological meltdown, that couldn't distinguish itself from reality and a status on a mobile phone screen, experienced in real time, was my catalyst to react, to say something useful, or at least, to create something real out of the chaos that was engulfing the times.

This is *Speakers' Corner*.

When writing the album I started thinking about words again and the value of words when spoken. I let them flow out my mouth and onto the page like a stream of conscious typewriter, extracted the light bulbs, then took out all the plastic. Kind of inspired by the approach Dylan took when writing all that Tarantula stuff and the pre-*Blonde On Blonde* wild mercury experiments of songs like 'Subterranean Homesick Blues' and 'Can You Please Crawl Out of Your Window'.

You see, despite the dominance of modern technology over the average person's methods of communication, word of mouth is still king - folklore will always prevail. And, folklore is best preserved in the songs, stories and news we exchange with each other, person to person.

In the past I've found creative inspiration in the everyday invisible and the romance and mystery of local folklore. This time I dug deeper into Liverpool's radical history of social, cultural, artistic and political rebellion to find the roots of what gave the city its most defining characteristic: a voice.

I found this in important historical social events like the Fisher Bendix factory workers protest and occupation of January 1972 and the Transport & Workers strike that took place on 'Bloody Sunday' - 13th August 1911, when the city found its voice and 100,000 people took to the streets in protest of working and living conditions. Other factions around the country did likewise, and the shockwaves that followed, the week after, became the nearest Britain has ever come to a full turn revolution.

I was inspired by the fact this had happened on my doorstep and had practically been erased from the History books. Now, they didn't teach us about that in school.

As well as retracing history, other inspirations included writers B.S. Johnson and Anne Quin, artist Rene Magritte, forgotten Liverpool poet Paul Birtill, modern spoken word artists like Roy, Russ Litten and Jerry Linford, architect Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, playwright/director Alan Bleasdale's work on *Boys From the Blackstuff*, especially Chrissy's Speech from the episode 'Shop Thy Neighbour', Elvis Costello's G.B.H. television music score, the ethereal songs of Michael and John Head, the invention of bowler hats, the history of the General Post Office, long lost Liverpool nightclubs, the psycho-geography of whispered, clandestine romances and the roots of British surrealism.