

E-Zine 2026



Semper Iuvenis

Headteacher's Welcome

It is with great pleasure that I introduce this year's Aston School e-zine. As always, it stands as a testament to the creativity, curiosity and thoughtful engagement of our students and staff. I am continually surprised by the depth and field of content in this publication. It stands a great example of students' contribution to the world of literary endeavour.



This edition offers a rich and diverse range of articles. From explorations of iconic figures in 1980s music, to insightful commentary on complex global issues such as the situations in Iran and Venezuela, our contributors demonstrate both intellectual depth and a willingness to engage with the wider world. Alongside this, you will find pieces examining the opportunities and ethical questions surrounding artificial intelligence, as well as reflections on the pressing challenges facing our environment; the latter is a theme of personal interest to me and the members of our eco-committee at the school.

What makes this publication so special is the breadth of voice and perspective it captures. Each article reflects the enthusiasm, independence and critical thinking that we strive to nurture across the school. It is a publication by the students, for the students.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the students who have contributed their work, often going above and beyond their normal studies to do so. My sincere thanks also go to the editorial team for their dedication, organisation and editorial judgement in bringing together such a professional and engaging publication.

I hope you enjoy reading this e-zine as much as we have enjoyed creating it, and that it inspires further curiosity, discussion and creativity within our school community.

With my very best of wishes,

Matt Brady
Headteacher

E-team 2026

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The Ugly Truth of AI

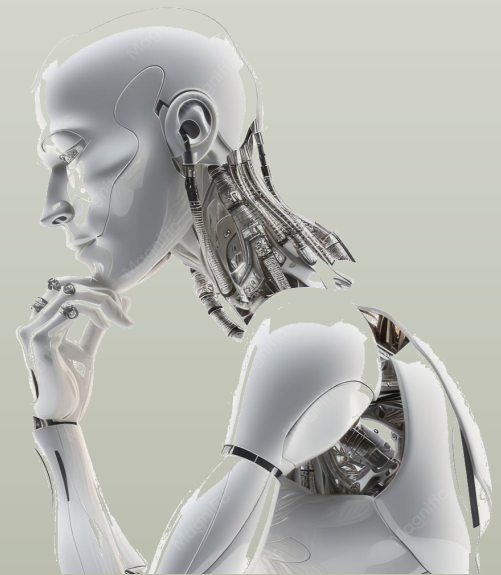
By Ayaan Hussain

There is a legitimate concern that the use of LLM's such as the household name, ChatGPT, will cause serious harm to the environment and the access to free information. I will begin by discussing the environmental impact of training AI technologies.

Most Artificial Intelligence needs training data, AI companies take data without permission, or financial kickback to the creator of said data.

This stolen data is fed to the dataset and used to produce responses to queries. Typically, if you had a query you'd go to Google (or Edge if you are weird) and ask your question, you would look through some websites and get your answer. The creator of that data would get some money from ads.

However, if you do not open that website and read that article but instead are spoon-fed by the AI overview or ChatGPT, the writer receives no money, this means that writer loses the incentive to write those articles.



Tim Berners-Lee vision for the World Wide Web was '*a place to be found for putting any information or reference which one felt was important, and a way of finding it afterwards*', with the state of the web currently, this dream is in the rear-view mirror. The effect of this is only starting to arise, websites are pay walling content or shutting down all together. This leads to the loss of jobs and loss of access to information. More recently, OpenAI have announced that they will be displaying ads in ChatGPT. This is genuinely terrifying as this can and will influence ChatGPT to suggest highly targeted ads, which is a privacy concern. Its already common knowledge that Amazon raises the price for products it thinks you might buy. But imagine what this will be like with ChatGPT, which knows more than every other company, Google knows your search history, but people tell ChatGPT more private things. Google gives you targeted ads based on what it think it knows about you, however ChatGPT will be able to knows with a greater degree of accuracy.

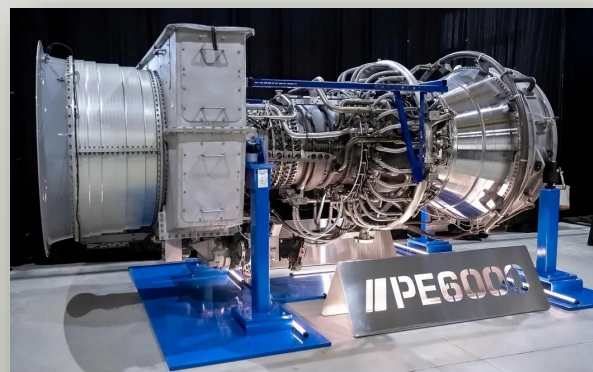


The Ugly Truth of AI



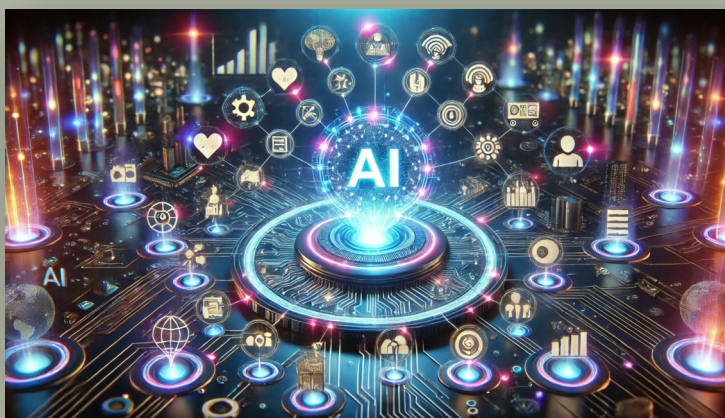
Moving on from the access of information and privacy, we also have environmental concerns. There is the issue of water which is used to cool the hardware running the services and electricity used to run them. Now, it is purposefully difficult to find out how much electricity is required but what we do know is that Google signed a deal to use a nuclear reactor to generate energy.

We also know that Google and OpenAI have acquired and are continuing to acquire retired commercial aircraft engines to generate electricity to power AI infrastructure. This speaks volumes for the power demand, especially considering that jet engines are so incredibly inefficient due to the heat they produce. This is genuinely bad as we may not have the infrastructure to provide it. In Ireland 17% of the demand for



electricity is from datacentres, this can strain the national grid, especially as AI use increases, and increases the price for regular consumers. Also, datacentres tend to exist where fossil fuels still dominate which is horrible for the environment. As for water, we know how much water is being used, training ChatGPT-3 took 700,000 litres of clean freshwater, use up ground water resources where datacentres are based. Worryingly, it's estimated that in 2 years AI demand will have a water footprint of half of the UK.

What I want you to come away from this is that you are not the problem, but you can be part of the solution. Your AI use is likely an insignificant addition to your overall carbon footprint but collectively we can enact for changes such as companies having to declare their electricity and water usage. I really like this quote '*The only good is knowledge and the only evil is ignorance.*'



Stop Motion Animation

By Ibraheem Oladimeji

Have you ever wondered how Sean the Sheep or your favourite clay character Gromit came to life? Perhaps you've thought about how the movie King Kong was made? Well, in this article you'll learn all of this, the history, the styles and more.

Stop-motion is the centre of all animation styles, but it doesn't always get the credit it deserves. Being the first style of animation, it is often seen as old-fashioned but by reading this article, you will hopefully learn just how amazing it can be.



What is stop-motion?

Stop-motion animation is a style of animation also known as 3D animation. It is a film making technique that creates the illusion of movement by physically manipulating objects in small increments, between individually photographed frames. When these frames are moved across quickly the viewer perceives movement. Some examples of popular stop-motion movies would be Coraline: it used over 144,000 of frames to create the illusion of motion. Another example would be The Nightmare Before Christmas, which has 110,000 frames over 76 minutes, or an hour and 16 minutes!

Where did it originate?

Stop-motion was developed in the nineteenth century with the invention of a pre film device called a Zoetrope. This was a spinning disk with multiple pictures spread across the inside and regular slits to see through. When spun it created the illusion of motion, this was a revolutionary discovery.





Stop Motion Animation



Want to make a stop-motion movie of your own?

Stop-motion animation is a fun way for beginners to bring objects to life using photos. To start, you need a camera or phone, a tripod or something steady, and good lighting so your images don't flicker. Place your object on a flat surface and take a photo, then move it just a tiny bit and take another photo. Repeat this process many times, because lots of small movements make the animation look smooth. Once you have your photos, you can use apps to turn them into a video. Beginner-friendly apps include Stop Motion Studios, Stikbot Studios, Flipaclip, and iMovie.

Styles of stop-motion:

In stop-motion there are many styles such as:

-*Claymation*: the most popular, as the name suggests, Claymation is a type of stop motion using clay or mouldable substances to slowly move the animation along like in "Wallace and Gromit".

-*Puppet Animation*: is another style of stop-motion (and I think you've noticed by now these names aren't the most creative names) where you use dolls or proper puppet on strings and articulate the character's movements via its joints to make the animation.

-*Cutout Animation*: this is when we use paper or thin materials to create movement offering a distinct way to project stories with minimal redrawing.

Object Animation: is a stop-motion technique where inanimate, real-world objects (toys, tools, household items) are manipulated in small increments and photographed frame-by-frame. When played in sequence, these objects appear to move independently, creating a lifelike illusion. It is distinct from puppet or clay animation because it uses objects that already exist.





Stop Motion Animation



Why is stop motion so special?

Stop-motion is a bit of magic made with patience and tiny movements. It encourages imagination and problem-solving. Instead of clicking a button and letting a computer do everything, animators like Ray Harryhausen or Willis O'Brien move characters bit by bit, taking photos after every change. Stop-motion shows the effort and hard work put into movies and shows and the dedication of passionate animators. Stop-motion encourages readers to experiment and tell their own stories.

So next time you watch a stop-motion film, remember that every blink, step, and smile was created by patient hands and a whole lot of creativity. Stop-motion animation proves that you don't need fancy effects to tell an amazing story—sometimes all it takes is a camera, a few objects, and imagination.

Whether it's clay figures, paper cut-outs, or toys from your bedroom floor, anything can come to life one frame at a time. Who knows? Your next science project or weekend hobby could be the start of your own stop-motion masterpiece.

Lights, camera... move!

Here are two of the stop-motions I created last year:

▶ [stopmotion video by ibraheem.mp4](#)

▶ [stopmotion 2.mp4](#)



The Pond and Garden

By Eyobed Medhane and Noah Wilkinson

The pond was initially created by sixth formers several years ago. They cleared out the overgrown area behind the MUGA and dug a hole before placing the pond into it. Since then, the pond has grown to have a large mix of wildlife, with numerous insects and plant species growing and thriving within it. We believe this pond is a great achievement, since it shows how a diverse ecosystem can form in what is arguably an industrial area, located between a school and busy expressway. Additionally, we hope this pond can inspire future students to continue environmental projects throughout the school and for them not be limited to simply the pond area. Moreover, we would like to see other schools take part in similar projects, as every ecosystem, big or small, brings us closer to environmental success throughout the world.



A major project we have both participated in has been the creation of plant beds positioned next to the pond. This was a lengthy process since it involved flattening the land, removing weeds that were in the place of the plant bed, then building the actual plant bed, which was mostly done by Mr Hill. Then we had to move dirt in wheelbarrows so we could then add it to the plant bed. After some much welcome refreshments provided by Mrs Mound, we eventually completed the plant bed. The completion of this was so tiring, especially because it was done in the summer. However, it gave us one of the best memories of our school year and allowed us to begin growing food there. We have planted and picked a variety of herbs in these beds, and hope this can carry on into the future.

At the pond and garden, we regularly empty the food caddies into our compost bin, which produces a nutrient-rich compost that is so beneficial for plant life. We also collect water in the water bucket, but during times with limited water, we must fill our water bucket.



The Pond and Garden



The water is used primarily to help fill the pond when the water gets low and to water the plants that grow at the flower bed. More recently, bird boxes have been installed (courtesy of William Bret), and we hope that this will help encourage birds to come visit this area and even live here, so that the pond can become a more biodiverse area. With a new acquisition of land, not too far away from our school, we have had an opportunity to establish a meadow. In late November, we began by preparing the site; we had to remove the surrounding grass because the area had become particularly overgrown.

Unfortunately, we also had to clear the area of litter. Despite the area being closed off, there was still litter that had blown inside the boundary, and this was quite disappointing to see. With the help of Mr Mackie, we began prepare the area so we could sow an extremely important plant (Yellow Rattle) into the soil. The Yellow Rattle is a hemiparasite of grass, drawing nutrients from it. The plant weakens grass growth and prevents it from growing into a monocultural grass patch, which would usually dominate, and this allows for a wider variety of plants to grow, increasing biodiversity. If you would like to add a splash of yellow to your garden without having to do too much gardening, the yellow rattle may be the perfect plant for you!

We aim to continue maintaining this area throughout the next two years we are at school, and hope that the current Eco Committee, along with any future members, can continue looking after it once we have left. Personally, it is my goal to be able to come back to this school after a few years and see that the area is flourishing, and hopefully even expanded. If you would like to get involved with the pond area, you can get in touch with the Eco-Committee to volunteer to help. You are also encouraged to pursue similar activities across the school, even if this specific one is not to your liking. Doing this not only helps the school but will provide you with memories for life. Thank you for taking the time to read this article, and I hope you have gained something from it.



Brass Instruments

By Shay Wahid

Brass instruments are the big, bold and loud instruments in the orchestra. They are positioned behind the woodwind instruments and in front of percussion section.

How they work

Brass instruments are simple; you blow into a metal mouthpiece while making a buzzing sound, this causes the air column inside the instrument to vibrate and the sound comes out of the bell. The pitch of the note produced is changed by pressing on valves to change the airflow (except for trombones where a slide is used instead).



What are the different brass instruments?

There are four key brass instruments. The trumpet is in the treble clef, the French horn is in the alto clef, and the trombone and tuba are in the bass clef.

Trumpet

The trumpet is the highest pitched and smallest brass instrument. It is commonly used in royal parades and is a key part of brass history. The trumpet is also common in jazz music and was used by Louis Armstrong and Miles Davis.



French horn

The French horn is a brass instrument known for its rich, warm sound and complex playing technique, making it a staple in orchestras and wind ensembles. It developed from ancient hunting horns which would have been made from animal horns and shells.





Brass Instruments



Trombone

The trombone is a lower pitched musical instrument in the brass family. As with all brass instruments, sound is produced when the player's lips vibrate inside a mouthpiece. Nearly all trombones use a telescoping slide mechanism to alter the pitch instead of the valves used by other brass instruments. The valve trombone is an exception, using three valves like those on a trumpet, and the super bone has valves and a slide



The Tuba

The Tuba is the largest brass instrument and therefore it can produce the lowest pitch notes. As with any brass instrument, sound is produced with a lip vibration or "buzz" in the mouthpiece. A person who plays the tuba is called a tubist, or simply a tuba player. In British brass bands and military bands, they are known as a bass player.

The intruder

Despite contrary belief the saxophone is NOT a brass instrument! The primary reason the saxophone is considered a woodwind instrument is its method of sound production. Woodwind instruments generate sound by vibrating air within a tube, often assisted by a reed. The saxophone has a single reed. When a player blows air through this reed, it vibrates against the mouthpiece, creating sound waves that travel through the instrument's body. Brass instruments do not have reeds, the one thing in common all brass instruments have is a mouthpiece. The saxophone might be made of brass but it is part of the woodwind family, alongside the flute, clarinet and bassoon.

Thank you for reading.



Green City Environment

By Joseph McClenaghan

The email landed in my inbox showing the marks, and as I scroll down the list, my eyes fix on geography. I imagine my parents' reaction and already know what they are going to say. I urgently need to come up with a plan! I choose the usual, my mom's favourite recommendation – read the books, research the articles, attend extracurriculars. Whilst at school I look over at the group of eco-committee boys walking past to their usual meeting. I am holding the table tennis racket, and it's burning my fingers. It's calling me.



As I scroll past the research papers at home, I get more and more involved. The statistics show that the United Kingdom is in the bottom 10% for biodiversity globally. Statistics from the English State of Nature report show:

Average 32% decline in species abundance. Average 18% decrease in the distribution of invertebrate species. Decrease in the distribution of over half (68%) of plant species. 13% of species are threatened.

The West Midlands is home to almost 3 million people but comes with challenges that an urbanised landscape brings, including reduced habitats for species, eco networks that don't link up, and pollution from transport.

What can a school child do?





Green City Environment



I think deeply, imagining what it would be like to live by the sea. Breathe fresh air. Cycle without fear on the road.

My thoughts return me to Aston. I walk with my friends from the station. How about we adopt the rail station? The station sign could show that it is home to King Edward VI Aston School. I smile. Perhaps we could replace the sign. We could plant flowers and install bee houses from logs. As we pass the industrial estate, my thoughts return to information I have read on the Natural History Museum website. Insects are unable to communicate if it is too loud – noise from cars, machinery, people. We need more hedges, trees, and fences with English ivy. They are best for keeping the bugs happy. As I get to the crossing, I patiently wait for cars to turn. I wish more people walked, cycled, or came by public transport to school. Thousands of cars less a day if all at Aston changed their mode of transport. Modeshift! There is even a school competition for this.

I continue my research. We need more urban trees, green walls, green roofs, green and blue corridors. Can we plant a tree at Aston? In a similar way to what you see on TV, with a little plaque showing the year. Can it also be a memory? This is the 2026 tree! Install bat and bird boxes? Bug hotels? I am looking at trees on the website. Black poplar! The UK's most endangered and rarest native timber tree which has declined close to extinction with an estimated population of around 7,000 trees across the whole of the UK. Can we crowdfund and plant this tree in Sutton Park by the pond? It grows well in moist soil. My thoughts are racing.

I realise that fixing the environment is not just the job of the council or the brilliant eco-committee at school. It starts with small actions taken by everyone, including me. Every plant grown, every little bug protected, and every school journey walked instead of driven makes a difference. Geography is not just a subject on my timetable; it is the world around me. Small changes can lead to big shifts.



Gaming

By Marwan Hussain

Gaming is currently one of the most popular forms of entertainment nowadays. It combines technology and creativity, making it enjoyable for people of different ages around the world. Players can take part on a wide range of devices such as computers, consoles, and smartphones. Popular gaming systems include the PlayStation 5, Nintendo switch and the Xbox Series X. These platforms allow players to experience a variety of games with different styles and features.

There are several types of video games otherwise known as genres. Each genre offers a different experience. Action games involve fast paced movement and require you to have a quick reaction time, such as Call of Duty. Adventure games focus on storytelling and exploration, like The Legend of Zelda. Sports games simulate real-life sports, such as FIFA. Sandbox games are creative and gives you the freedom to do whatever you want, for example Minecraft.



Gaming has also developed into an area for competition known as esports. Professional players compete in tournaments in games like League of Legends. These competitions attract millions of viewers and offer large rewards. Gaming can have several benefits. It can improve problem-solving skills, hand-eye coordination, and teamwork. Many games encourage creativity and strategic thinking.

However, gaming also has some disadvantages. Spending too much time playing can affect health. In addition, some online games can expose players to bullying. It is important to manage time while playing and maintain a balance between gaming and other activities. In conclusion, gaming is an important part of most people's life and continues to grow in popularity. While it offers benefits, it is important to use it wisely. With the right balance, gaming can be both enjoyable and good for you.

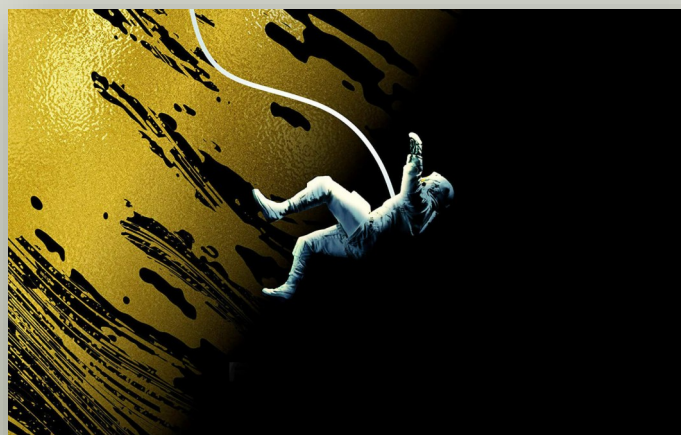
Project Hail Mary

By Anon

'Grace, Rocky, save stars'

Phil Lord and Christopher Miller's return to live action: **'Project Hail Mary'** is nothing short of a masterpiece and does Andy Weir's novel justice. This adaptation is so faithful to the source material, I felt like Leonardo DiCaprio doing the pointing meme every time I recognised something from the book. Few films can adapt from a book and look exactly how I imagined it when reading.

Visually, the film is a beauty to look at, and I am so surprised that all of it was done without a single green screen, you have to credit the directors for putting in such effort in order to create something so magnificent. The colours are so vibrant both in Space and on Earth and really brought so much life to the film. It was



such a phenomenal watch in IMAX. Such a phenomenal cinematic experience that simply took my breath away in every single scene, there wasn't a single moment in which I wasn't immersed. I haven't seen many, if any, films that visually look better than this, it had me enchanted the entire runtime and I am still in awe when writing this review.

Emotionally, this film is amazing, and I don't really want to say much without giving anything away, but it genuinely was amazing, I mean, they were able to make me emotionally connected to a rock. This film did achieve to make me cry but rather than making me cry in a particularly sad moment, it made me cry from a moment that made me happy and smile and feel a mixture of emotions whilst also bringing tears to my eyes. At the time of writing this here, 3 films have managed to achieve that with this being one of them and the other two being DreamWorks' **'The Wild Robot'** and Netflix's **'Klaus'** both phenomenal films that excel in their respective genre and if a film manages to make me feel such emotions in such a way, it has to at least be [????], in this case, **'Project Hail Mary'** just goes above and beyond that.





Project Hail Mary



The performance from Ryan Gosling is impeccable and he had such great on-screen chemistry with a rock. He never failed to make me laugh even by just being himself, although I haven't seen much of Ryan Gosling's filmography, this must be one of his greatest performances. I can't think of anyone else who would need to be picked to play the character of Ryland Grace.

And of course, I had to save the best for last. If you are familiar with the '*Into the Spiderverse*' franchise, you may also already be familiar with Daniel Pemberton and his score for those movies, in which he produced and worked on the music for both films (alongside Metro Boom-in in the sequel) and if you heard the score in those films, you would know that they were nothing less than magnificent. That is also carried here as Daniel Pemberton's score in '*Project Hail Mary*' is one of the best scores in any film. Let alone any sci-fi film. There wasn't a single moment during my time watching this film in which my ears were not being treated.

All of these factors lead into why I think '*Project Hail Mary*' is already, easily a science fiction masterpiece. The film was a visual marvel, had a perfect movie score and had great acting all the while staying faithful to the fantastic original novel by Andy Weir. There weren't many aspects, if any, in which this movie was lacking. This is phenomenal and already is my Oscar pick for the next year. A 10/10 score, with 10/10 visuals. This alone is enough for its Oscar charge.

'Amaze, Amaze, Amaze '

Overall: *****



Singing in a Cathedral Choir

By Dominic Manning

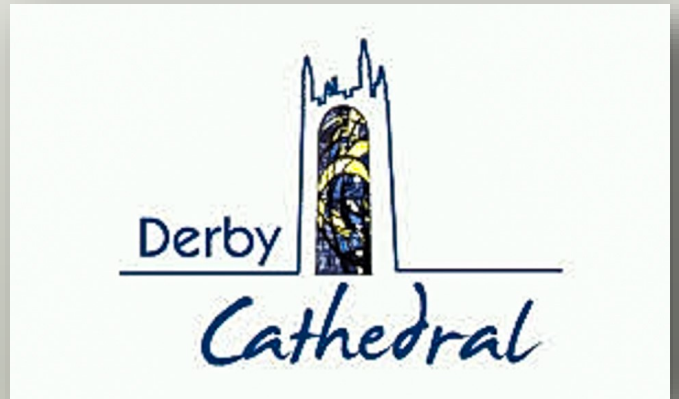
Hi, my name is Dominic and I sing in the Derby Cathedral Choir.

Derby Cathedral is in the East Midlands, in the middle of Derbyshire. It's about 50 miles away from Birmingham. Derby has a rich heritage and, while being quite far from Aston, it is well worth a visit, especially if you live nearby – for example Litchfield, which is 30 minutes away.

I got into the choir because my parents saw an opportunity and they seized it: I don't think it was a mistake. It seemed like a great opportunity. Being in a choir gives you the chance to do something different and can help with CVs and university applications. You also get paid up to £100 a term. I have bonded with other choristers and don't regret it, but it's a huge commitment. While not as tough as other choirs (who sing at seven services per week) it is still quite a commitment to go to choir every Tuesday, Friday and Sunday, giving up free time and part of my mornings as well.

Not everyone can join the Cathedral choir, as you need to pass an audition. The audition requires singing back notes that are played on the piano and repeating a tune. Successful auditioners then receive a place at the choir. Before auditioning, you may receive a taster session, where you spend a rehearsal with the choir.

Derby Cathedral Choir began with the old choral tradition of All Saints' Church, which became Derby Cathedral in 1927 when the Diocese of Derby was created, making it even more important. Over time, the choir developed into a professional ensemble comprising adult lay clerks and trained choristers, supporting the cathedral's daily worship and important events. Today it is the main choir of the east midlands and the only professional choir there too.





Cathedral Choir



The ensemble setting of the choir means that people in the choir are well connected and have a healthy attitude to teamwork and work in general. There are many friendships within the choir. But this also means that you must work hard to support the choir; you can't stop working, even if you're tired and want to be doing something else.

The acoustics of Derby Cathedral are very interesting because it is so large. Larger spaces tend to have a larger echo than smaller spaces as the sound bounces off the hard surfaces. The acoustics of Derby Cathedral are in the middle; the reverb is not too long, so notes echo a bit, but not too much. After some notes, the echo can come back as a 'ring', which can sound magical. If you have never been in a cathedral, I would recommend attending one of the concerts so you can hear the full sound.

The choir does two main things: services and concerts. A service is a religious ceremony, with Christian readings and Anglican music. They are less formal and there are more offerings of worship: there is less work put into them, but they are definitely worth a visit if you have time. Concerts are rich in great music and are amazing to listen to, and you are sure to enjoy every one of them. The choir holds many events, including the Messiah, Bach St John Passion, Carol services, international tours and much more.

For information on how to audition, see the Derby Cathedral Choir Webpage.

www.derbycathedral.org



European Holiday Destinations

By Armaan Currim

My top holiday destinations around Europe are places that offer a mix of culture, natural beauty, and memorable experiences. Europe is full of vibrant cities, towns and villages which are rich in history; art; culture- with stunning architecture, delicious food; a blend of modern and cultural heritage.

NORWAY: Norway occupies much of the western half of the Scandinavian Peninsula. About two-thirds of Norway is mountainous, and off its much-indented coastline lie, carved by deep glacial fjords, with thousands of beautiful, unique islands.

Some of the best places to visit in Norway are: Geirangerfjord, Sognefjord, Lofoten, Oslo, Bergen, Tromsø and Svalbard.



Some of the things that Norway is famous for are exploring the fjords, hiking adventures, witnessing the Northern Lights, Arctic activities, visiting the historic stave churches, scenic train journeys and the Midnight Sun.

FINLAND: Finland is another beautiful Nordic country in northern Europe- bordering Norway, Sweden and Russia. Helsinki is the capital and the largest city in Finland, with a population of around 1.36 million. Helsinki and Lapland- especially Rovaniemi are well worth visiting.





Holiday Destinations



Some of the fun things one can do when in Finland are visiting the rock-carved Temppeliaukio Church, the white Helsinki Cathedral, the Old Market Hall for local food, Suomenlinna Fortress- which is a UNESCO world heritage site- and Santa Clause Village- where you can witness the experience of true Christmas. Finland offers great outdoor activities such as witnessing the Northern Lights which are best seen in Lapland between September and springtime, thousands of saunas and lakes, national parks, wildlife and winter activities such as dog sledding and ice-breaker cruises in Lapland.



ICELAND: Iceland lies nestled between the Arctic and north Atlantic Ocean- north of the UK. The most popular places to visit in Iceland are Reykjavik; many locations along the Ring Road and Golden Circuit– such as Kirkjufell, Vatnajökull and Skógafoss- are like no other.

Fun things to do in Reykjavik include visiting the Reykjavik Cathedral, immersing yourself in local Icelandic culture and visiting the countless museums that this city has to offer. Reykjavik is the capital of Iceland and is a great central location for excursions to many notable locations along the Golden Circuit.

Iceland also offers some of the best viewing opportunities of the Aurora Borealis in the northern regions of Iceland- near Hvannadalshnúkur.



GERMANY: Germany has many major cities, which include: Berlin, Munich, Hamburg, Cologne, Frankfurt to name just a few. Germany is famous for its Automotive industry and boasts of iconic brands such as Porche, Mercedes Benz, BMW, Audi and Volkswagen.





Holiday Destinations



You can experience nature and hiking in Black Forest, which is also famous for its Cuckoo clocks. Tourists can also enjoy the beautiful views from the Bavarian Alps, visit the fairytale Neuschwanstein Castle, Freiburg, Kalstein and Brandenburg gate in Berlin.



AUSTRIA is a country in central Europe and it is famous for its rich imperial history, architecture, palaces, skiing, hiking and its musical heritage boasting of legendary composers such as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Johann Strauss.

Major cities in Austria worth visiting are Vienna and Salzburg.

Apart from enjoying the picturesque landscaping and the historic architecture of Austria, one must visit the iconic palaces in Vienna is the birthplace of Mozart. The Alps are famous for its winter sports and hiking.



ITALY: Italy is the eleventh largest country in Europe and has amazing sightseeing, food, culture, art and architecture.

It is home to one of the finest cuisines in the world and many historical sites- such as the Colosseum, the Cathedral of Santa Maria, the Pantheon and the Leaning tower of Pizza- just to name a few. Italy is also the fashion capital of the world and producer of some of the finest cars in the world.



Holiday Destinations



Must visit Cities in Italy would have to be Rome, Venice, Milan, Naples, Turin, Verona and Florence. Additionally, you must visit Lake Como, Sicily, the Amalfi Coast and the Dolomites- as they offer some of the best scenery in Italy.



Slovenia is a small country also situated in the Balkans, which offers stunning natural beauty and is famous for its Alpine mountains, deep forests and scenic coastlines. The cities that are a must visit in Slovenia are Ljubljana, Piran, Bled, Maribor and Kranjska Gora.

Things to do in Slovenia include visiting: picturesque old towns; Lake Bled; Bled Island; Hilltop Castle, also skiing, hiking and visiting: Vintgar Gorge, Lake Bohinj, Soca Valley and Lipica Stud Farm.



Montenegro is a beautiful Balkan Country famous for its coastlines, rugged terrains, mountains, historical UNESCO listed medieval towns, coastal towns and stunning beaches. You must experience the famous night life, visit the sandy beaches of Budva, witness the Premier Marina for super yachts of the super-rich in Porto Montenegro, visit historic sites in Cetinje which is the old royal capital and the life in Podgorica which is the capital and the largest city in Montenegro.



Iran

At the time of writing, around 5:40pm on 15th January 2026

By Zakariah Khan

There has been a grave situation in Iran. Anywhere from 2500 to 25000 people have been killed at the time of writing. People are suffering. What I want to find out is whether there will be a revolution or not. I cannot make predictions into the future. I will state the facts and let you, the reader, form your own opinion. I will list the necessities for a domestic revolution, taken from James Defronzo who wrote "*Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*", and I will let **your** mind decide.

There are 5 things needed for a domestic revolution.

1 - The people have nothing to lose but their chains!

The vast majority of people in Iran earn millions a year... Millions of Iranian Rial! That would not be so bad if it wasn't for the fact that 1 Pound Sterling is worth 1.467 million Iranian Rial. And the average salary of a General Practitioner, for example, earns 1629.21 Pound Sterling a year. That is **not**

a typo. If we cost of living adjusted, it is £6516.84 a year. Could you imagine living on that annual salary! But it is much better than the average wage of so many jobs. A janitor's mean wage is 71.15 GBP a month, or cost of living adjusted a whopping 284.60 GBP a month, or 3415.20 GBP a year. Could you imagine living on that amount! Need I say more?

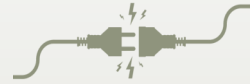
2 - No foreign countries are willing to intervene in favour of the regime. Russia, Iran's main ally, has not really done anything as it is focused more on the War in Ukraine, not fighting wars in the middle east. There is not a single country I could think of that would try and stop the revolution.

3 - Dissident Elites. A lot of politicians in Iran (which is still technically a democracy), bravely spoke out against the quelling of protests, including former presidents, former speakers of the house, and just very powerful people in Iran in general, who are scared at the, for lack of a better word, risky, tactics of the regime to quell protests or riots, and just fully ignoring international law, and in general, lacking a moral compass that (while rare and not the main reason of dissident elites), that some elites do have.





Iran



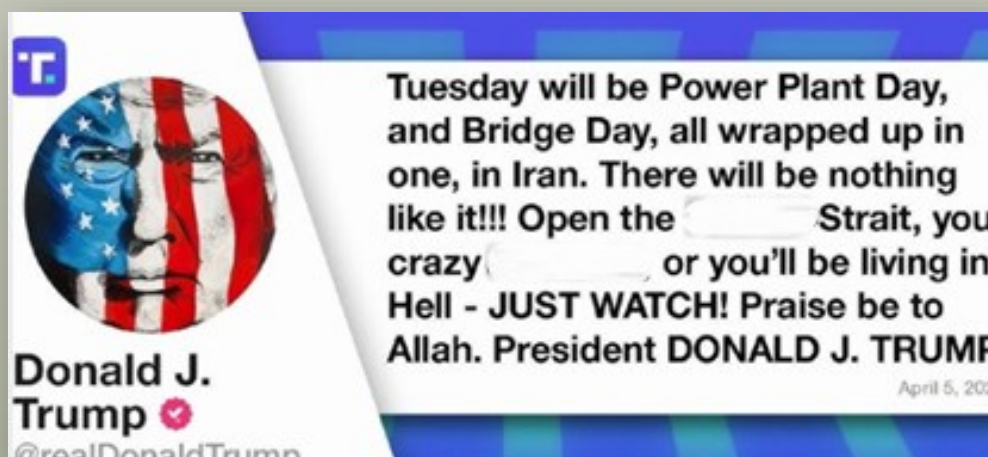
4 - A unifying motivation. Some support the Shah, some support Kurdish Independence, some support the regime, some want a parliamentary democracy, it is just mixed up with different interests. This will need fixing before there is a domestic revolution.

5 - A Severe Crisis! There are several "severe crises", from a water shortage in Tehran, to a hyperinflation crisis caused by the central bank printing money largesse. You name any bad non-specific thing that can happen to a country, and it is probably happening in Iran right now.

So, I will say that if there is a revolution, it might be one of the most defining events of the 2020s, or these protests might just fizzle out with the only thing left being a memory of the regime being near collapse.

"At the Time of Writing, around 18:00pm on 24th June 2026"

Well, it has been some months since when I wrote the previous words and there has been a rollercoaster of change since then. Firstly (this is a very important part), President Donald J. Trump made a very bad decision by posting this tweet:



This statement destroyed the chances of any Revolution domestically in Iran. Before this tweet, the vast majority of Iranians (not elites but actual Iranians) supported the American Forces. If we go back to just 44 days after my previous words some people even celebrated the death of the previous Supreme Leader on the first night of the strikes. The American Leadership most likely believed this was a sign they didn't need to land troops on Iranian Soil and could just destroy the entire Iranian Regime (one of the biggest American mistakes), so they decided after the first few days to try and bomb Iran into submission.



Iran



And then when they found out you can't just bomb a country's government into submission if it has literally brainwashed a sizable fraction of its population. The American leadership also needed the American public to support the war, or at least to tolerate it. In an instant Trump's tweet, turned the pro-American public who hated the Iranian Government's strict religious rules against America ending any chance of a domestic revolution.



After he then realised (due to chaotic domestic American politics) that it would be impossible to actually carry out his threat and that he was running out of time Trump was forced to sign a 14-point Memorandum of Understanding with Iran, which is very similar to the Iran Nuclear Deal Obama signed. Trump had condemned Obama's deal at the start of his first term.

To see the actual details of the US Iran agreement, go to the BBC at this link <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cvgmqzr6p9mo>

This does secure a major American Victory by ending all Iranian Nuclear Weapons programs but also ends all American Sanctions on Iran. On Reflection, there could have and would likely have been a revolution if not for the disastrous war effort after the first few days where Trump was unwilling to actually land troops on the ground or do anything but make disastrous Truth Social Posts and the squeamish reactions of the American Public to any American Deaths. Above all, the failings were due to the incompetent American leadership.



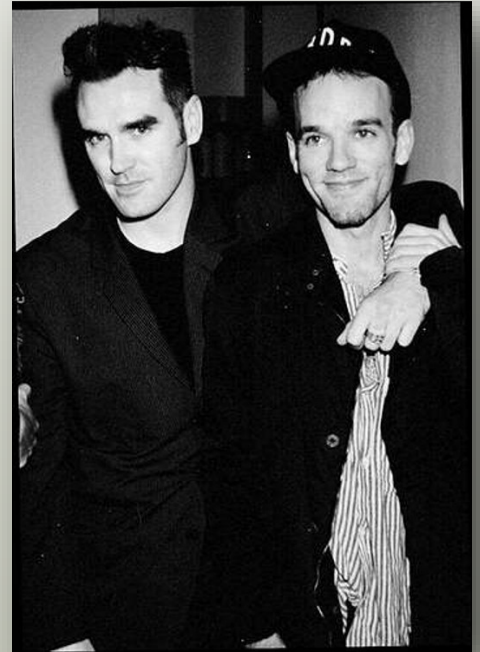
Who Takes the Crown?

By Gabe Brown

Back in lockdown, I found myself digging through my dad's CDs, mixtapes and joint Spotify playlists with friends I couldn't see. One of these friends once asked me if I listened to R.E.M (which I didn't) or The Smiths (which I didn't either). A few hours later I got a message with a link to a playlist: *Surfer Rosa*, *The Smiths Greatest Hits*, and a handful of the best songs from *Automatic for The People* and *Out of Time*.

I loved everything about The Smiths, which I think stemmed from my angst at being indoors all day and being a fan of Pixies' Doolittle and Jeff Buckley. The Smiths are also a great musical package. But love for a band's music is rarely explained by the sum of its parts. For example, the musicians in the Brand New Heavies are excellent and the songs are very well written. Despite this, I don't care for BNH. But The Smiths have that X-factor that attracts me emotionally and spiritually.

At the time, I didn't care for R.E.M. either. It is only recently that I logged into my Spotify on my old phone after switching to Apple Music that I decided to face the music; obediently listening to the Spotify Free Plan advert for the free 30 minutes and chronologically working my way through the R.E.M. songs on the playlist. A new love had been born, given my discovery of College Rock in the summer. With this, I decided to give their 80s stuff a go, which led me to compare these two, given both bands are respective kings of their own niche but can be categorised into 'Post-New Wave'. A rejection of Pop-centric, synth-forward New Wave. Favors guitar-forward Rock sounds with traditional Rock band instruments, dressed down fashion, and lyrics sung with emotional restraint; the return to post-punk style with less artsy musical experimentation and moderately more Pop appeal.

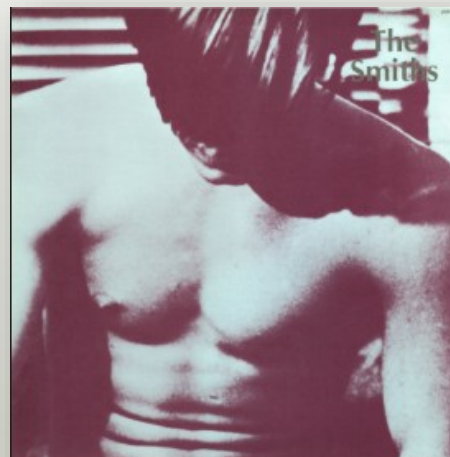




Who Takes the Crown?



The Smiths' debut felt fully formed as the British adolescent's band. From the opening jingle of *This Charming Man*, nothing is tentative. Johnny Marr's nostalgia-driven melodic clarity and intricacy create the perfect memory of the happy daze of a drunken hour, while Morrissey's unique voice has The Smiths' identity ingrained in his tenor.



Contrastingly, *Murmur* feels deliberately elusive. I found myself repeatedly wondering; 'am I listening to *Murmur* or *Mumble?*', albeit this captures the essential early appeal of R.E.M. *Radio Free Europe* pulsed with intensity, while *Laughing* is remarkably similar to John Frusciante's *The Past Recedes* (*Curtains* is a fantastic acoustic album in its own right). So, at this stage, The Smiths' debut album knocks *Murmur* out of the park with home-run precision.

Yet it is *Reckoning* that complicates this reading. Most bands usually stumble with their second album after producing such a fantastic first, because they have exhausted their cache of good music on their debut. This was not the case for R.E.M, with the band discussing making *Reckoning* a double album. Having made a name for themselves as top live performers, they flexed that muscle with this album, encapsulating their sweaty, dynamic, onstage sound. Buck's guitar often set the songs in motion, similar to Keith Richards of TRS (though the two share little in common), while *Pretty Persuasion*, *Letter Never Sent*, and *Harborcoat* push the album forward with a kinetic force that rivals The Smith's floating elegance. So. *Central Rain* is a gorgeous and keening ballad, released in 1983 to build anticipation for the album. *Little to America* also reminds me of *One Way or Another* by Blondie. Altogether, *Reckoning* is the catalyst for R.E.M.'s renowned College Rock sound.

Meat is Murder and *The Queen Is Dead* see The Smiths operating on a level that few bands could match, let alone sustain over an extended period. *Meat is Murder* holds an onslaught of infectious tunes that mostly escape the inclusion of their studio albums, with brilliantly sad and futile songs like *Hatful of Hollow* and *That Joke Isn't Funny Anymore* exposing Morrissey's 'Morriseyism'; an unrelenting attack on contemporary society, given his liminal position as a sexually ambiguous, working class man. *Barbarism Begins At Home* was also enjoyable, reminiscent of punk and funk through Marr's arpeggios and barre chords with the adolescent flavour of The Smiths.



Who Takes the Crown?



The *Queen Is Dead* is perhaps The Smiths' best album; *There Is A Light That Never Goes Out* is one of Morrissey's disconsolately romantic lyrics that R.E.M. couldn't possibly match. The whole album also has that sweet nostalgia of a first date/relationship that many songs fail to capture, which is what makes Morrissey's lyrics so special. It is the telling that Jeff Buckley's renditions of *I know it's over* and *The Boy With The Thorn In His Side* (one of Marr's most glorious works) that prove The Smiths' greatness, perhaps due to the fortification of emotion in which the works are constructed, which allows the songs to be reimagined without losing their essence of despair.



I did not enjoy *Fables of the Reconstruction* whatsoever, but R.E.M. - like all great things - continue to evolve. I had an initial prejudice to *Life's Rich Pageant*, due to my harsh experience with *Fables of Reconstruction*, but I actually enjoyed it a lot. This was mostly given the album was recorded during the politically charged second term of Ronald Reagan, with Stipe's exploration of political themes sounding gratifying to the student's ear. *Cuyahoga* explores Native American genocide, *Swan Swan H* tells the story of the Confederacy defeat in the Civil War, while *The Flowers of Guatemala* criticises the oppression of political prisoners in Central America, giving flowers to R.E.M. as a band widening its scope, moving away from the 'murky feelings and sounds' of earlier albums (Bassist Mike Mills), despite the fact that The Smiths are skyrocketing as a musical presence.

By 1987, the bands trajectories seemed to part. *Strangeways, Here We Come* captures The Smiths on the brink of dissolution, echoed by the haunting spectacularity of *Last Night I Dreamt That Somebody Loved Me*. Compilations like *Louder than Bombs* just prove the depth of their catalogue, with *Rubber Ring* has a similarity to Andy Summers' jazzy funk on *Walking on the Moon* (The Police). The compilation is an embarrassment of riches and gives the band the perfect look as one of the best alternative Rock 'n' Roll bands of the 80s, while *Back to the Old House* is a classic that really embodies adolescent yearning; hot summer nights, wind blowing in your hair, beverage in hand, fresh from the end of something beautiful.



Who Takes the Crown?



There were also a few songs across the two Smiths' albums that were eerily reminiscent of R.E.M., namely *Death At Ones Elbow* with a Western similarity to (*Don't Go Back To*) *Rockville* and Johnny Cash, echoing Dire Strait's *Communique*, as well as *Unhappy Birthday*'s strange progression close to Buck's musical style, conveying The Smiths' versatility and ability to extract different styles to add to their musical flavour.

R.E.M., on the other hand, move in the opposite direction; towards the spotlight of stardom. There are two primary sounds on R.E.M.'s fifth studio album, *Document*. One is the sound a beloved college-radio band emerging as a big-time mainstream rock group. The other is the sound of singer Michael Stipe going to war with the politics and economics of the 1980s, evident in *Exhuming McCarthy* - which is more explicit in creating a historical link from the Red Scare of the 1950s to the Reaganite glorification of self-interest and wealth. Beyond this, Stipe adds satire and comedy to the record, as in his description of yuppies who are "loyal to the Bank of America". I loved *Finest Worksong*, and as such I could describe the entire album as pure brawn; a big change from R.E.M.'s start-up phase as arty folk-rockers. The effect is akin to a Year 11 nerd who struts into Year 12 in September with fearsome biceps. With *Green*, such expansion continues. Although this wasn't my cup of tea, the album represented a shift towards the mainstream, with R.E.M. losing thousands of fans but gaining millions.

At this point, the contest shifts. For me assessing this, I transitioned towards sustainability, rather than who was better when.

On longevity, R.E.M. take the crown comfortably. Their 90s rule, from *Out of Time* and *Automatic For The People* demonstrates their adaptability and transition from indie to mainstream without losing their core identity. Songs like *Losing My Religion* and *Everybody Hurts* reach an audience far beyond the confines of *Shiny Happy People* and *Man on the Moon*. However, as is inevitable with all creative strands, R.E.M.'s 21st Century work has aged like milk and cast a shadow over the gems of their prime. Despite this, the breadth of their career is undeniable.

On Hit singles, The Smiths have the higher ground. Despite a shorter lifespan and limited commercial backing, The Smiths continued to produce sensationally distinctive tunes.





Who Takes the Crown?



Pick any song from 1982-1987 and nothing sounded like them; the crunching opening of *How Soon is Now?* is something you simply don't hear elsewhere. *Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now* has achieved a one-of-a-kind cultural permanence. The Smiths drew 15,000-20,000 for their concerts on an indie record label several times in the 80's, which was unprecedented.

R.E.M. were once seen as the indie band that would 'never change', identified by their reluctance to engage with the mainstream and by Stipe's famously guarded public persona. In fact, in their first Letterman appearance, Stipe wouldn't even talk to Letterman. Their move toward larger audiences in the late 80s and early 90s inevitably drew accusations of selling out, particularly as their sound became more expansive and commercially accessible. The Smiths stuck to Rough Trade, and while they missed out on the opportunity of commercial money and interest, good music, like water, always finds a way; topping the charts in 1985 with *Meat is Murder*.

That being said, R.E.M.'s first two records are brilliant masterpieces that have some of the best records around. Radiohead, Pixies, and most famously Nirvana wouldn't have existed without those two albums; especially the inspiration from *Murmur* and *Reckoning* for *Pablo Honey* and *The Bends* (Radiohead). REM's influence can be heard more strongly today due to their instrumental and inextricable part in bringing indie to the American masses, while The Smiths' influence is far more concentrated.

Renowned as The Godfathers of Twee and the Founders of British guitar music, The Smiths' influence is far more distinct than R.E.M.'s. From The Stone Roses, to Oasis, to Arctic Monkeys, to Radiohead (*Karma Police*) and Jeff Buckley, they are renowned as every lower and middle class adolescent's favourite band. Individually, Johnny Marr is easily more influential than any single REM member. There is a major struggle to find a 90s UK guitarist that doesn't cite him as a major inspiration, perhaps his playing was the spark that lit the flame of Britpop, verified by the innumerable "Greatest Guitarist" lists on the back pages of the internet, given Marr will often make the top 10-20 whereas Peter Dinklage often barely limps in to the top 100. The Smiths could be screamingly hilarious - outlandish songs like *Some Girls are Bigger Than Others* and *Bigmouth Strikes Again*, and once again that mixture of rock and Johnny Marr's quasi-afrobeat guitar parts full of intricate inner movement, seemed so fresh c1985 in comparison to the bombast of Guns N' Roses and Wham!'s hairspray.





Who Takes the Crown?



The transatlantic divide complicates this even further. The Smiths were enormous in the UK by the end of the 80s but they never broke through in the States during their existence. R.E.M. didn't go top ten big in the UK before *Out of Time* many years later.

Both bands were also incredibly influential to their listeners; R.E.M. influential in the sense of reaching the millions of listeners who respond directly to their distinct expression of humanism, while The Smiths conjoined the power of adolescent angst and gorgeous pop melodies which attracted the disillusioned youth, sick of the commercialised punk of The Clash and the glamour of Duran Duran. Morrissey's solemnity is often eased by the indelible melodies played by the other three Smiths, although some are unable to look past his self-pity, like my dad (who has an avid dislike for The Smiths).

Both R.E.M. and The Smiths feel indispensable to the musical era of what followed. R.E.M. in particular have a kind of emotional generosity that is difficult to ignore, encapsulated perfectly by John Frusciante in an interview after a Red Hot Chili Peppers recording in 2004; "R.E.M. felt like a friend to me in a time when I had none". Stipe's openness and offer of music as a poetic conversation underpins their longevity and influence. And yet, there is something about The Smiths that resists such diffusion, as a shorter, sharper, and sardonic run, arriving with an identity without putting all their cards on the table.

There is a more tempting conclusion, and in many ways a fair one, as Morrissey sung in *I Can Have Both*;

I can have both

There's no need to choose

Because

I can have both.

But the court is in session, and The Crown demands a verdict. R.E.M. reached their widest and most refined creative spirit in the 90s, yet phased in and out due to their uneven later output and commercialised musical flow, though The Smiths, for their short reign as the Kings of post-New Wave, cemented their legacy as original pioneers of modern alternative, musical poetry, and ingenious rhythms. So, as a British teen, The Smiths take the crown.



Yo-yos

By Hadi Ali

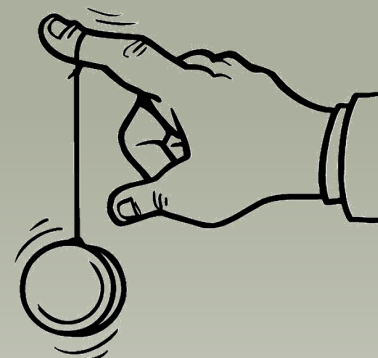
Yo-yoing is often seen as a simple childhood pastime, but for many people it is a skilled hobby, a competitive sport, and even a form of artistic expression. From its long history to modern-day competitions and impressive tricks, yo-yoing has evolved into something far more exciting than just a toy on a string.

The history of the yo-yo dates back thousands of years. Historians believe that early versions of the yo-yo existed in ancient Greece around 500 BCE, where children played with disks made of wood, metal, or terracotta. However, the modern yo-yo became popular in the early 20th century thanks to Pedro Flores, a Filipino immigrant in the United States. He began manufacturing yo-yos in the 1920s, calling them “yo-yos,” a term from the Philippines meaning “come back.” Soon after, American businessman Donald F. Duncan bought the rights to Flores’ company and mass-produced yo-yos, making them a worldwide trend.



Over time, yo-yoing developed from simple up-and-down movements into a wide range of tricks. Beginners usually start with simple tricks like “Rock the Baby,” which involves forming a cradle shape with the string, and “Around the World,” where the yo-yo swings in a large circle. As players improve, they can learn more advanced tricks such as the “Trapeze,” where the yo-yo lands on the string, and the “DNA,” a visually impressive trick where the yo-yo spins rapidly and the string wraps around it in a tight spiral. At the highest level, players perform difficult combinations and routines, including famous combos like “Godspeed” and “The Angel”, which require speed, precision, and excellent control.

Yo-yoing is not just a hobby; it is also a competitive activity with events held around the world. Competitions like the World Yo-Yo Contest bring together talented players from many countries. Competitors perform choreographed routines set to music, showcasing their creativity, precision, and technical ability.





Yo-yos



There are different divisions depending on the style of yo-yoing, including single-hand string tricks, looping, and off-string play. Some famous yo-yo players, such as Shu Takada, Gentry Stein, and Hiroyuki Suzuki have become well-known for their incredible performances and have helped inspire new generations of players.

There are many benefits to yo-yoing as a hobby. First, it improves hand-eye coordination and fine motor skills, as controlling the yo-yo requires precision and timing. It also encourages patience and persistence, since mastering tricks often takes practice and repetition. In addition, yo-yoing can be a great way to relieve stress and relax, as the rhythmic motion can be calming. It is also a portable and relatively inexpensive hobby, making it accessible to many people.

Personally, I first became interested in yo-yoing when I was in Year 7. I would often see people performing impressive tricks with yo-yos on social media, and I was amazed by what they could do. The combination of skill, creativity, and style made me want to try it myself. What started as curiosity quickly turned into a hobby, as I began learning simple tricks and gradually improving over time.

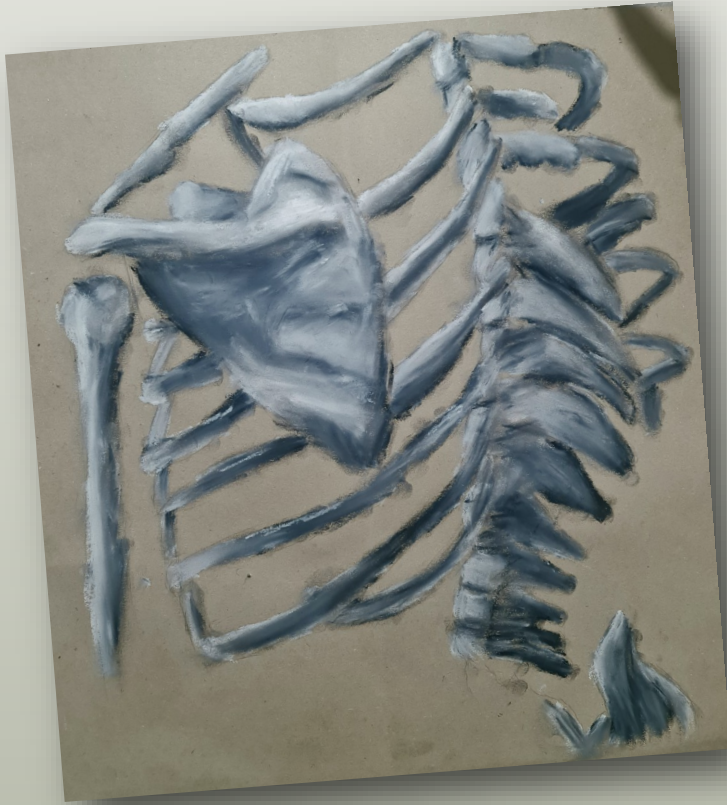
In conclusion, yo-yoing is much more than just a toy, it is a fascinating activity with a rich history, a wide variety of tricks, and a global competitive scene. Whether someone is looking for a fun pastime or a challenging skill to master, yo-yoing offers something for everyone. It is easy to start, but difficult to perfect, which makes it both rewarding and enjoyable.

www.yoyotricks.com



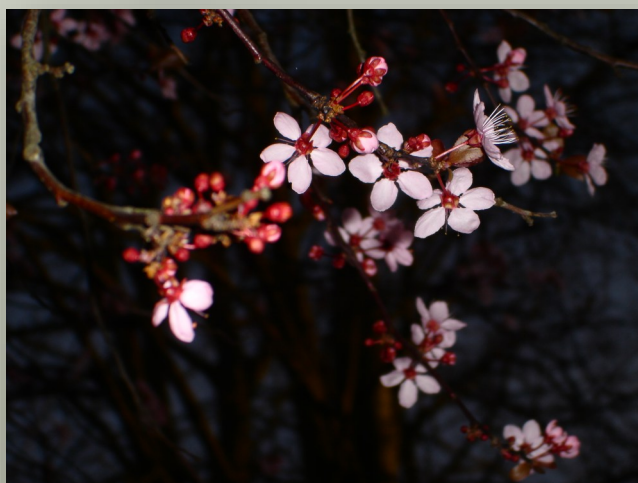
My Art and Photography

By Wealth Hambeh





Art & Photography



Venezuela

By Zakariah Khan

Simon Bolivar was born in Caracas, the current capital of Venezuela, in the late 18th century. He fought for the independence of his country and several others in the Spanish American Wars of Independence between the years of 1808 and 1830. He became the President of several countries, from the Atlantic to the Caribbean all the way to the Pacific. I would explain more about him, but it would easily cover this entire piece a hundred times over.



Below is a painting of Simon Bolívar's deathbed, by Venezuelan Antonio Herrera Toro, 1889. He had resigned from his presidency and was in terrible health. He had hardly a fortune as he had given it up all to his career or to charity. He sold all his possessions and decided to go to Europe in exile in misery after several unfortunate events before his death, including accusations of dictatorship. But he died in the port town of Quinta de San Pedro Alejandrino, Santa Marta in the nation of Colombia. He said on December the 8th 1830 as his final public announcement, a few days before his death. "Colombians! My last wish is for the happiness of the patria. If my death contributes to the end of partisanship and the consolidation of the union, I shall be lowered in peace into my grave."

Later, between that announcement and his death he apparently said, "All who served the revolution have ploughed the sea", believing the revolution was useless and all the people had done, metaphorically, was "to plough the sea". "On December the 17th, he died of Tuberculosis. His last ever words are disputed and were either "¿Cómo saldré de este laberinto?" translated as "How will I ever escape this labyrinth!" or "José, trae el equipaje. No nos quieren aquí", translated as "Jose, bring the luggage. They do not want us here"





Venezuela



If we fast forward over a century and a half later after the liberation of Venezuela, it's the Cold War. America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics are fighting for either one of two ideologies of Capitalism or Communism, across the world, and Latin America is at the centre of it. The oil-rich petro state was undergoing hard times of extreme wealth inequality and their previous economic policy of extreme amounts of borrowing because they believed the oil boom would last forever, which it did not. Then someone called Hugo Chavez came, backed by the USSR, with promises of an easy solution, stop paying the debt and seize the rich landowner's wealth and nationalize all the foreign and domestic oil companies. He was elected by popular vote to the presidency, and he declared a Bolivarian revolution across the land, named after the long-dead revolutionary, and did the things he promised with brutal efficiency, reducing poverty but by morally ambiguous means. His extensive social programs lifted millions below the international poverty line but also packed the courts with political allies to influence trials. He did grow and benefit the economy though, increased the standard of living of the average Venezuelan, and did win several Presidential Elections (mostly) legitimately. But in 2013, Hugo Chavez died of Pelvic Cancer and Nicolas Maduro took power...



Hugo Chavez (centre, wearing an AM shirt) before he was de facto President of Venezuela; he was a junior soldier at the Venezuelan Military Academy in Caracas.

Nicolas Maduro was chosen by the people in an (again, mostly) legitimate election in 2013 after Nicolas Maduro died. And his terrible economic policies of much more extreme socialism (even more than Hugo Chavez) destroyed the already oil-dependent economy. He then decided to print money largesse from the Central Bank, which led to hyperinflation and people taking raises every fortnight. By the next election in 2015, the inflation rate was 181%, the highest in both the world and in Venezuela's history at that time. Nicolas Maduro, to try and win the election, arrested hundreds of opposition figures, barred the recent Nobel Prize winner Maria Corina Machado from running in the election, having clear glass voting booths, and instead of a "free and fair election". It was just meant to be a rubber stamp ceremony. But by complete shock, somehow, somehow, the opposition candidate, who was in place for should-be President Maria Corina Machado, won with a very high underestimate of 62.3% of the vote. But then Nicolas Maduro just had the legislature let him rule by special decree, completely removing the constitutional legitimacy of his regime.



Venezuela



And then he instituted even more extreme economic policies, increasing inflation to 4 figures, then 5 figures, then 6-figures then even over 1 million, yes 1 million percent. That means, every single year the currency was being increased by x10000 or every week the currency was being increased by approximately x190, or x25 a day. People had to get raises, not every fortnight, not every day, but literally had their pay in US Dollars, and stores stopped accepting Government Currency. Food, clothes and even the same cocoa planted just 20 miles away became unaffordable if you somehow found a store accepting Venezuelan Bolivars with the same currency just an hour later. That is what hyperinflation does. Then in 2018, the legislature called an early election, and unsurprisingly, Maduro won. The people were silenced at the stroke of a rifle barrel or the banging of gallows.

In late 2023, Donald Jr. Trump (who I personally and morally do not agree with his **other** actions, but it is of your own opinion to form) was elected President of the United States of America (the most powerful country in the world, whether rightfully or wrongly. He had a "grudge", for lack of a better word, with Nicolas Maduro, who he saw as a despot and a murderer. And over the months this grudge got much, much more intense, and by late 2024 the USA had seized a Venezuelan Oil Carrier, and even though it seemed unlikely that the US would intervene in Venezuela, very excited but (usually) very untruthful tabloids were making what seemed like crazed predictions at the time. But on the 3rd of January 2026, US Troops landed in Caracas, and bombed nearly all the military sites, killing about 80 Venezuelans and Cubans who were in the President's personal guard, and the US Space Force disabled communications across Venezuela. They captured the Dictator, who I will not give the honour of calling President, Nicolas Maduro, and his Wife Cilla Flores, on the Iwo Jima, to a New York City court. As of the time of writing, he is currently being charged with drug trafficking and other related crimes and has pleaded an infamous prison. At the time of writing, the US Military is seizing oil tankers off the coast of Venezuela that are violating sanctions placed by (primarily) the G7.

What was on the news when I woke up on the 3rd of January, of the US Strikes in Caracas!



One of Nicolas Maduro's Military Parades



Sticky Thai Salmon



By Tom Stevens

Salmon

- 1 salmon fillet (150–180g), skin removed
- 1 tsp oil
- Salt and black pepper

Sticky Thai sauce

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| • 1 tbsp sweet chilli sauce | 1 tbsp soy sauce |
| • 1 tbsp honey | 1 tbsp oyster sauce |
| • 1 tbsp sriracha | 1 garlic clove, finely chopped |
| • 1 tbsp grated ginger | Juice of 1/2 lime |



Rice

- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| • 75g jasmine rice | 150ml water (pinch of salt) |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|

Optional toppings

- | | | |
|----------------|--------------|------------|
| • Spring onion | Sesame seeds | Lime wedge |
|----------------|--------------|------------|

Method

1. Cook the rice

Rinse the jasmine rice under cold water.

Add to a saucepan with the water and salt. Bring to the boil, then lower the heat completely and cover with a lid. Cook for 10–12 minutes until the water's absorbed.

Turn the heat off and leave it covered while you finish everything else.





Sticky Thai Salmon



2. Cook the salmon

Cut the salmon into bite-sized chunks and season lightly with salt and pepper.

Heat the oil in a frying pan over medium heat.

Cook the salmon pieces for about 3–4 minutes, stirring occasionally, until lightly golden on the outside but not fully cooked through yet.

Take the salmon out of the pan and set aside.



3. Make the sticky sauce

In the same pan, add:

sweet chilli sauce, soy sauce, honey, oyster sauce, sriracha, garlic, ginger and lime juice

Stir everything together and let it bubble for about 2 minutes.

4. Finish the salmon in the sauce

Add the salmon back into the pan.

Keep stirring the salmon through the sauce for another 2–3 minutes until:

- the salmon is fully cooked
- the sauce becomes thick, sticky, and glossy

everything is coated properly

The sauce should reduce right down and cling to the salmon pieces.

5. Serve

Fluff the rice with a fork and spoon it into a bowl.

Top with the sticky Thai salmon and scrape every bit of sauce from the pan over the top.

Finish with spring onion, sesame seeds, or extra lime if you want.



My Journey into Music

By Joseph McClenaghan

I recently had the opportunity to interview my school music teacher, Mr McBrien, and Mr Banks from the New Sounds Jazz Workshop. Honestly, reading their responses got me thinking - really thinking - about what I do musically and why I even do it in the first place.

Music is everywhere in my life. I've got it playing while I do homework, when I'm relaxing and even when I'm out and about. But there's something my teacher said that really stuck with me: "Hearing music is easy, but listening to it? That takes concentration." Since that moment, I've been making an effort to pay more attention. I try to catch the different instruments, listen for patterns, and think about how everything fits together. I have realised that listening is tough work!

Then there's the Symphony Hall—what a place! There's just something about live music that feels so different. Watching the musicians play really brought to life what my teacher meant when he said, "Most musicians around the world learn by ear".



At home, music plays a big role too. My family listens to music I wouldn't necessarily pick out myself. But guess what? I get why my music teacher encouraged us to "open our ears and minds to as many styles of music as possible." Just because I'm not feeling something at first doesn't mean I won't come around to it later.

Talking to Mr Banks got me thinking a lot about creativity. He mentioned that jazz allows musicians to "express their own voice in the moment." I used to think improvisation was this super complicated thing. But now? It feels different. He said, "Improvisation encourages us to express ourselves... creatively, artistically, and emotionally." That really hit home for me. It's not just about hitting the right notes; it's so much more about how you feel. Even when I hit a wrong note or go flat it feels less daunting now.



My Journey into Music



Another thing that really surprised me was when Mr Banks said that learning music means “being prepared to start before you feel ready.” I often sit back and wait until I feel confident. But maybe that’s not always necessary, right? Both Mr McBrien and Mr Banks talked about the importance of listening. Mr. Banks pointed out that jazz “requires listening, supporting, and responding to others while having confidence in your own voice.” It struck me that music isn’t just a solo gig; it’s about collaboration too.

Oh, and I’m heading to the Birmingham Conservatoire New Sounds Jazz workshop soon to pick up new skills! I used to feel a bit nervous about it, but now I’m really excited to dive in. Their encouragement to just “Go for it!” has stuck with me. Overall, these conversations have really shifted how I view music. It’s not just about raw talent. It’s about listening, practicing, trying new things, and finding ways to express who you are.

But most importantly...I think I finally get why I’m into music. It’s not just for school or exams. It’s because it allows me to think, to feel, and to express myself in a way that nothing else really can.



Below are the interview questions:

Interview with Mr Banks from New Sounds Jazz

Why is improvisation such an important part of jazz music?

Improvisation encourages us to express ourselves as individuals; creatively, artistically and emotionally. As we learn jazz music as a language and become more confident, this expression is a very exciting and rewarding experience. However, this is traditionally within agreed parameters of rhythm and harmony. Therefore, as in life, our own individualism is part of a wider society.

What skills do students develop during the workshop besides playing their instrument?

Participants develop many skills including aural awareness and playing within an ensemble - both with agreed melodic and harmonic forms and by improvising. They also learn about jazz history and repertoire, how to practice and develop further as a jazz musician, amongst many other skills.



My Journey into Music



How do you help students who have never played jazz before feeling confident joining in?

NSJW is very welcoming and encouraging to all participants. We create a space where trying things out in a safe and supportive environment is what it's all about: being prepared to start before you feel ready! We share, enjoy and experience the music together and there is no pressure for anyone to do more than they feel comfortable.

What advice would you give to students who want to try jazz but feel nervous about improvising?

Go for it! Find a supportive teacher and like-minded peers. Listen to inspiring recordings and live concerts. Begin with rhythms, find the groove, then begin to add notes . . . once you start, you'll realise there's no need for nerves, it's too much fun!

Interview with Mr McBrien

What skills should students start developing in Year 8 or Year 9 if they are thinking about GCSE Music?

Practise regularly on whatever instrument you play, keep the instrument somewhere where it is easily accessible and use this time to break up other homework. If you only played for 10 minutes in between other homework (e.g. between Maths and Geography) 5 times a week, your skills will build up quickly. Listen to lots of different types of music and try to work out what instruments are playing etc. Open your ears and mind to as many styles of music as possible (from all over the world and from every point in history). We are lucky to live in an age where recorded music is at our fingertips. In the past you would only have heard music if someone was performing it in front of you.

How does learning by ear and listening help students become better musicians?

Listening is one of the most important skills in music and it is something that will get better the more you do it. It is not just about hearing the music; it is about being able to hone in on a certain element (e.g. what exactly is the bass line doing in the background? Or how many parts are in a particular vocal harmony?) Hearing music is easy, listening to music requires concentration. If you are able to listen closely and understand what is happening in any piece of music this will help with your performance and creative skills. Most musicians around the world learn by ear. That said, reading music is a valuable skill.

What advice would you give a student who is thinking about choosing GCSE Music?

It helps if you have already been playing an instrument, if not, it is best to start one as soon as possible. If you can get to Grade 4 level by Year 11 this can achieve a high end grade in the practical part of the exam. As well as the practical part of the course, you get to compose two pieces of music and sit a listening exam.

Can jazz performance or improvisation be used in GCSE coursework?

Of course, the nice thing about GCSE music is that any style is welcome.

Why is it important for young people to experience different styles of music?

You never know what you might discover!

www.newsoundsjazz.com



Cricket:

The Sport that brings the world together

By Aryan Gcharge

Cricket is one of those sports that seems simple when you first look at it—someone bowls, someone bats, and people cheer. But once you start paying attention, you realize it's a game full of skill, strategy, and excitement. As a Year 8 student who has watched cricket at school, on TV, and even in the park, I've come to understand why so many people around the world love it. Cricket isn't just a sport; it's a tradition, a community, and a way for people to connect. In this article, I'll explore why cricket matters, how it's played, and why it continues to inspire millions of fans and young players like me.

A Sport with a Long and Fascinating History

Cricket has been played for hundreds of years. It began in England, where children first played it in fields and villages. Over time, it spread across the world, especially to countries that were once part of the British Empire. Today, cricket is huge in places like India, Australia, Pakistan, South Africa, New Zealand, and the West Indies. In some countries, cricket isn't just a sport - it's a national passion.

One of the most interesting things about cricket is how many different formats it has. Test cricket is the oldest and longest version, lasting up to five days. It's all about patience, endurance, and careful planning. One Day Internationals (ODIs) are shorter, usually taking around eight hours. Then there's T20 cricket, which is fast, explosive, and full of action. T20 matches last about three hours and are perfect for people who want excitement and quick results. These different formats mean that cricket can appeal to all kinds of fans.

The Thrill of the Game

Cricket is exciting because anything can happen at any moment. A bowler might deliver a perfect ball that knocks over the stumps. A batter might smash a six into the crowd. A fielder might sprint across the pitch and dive to make an unbelievable catch. These moments are what make cricket unforgettable.





Cricket



But cricket isn't just about big hits and fast bowling. It's also a game of strategy. Batters have to decide which balls to hit and which to leave. Bowlers use different speeds, angles, and spins to confuse the batter. Captains must choose the right field placements to stop runs or take wickets. Every decision matters, and one small mistake can change the entire match.

Why cricket still matters today

In a world full of fast entertainment, video games, and social media, cricket remains a sport that encourages people to slow down and enjoy the moment. It brings families together, fills stadiums with excitement, and inspires young players to dream big. Cricket matches are watched by millions, and major tournaments like the Cricket World Cup create unforgettable memories.

Cricket also brings people from different cultures and backgrounds together. Whether you're playing in a school team, watching a match with friends, or cheering for your favourite country, cricket creates a sense of unity. It reminds us that sport can connect people in ways that nothing else can.

Player Spotlight: Vaibhav Sooryavanshi

Vaibhav Sooryavanshi is an exciting young cricketer who is quickly becoming known for his calm batting style and strong work ethic. He plays with maturity, choosing smart shots instead of risky ones, and always gives full effort in the field. His dedication to training and improving makes him a standout player among his teammates, and many believe he has the potential to rise to much higher levels in the future. He plays for Rajasthan Royals in the IPL and also plays for the Mens U19 Indian Cricket Team. HE IS ONLY 15 YEARS OLD!



Why cricket is a unique sport

Cricket isn't any normal sport. It is played with a ball, but not any ball, but a hard ball. These balls are VERY hard. Cricket balls are hard *because they're built to stay strong and keep their shape when they're hit or bowled at high speed*. They have a solid cork center wrapped tightly in layers of string, all covered by tough leather.



Cricket



This firm structure helps the ball bounce properly, travel fast, and last through long matches. Because of this, cricket players in hard ball matches need gear or also known as ‘pads’. These consist of batting pads, thigh pads, helmet gloves, a box, and a bat. The cheapest kits can be from £150+ and proper professional kits are from £250+ all the way up to a whopping £550.

Gear Item	What It Protects	Approx. Price (GBP)
Batting Pads	Legs (shins & knees)	£25–£80
Batting Gloves	Hands & fingers	£20–£60
Helmet	Head & face	£30–£120
Thigh Pad	Thigh (front leg)	£10–£35
Inner Thigh Pad	Inside thigh	£8–£25
Arm Guard	Forearm	£8–£20
Chest Guard	Chest & ribs	£12–£30
Abdo Guard (Box)	Groin area	£3–£10
Wicketkeeping Pads	Legs (for keepers)	£30–£90
Wicketkeeping Gloves	Hands (special grip)	£25–£80

Top Brands

Top Brands such as Gunn & Moore (GM), Gray Nicolls, Sanspereilis Greenlands (SG), Sareen Sports (SS), MRF, Kookaburra and DSC are all used by professional cricket players like Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma, Mahendra Singh Dhoni, and many more!

The World’s Biggest Cricket Stadium

Narendra Modi Stadium stands as a monumental symbol of modern cricket, redefining the scale and spectacle of the sport. Located in Ahmedabad, India, it is the largest cricket stadium in the world, with a seating capacity exceeding 130,000 spectators. Originally built as the Sardar Patel Stadium, it underwent massive redevelopment and was reopened in 2020 with state-of-the-art facilities.

The stadium is designed to host high-profile international matches, including Tests, ODIs, and T20s, as well as major tournaments like the Indian Premier League. Its innovative architecture includes multiple dressing rooms to accommodate back-to-back matches, advanced drainage systems that allow quick resumption of play after rain, and LED flood-lights mounted along the roof instead of traditional towers, ensuring unobstructed views.

Beyond its sheer size, the Narendra Modi Stadium has quickly become a fortress of atmosphere, where the roar of the crowd can be overwhelming for visiting teams. It has already played host to historic encounters, including day-night Test matches and World Cup fixtures, cementing its place as one of the most iconic venues in contemporary cricket.

Football Facts

By Ire Ajayi

Football is a team sport played with a ball between two teams of 11 players. The aim is to score by getting the ball into the opposition's goal. Football is the most popular sport in the world, with an estimated 4 billion fans globally!

The pitch

- . Rectangular Field: A grassy area with goalposts at each end.
- . Goal box: The small box near the goal.
- . Penalty box: The box laid out in front of the goal.

Basic rules

- . Hands Off: Except for the goalkeeper, players cannot use their hands or arms.
- . Kick-Off: Starts the game and restarts after a goal
- . Throw-in: When the ball goes out of play over the sidelines.
- . Corner Kick: When the opposition puts the ball out over their own goal line.
- Foul: An unfair action against an opponent. Can lead to a free kick or penalty kick.
- Offside: A complex rule, but basically, you can't be too far ahead of the ball in the opponent's half when it's passed to you.

Players & Positions

Goalkeeper: Guards the goal, can use hands.

Defenders: Protect the goal.

Midfielders: Connect both the defence and attack.

Forwards: Try to score goals

The World Cup was founded in 1930 and established itself as the premier international tournament, this solidified football's global appeal.

Early games in the football community were less about sport and more about community ritual and tradition.





Football



How things link together

Each player has a role, but they must work together as a team to defend, pass, and score. Communication and coordination are key to winning a match!

Football is a thrilling sport with goals but lots of strategy. It's about teamwork, skill, and having fun while trying to push your team over the line.

History of Football

Origins: Many cultures played ball games, including China (Cuju), Greece (Episkyros), and Rome (Harpastrum). These games often involved carrying, kicking and throwing the ball.

Medieval Europe

Folk football: Popular in medieval Europe, these were chaotic, often violent crowded games between towns/villages. Rules were minimal, and objectives varied.

Ban by authorities: Frequently banned due to disruptive and dangerous play.

Formalization

Nineteenth Century English Public Schools: Key in standardizing rules which led to a variation of football.

Cambridge rules (1848): An early attempt to connect/unify rules, influencing later developments.

The Football Association (FA) (1863): Formed in England, leading to the creation of association football.



Word Search

Aston Word Search

R D E O F E H A D R G Y G D A
D D S E P O Y R Y N O N K A L
Z A U E E E D R O C E R E H T
D N O A O D Y E L H R E E D L
H F H L E N A N F O A D I K N
W B S O A A O O Y T E W R E L
N D A R E S D W P R D A L S L
C B L O S O T E M P E R L E Y
F R G I S N Z O G A S D O A Y
A A U I N I C A N A N G S N L
N N O E N N R R I R M T D A L
D D D E M N R R O U C R O O Z
Z O O A O A D G G L W L Y N F
Y N R W E L A A O T T Y D A D
D A O R K C I R D E R F O U D

BRANDON
THE RECORD
ASTON

MANTON
FLOYD
DOUGLAS HOUSE

TEMPERLEY
HAWLEY
EZINE

FREDRICK ROAD
MUGA
EDWARD

