

Fringe 2024 – In Conversation with Terry Christian

“Yesterday we had the Mayor of Greater Manchester in this room. Today we’ve got its king.”

Neil Findlay is joking of course. Or maybe not. The former Labour MP is at The Stand to talk with **Terry Christian**, and if anyone personifies Manchester it’s Terry. He’s one of the names that, like Johnny Marr, Liam and Noel Gallagher, Shaun Ryder and Ian Curtis, are synonymous with Manchester’s music scene. He was born in Old Trafford, and if these days he lives in Lancashire’s leafy suburb of Bramhall, he’s still Manchester through and through.

So Neil starts us off by asking Terry just what kind of a Mancunian he is: what does he put on his chips? Curry of course. Although brown sauce is the stuff of his memories, and he was pleased to see it on the shelf of a North Berwick chippy – ‘that’s civilised!’



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The death of Terry's sister at the age of just 11 cast a long-lasting shadow over the family. He said: It was a grieving household...everyone was on edge."

As was the way in those days, his sister was simply erased from the family. Their parents were so poor they couldn't even afford a headstone for her grave until Terry's Dad retired.

The other children learned not to bring their troubles to their mother, she had enough to worry about already. Terry tells a poignant story about his younger sister Mary. Their older sister had died during the Easter school holidays. After that little Mary had to walk to school alone.

Brooks Bar was a racially mixed area. There were lots of parties and as a child Terry loved listening to the sound of reggae coming through the bedroom window at night. The street was "no access" but few people had cars anyway. Children were expected to play out.

Terry was bullied at school – by a teacher. The anxiety this caused him was so severe he almost ended up in hospital, but things gradually improved. He's still got mates from that time, "though these days we mainly meet up at funerals".

Neither of Terry's parents had had much formal education. Like many working class families of that time, neither the cost of the uniforms nor the loss of income were feasible. Terry's Mum and Dad were out at work as soon as the laws of the time permitted; as a result they wanted better for their own children.

Terry passed the 11 Plus and went to St Bede's, a top Catholic state grammar school. He was the only child there in receipt of free school dinners. St Bede's educated an impressive number of future music industry names, including Buzzcocks' drummer John Maher, Joy Division and New Order's manager Rob

Gretton, and Swing Out Sister's Andy Connell.

How, asks Neil, did the Thatcher era of massive youth unemployment, deindustrialisation and a widening poverty gap affect him?

You'd not expect Terry to be grateful to Margaret Thatcher. And he's not. But by an unlikely sequence of coincidences, the riots that broke out across England in 1981 led to the music career that Terry's now enjoyed for over forty years. After a stint at Thames Poly (now the University of Greenwich) he was on the dole. He was hanging around at home when he was invited to take part in Gus Macdonald's *Devil's Advocate*, a TV series made in reaction to the Scarman report on that summer's riots. Another participant was none other than Johnny Marr ("Whatever happened to him?")

Manchester was full of people who would become famous names, but at the time Johnny and Terry were simply two of the hundred youngsters whom Macdonald recruited to discuss how unemployment affected them. The programme was delivered in eight weekly instalments.

Johnny, says Terry, already had complete confidence in his plan to play guitar in a band. Macdonald was 'apoplectic' at the idea that Johnny expected people to pay taxes for him to fulfil his ambition. Johnny didn't care. By 1982 the Smiths were making music, and Terry was presenting *Barbed Wireless* on Radio Derby.

'So thank you to the riots. That's social mobility!'

And as for the riots themselves, Terry sees the highly controversial Stop and Search laws as a major cause of the unrest

*'They only stopped blacks; cops beat the s**t out of them.'*

Unemployment was still high, people had no hope. It was the same, says Neil, when Thatcher closed the pits.

Terry was already politically minded. His Dad was a Transport & General Workers' shop steward, his Mum came from a socialist background. They had lived through the 1930s and knew how bad things could be.

When Edward Heath introduced the Three Day Week in 1974 they were deeply concerned. Terry's Dad's overtime money was an essential part of the household income.

Back at Radio Derby, Terry and his colleagues created a programme that won two Sony awards. Nowadays, he says, even one Sony award would get you a job at Radio 1, but back then a northern accent was completely unacceptable. How, asks Neil, did (and does) class permeate the media?

'They thought you'd come from a Coronation Street theme park.'

Terry shares a story told to him by John Peel (who grew up on The Wirral) about Peel's first meeting at Radio 1 when someone said to him: "Oh I see you went to Millfield – a sigh of relief went round the entire room."

Terry knew that, even with Sony awards under his belt, he'd never be offered a job on the BBC's main stations. Luckily Piccadilly Radio had no problem with regional accents. He presented their weekday evening and Sunday afternoon shows, and started writing a column for the *Manchester Evening News*. It was called *The Word*.

He enjoyed complete freedom of choice at Piccadilly, playing lots of new local music at a time when Manchester bands were struggling for air space. London music journalists, he said, hated writing about them. "In the 70s they'd tried to scorn Northern Soul out; in the 80s they did the same thing to

Mancunian bands.”

By then he was also managing bands himself, promoting concerts and running club nights. Eventually he did even get to present on Radio 4.

In 1990 ‘Madchester’ was exploding. It was, says Terry, fantastic for young teenagers, but despite its reputation it was not indy. He said: “It was pop. Even The Smiths wanted to be on Top of the Pops’.”

Channel 4 sniffed the wind and decided it needed a youth culture programme. Its managers came knocking and Terry said yes. He presented *The Word* for its entire five year run. Was it all fun?

It wasn’t. Despite the programme’s random, chaotic image, Terry said its producer was controlling, making it difficult for him to do his job. He said: “He was always moving the goalposts. He wanted me to be the fall guy. I wanted to hear what 14-15 year olds too young for clubbing liked, to bring a night out into their lounge.”

The producer, however, wanted *The Word* to be cool. There were constant conflicts. He had to fight to get Happy Mondays and Oasis on the show; despite his best efforts the Cranberries never appeared on it. Terry said: “The “Tarquins and Ruperts” made you feel like the gardener on Downton Abbey. How dare you speak out of turn?”

Giving interviews was a nightmare. He said: “Journalists would realise you weren’t a moron. They hated that so you still got a bad write up...The Hush Puppy types were suspicious.”

If music has filled most of Terry’s life, football has accounted for much of the rest of it. He’s a massive Manchester United fan (‘Not “Man U”! I once cut off a phone interview for that!’) He and Neil air their similar and scathing views about the club’s current owners and management

– “Nationalise Manchester United!”

So what does the future hold for one of Manchester’s best known sons?

Neil pleaded: “Please tell us you’ll never be on Strictly.”

Disappointment awaits you, Neil, “That’s the one I want! I’ve still got the moves!” (He’s already done *Bake Off* and *Big Brother*.)

After that whirlwind tour of Terry’s life to date, there’s still time for a few audience questions. He talks about Tony Wilson, tells a very funny story about the family cat, and discusses his own social media activity – “it’s doodling in the margins.”

But although he regrets the amount of time he wastes on it, he still enjoys twitter, especially “goading Man City fans”. He said: “I’m 64 years old and I act like a kid.”

As to whether he wishes he *was* still a kid, Terry replied: “I’d always rather be 21, but if you’re 21 now you’re f***ed’, Brexit made everyone poorer...it’s disgraceful what the Tories have done. Stop voting in Love Island and get out and vote!”

And finally, the million dollar (well it would be for them – possibly trillion...) question – “Will Oasis get back together?”

Terry’s saying nothing. Or as near to nothing that someone who likes to chat as much as he does can. Who knows?

Terry Christian is one of those people who hardly needs an interviewer, though Neil Findlay did a good job. Wind Terry up and off he goes, sharing his memories, and his sometimes controversial views, with us all. He’s a great speaker, well informed, unafraid, funny and quick witted. And I’m quite sure he’s never been near a pair of Hush Puppies.

The Stand’s *In Conversation* series continues until 25th

August; guests still to come are **Douglas Ross, Gary Younge, Monica Lennon, Tam Cowan, Kevin McKenna** and **Caroline Lucas**.

In Conversation events take place at Venue 12, The Stand Comedy Club Stands 3 & 4 (Stand 3), 28 York Place.

Tickets are available via the Fringe app and website or The Stand's own website [here](#).