

# SERIOUS

## **Basil Kirchin: Mind on the Run - A programme for Hull UK City of Culture 2017**

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Basil Kirchin is the forgotten genius of post-war British music, a pioneer of musique concrete whose roller-coaster of a life stretched from the days in the 40s and 50s when British dance music mutated into rock'n'roll, through a headlong succession of film scores and pop songwriting, before retreating to Hull, where he eked out an increasingly reclusive existence until his death in 2005 – while continuing to find ways to create sonic landscapes that still challenge convention and fire the imagination. Described by Brian Eno as “a founding father of ambient”, Kirchin’s remarkable and intriguing history represents a collision of popular and experimental musical cultures that predates and defines much of the music we hear today.

### The essential Basil:

- Joins his father, Ivor Kirchin’s band as a 13 year-old drummer in 1941. Sixteen years later, Basil’s beats fires the band’s brand of mambo rock that connects with the Teds and fills dance floors across the country.
- Declaring himself a “prisoner of rhythm”, in 1958, he sets out on a mind-expanding pilgrimage to India, and then to Sydney where he became the musical director of the Pigalle nightclub – before being deported for possession of cannabis.
- Through the 60s, Basil divides his time between swinging London and visiting his parents in Hull, where Ivor’s band is resident in the new Mecca nightclub. His wild appearance and obvious talent leading to celebrity status on the Hull music scene.
- Working with collaborators that stretch from Jack Good and Johnny Keating to Jimmy Page, Kenny Wheeler and Evan Parker, he composes music for a raft of British movies (including “Having a Wild Weekend”, “Primitive London” and “The Abominable Dr. Phibes”). Music that is achingly poignant, haunting and sometimes terrifying – evoking a world where a new brutality lurks beneath an innocent surface, where sex, drugs, black magic and violence are ever-present in a green and pleasant land...
- Basil’s epiphany in 1964 leads to the creation of the album series, “Worlds within Worlds” – creating a new kind of music by recording, distorting and looping found sound, and pioneering the use of the then state-of-the-art Nagra tape recorder. This begins an odyssey that makes and breaks the artist.
- Released by Columbia in 1974, the first two albums terrify a label confronted by the avant-jazz of Evan Parker over the delayed and looped sounds of birds, Hull Docks, and the voices of autistic children. The record bombs. Basil is devastated.
- Picked up by Island Records, through their prescient A&R man Richard Williams, and with liner notes from Brian Eno, the next two albums meet with non-comprehension. Now in his late 40s, Basil and his wife Esther, retreat to the seaside village of Hornsea, near Hull, and then to the rundown terraces of the city itself.
- Eking a diminishing living from a dwindling number of commissions, he finds kindred spirits in local studio engineers Keith Herd and Ian Firth – and despite economic straits and failing health, manages to produce late work that is astonishingly complex and inventive.
- Post millennium, Basil is rediscovered by musician and writer Bob Stanley. Jonny Trunk’s cult label Trunk Records re-issue a number of Basil’s seminal back catalogue, to a rapturous, if resolutely underground audience.
- Dies in 2005 in the Dove Hospice in Hull, penniless and with no living relatives other than his much-loved Esther, who died months later.

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## Fast forward to the present...

Serious is working with Hull UK City of Culture 2017, and with local partners including Nova Films and J-Night, to tell the Basil Kirchin story through a year of live events, alongside visual and aural explorations of his life and legacy. As well as delving into the Kirchin archive, and including the work of artists who worked with him, or acknowledge his influence and inspiration, the programme will also commission new work from a range of contemporary artists, from the UK and much further afield, some of whom may be discovering his work for the first time.

The various elements are planned to include:

- “Favourite Sounds of Hull”, curated by Peter Cusack – an interactive project starting in autumn 2016, that invites members of the public to suggest the sounds that define their city. This will build into a living sonic document informed by Kirchin’s vision.
- “The Kirchin Weekender” – Hull City Hall, February 2017. Three days of live performance, dialogue and images at Hull City Hall, with contributions from contemporaries and collaborators, and from today’s sonic movers and shakers – from DJs and producers to innovators from the worlds of rock, free jazz, electronica and ambient sound. From the beats and samples of the dance floor to the outer reaches of experimental noise.
- GoGo Penguin / PRSF New Music Biennial Commission – a new work inspired by Kirchin’s landmark recording “Abstractions of the Industrial North”.
- Newly created visual and audio materials, including an hour-long film documentary by Nova Films.
- Establishing a home for the Kirchin archive at the University of Hull.

The aim is to give Basil Kirchin the recognition he deserves, by entering his world and reflecting on his place in a changing nation. The story of a man who provided the beat for post-war Britain, and whose restlessly creative spirit produced amazing and ground-breaking work over some seven decades. It is also the story of how Hull itself became the creative hothouse for an experimental genius who was on a quietly determined mission to change the world.

*“The concept for Worlds Within Worlds hit me when I was walking around the docks in Hull. I had known all along that this music was there, but it was then that I realised that it could be used to fulfil a function as music. Up to then, it was impossible, because the equipment to capture the harmonic content of these sounds just didn’t exist. About 1968, equipment of sufficient quality became available, but it was so expensive that it was completely out of my reach. I was given an award from the Arts Council of Great Britain which enabled me to acquire the basics – a Nagra tape recorder and a directional Sennheiser microphone capable of isolating sounds from their environment”. (Basil Kirchin, quoted in a press release for Island Records, 1968).*

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