

## **Jon McLeod: a Musical Journey**

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The Chairman of Weber Shandwick's Corporate, Financial and Public Affairs practice recently joined the Board of Directors at the prestigious Hallé Orchestra. Founded in 1858, the Manchester-based symphony orchestra has an impressive history including the premieres of Edward Elgar's Symphony No.1 and Ralph Vaughan Williams Sinfonia Antarctica. Today it is ranked amongst the UK's top symphonic ensembles.

I spoke to Jon about his lifelong love of music.

**Your first classical purchase was Holst's The Planets, what is it about that particular suite that captured your imagination?**

It's well-known as a very accessible classical work, Holst was an English composer that had a European background so it has a depth that makes it more interesting than some other work. Mars The Bringer of War is the most famous piece of music in that suite and was enormously influential on John Williams' Star Wars score, Star Wars having just come out in 1977.

Gustav Holst's seven-movement suite premiered on 28th September 1918, leading many to suggest that it was inspired by World War One, but Holst denied this.

**How old were you when you bought it?**

I was 12.

**Could you give me an overview of how your musical tastes have developed since your youth?**

It only deteriorated. That was the first classical record I bought, my first single was The Day The World Turned Day-Glo by X-Ray Spex who were a particularly fine punk band. I was an obsessive collector of vinyl singles, and I mean hundreds of vinyls.

**Did you have a proper punk phase with the outfits and everything else?**

Yes because I got into music at the point where literally everything made before that time was rejected so I hated prog-rock, I hated Pink Floyd, I still hate Pink Floyd, I hate Led Zeppelin, I hate any self-indulgent guitar band. I followed that trail from the late 70s through into electronic music and bands like New Order.

By the time I got to university the band I was part of at the time ended up supporting New Order while they were in their pomp, this was in the mid-80s so not long after Blue Monday, which was really amazing.

While we were doing the sound check Peter Hook came up to us and said, “keep off our fookin stuff or I’ll smash your fookin faces in”.

**What about the politics of bands like the Clash and the Sex Pistols, did that appeal at the time?**

Definitely, yes, the Clash at the time were taking white music towards black music and that was critical. You’re talking about a period of quite considerable social strife when you still had riots because minorities were politically concerned about their place in society.

So music that brought black and white communities together was really critical and much more engaged. Music now is just not politically engaged which is a shame.

**How did you come to be involved in the Hallé orchestra?**

A member of the board, Heejae Chae is a client of Weber Shandwick. He runs the Scapa Group and he approached Nick Osborne about seeing whether anyone at Weber Shandwick would be interested in serving on the board who had connections with Manchester [Jon is also chair of Weber Shandwick’s Manchester practice] and an interest in music.

It’s an unpaid role but there is still a competitive selection process, I had to be interviewed and jump through all the hoops and for some reason they decided I could do the job.