

# 'I'm very used to Norwich - it was exciting and just so different to London'

**Danielle Lett** chats to founding father of punk John Lydon about his love of Norfolk, going back on tour, and dabbling in NFTs

**N**ow that lockdown has lifted across the board, musicians are very excited to get back out on the road again – ensuring they make summer 2022 the biggest, best, and loudest one yet.

And one man who's particularly itching to perform again is John Lydon.

Formerly known by his stage moniker Johnny Rotten, Lydon is on the road next month, playing a series of shows with his band Public Image Ltd (PiL).

And he's making sure he stops over in Norwich, where PiL will take to the stage of The Nick Rayns LCR at UEA on Monday, June 20, making their long-awaited return for eager fans here in the region.

Before we got chatting about this upcoming 13-date headline tour and his glorious return to home turf, I had to find out how John was, and how he's been keeping over the past two years.

"I've got nothing to complain about," he says.

"I'm just a fella who gets on with it, no matter what the gods throw at me."

That's what we love to hear.

John currently resides on the Californian coast, just outside LA, with his wife Nora, who was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 2018.

"I'm a full-time carer for my lovely wife, so that occupies a great deal of my time. All of it, in fact," he explains.

"It makes songwriting quite difficult, but I can't stop thinking, so I've always got these little microphones I'll yell a few lines into. I'll record those and go back to them later – and sometimes it surprises me what I write because I'm doing it unconsciously."

So that begs the question – are we due any new PiL music any time soon? After all, the post-punk outfit's latest studio release, *What The World Needs Now...*, came out in 2015.

"The songs are flowing – there's at least four songs roaring. We're ready, and as soon as we hit Blighty, we're going to head into

the recording studio. We're either going to manoeuvre it around the tour, or wait until the end."

The band managed to work on music together throughout the pandemic, keeping in contact thanks to Facetime and Zoom.

But nothing beats actually being together with your bandmates, with real music, playing real music to real fans.

"I'm terrified because I don't ever want to let people down, so I do the best I can. But it's what I'm made for, and it's the one thing I've spent my whole life doing. I was a teen when I went straight into the wonderful world of music. I'm no good at anything else. It's where I belong."

"Hopefully by Norwich I'll have gotten over the major stage fright. It's been difficult, having to spend the last two years in lockdown. It kills creativity."

For anyone who's not experienced a PiL show, what can they expect on next month's tour?

"We're one of the few bands that are very open-hearted and open-minded. We share our emotions," John says.

"All of the songs are emotional – whether that be joy, happiness, utter misery, or grief. These are all valid human emotions, and our songs absolutely go in at the deep end, no matter what the subject matter is."

Not one for ostentatious displays, Lydon and co pride themselves on their no-frills approach to performing.

"The eye contact between us and the audience is absolutely part of the show. And once you hook into the emotional response of an audience, that's pure heaven. That's what live music is supposed to be about, and that's exactly what we do without a light show."

"If there's some lightbulbs at the venue, it'd be nice if they went on and off occasionally but that's as far as that showbiz thing goes with us. It's much more important that our fans can see us and hear us clearly. There's no gimmicks – we're a band that can properly play its stuff."



**John Lydon**  
Picture: PAUL HEARTFIELD



PiL will be heading to Norwich this June

Picture: ROB BROWNE / PIL OFFICIAL

"I've got to say though, these are some of the best and most musically capable people I've worked with – but more importantly they're my friends. Come to a PiL show and you'll get a wonderful sense of community and respect, and an understanding of the grief and troubles you could possibly be going through. You're not alone, and that's the message."

Attendees to PiL's upcoming Norwich show are certainly in for a treat, then.

And John can't wait to come back this part of the world, after spending some of his childhood growing up on the Norfolk coast.

"My dad worked on the oil rigs back in the day and we lived in Bacton-on-Sea, so I kind of know the place, and I'm very used to Norwich."

"It was exciting and different to London, and certainly different to Ireland."

"Variety is the spice of life', as they say. And I've always loved the football team, because of the colours – green and yellow are great," he chuckles.

Fans of John may remember that Lydon and his Sex Pistols bandmates were actually banned from performing at Norwich's UEA back in December 1976, following a controversial TV interview by the foursome.

"I shouldn't have been banned," he chuckles.

"I've been banned for all the wrong reasons. I've never lied,

cheated, stolen, or caused grievous bodily harm. I have been wrongly accused, but I've proved my worth as a human being."

But all is well that ends well, as the ban has since been lifted – and in 2016, the university's current vice chancellor, Professor David Richardson, wrote a two-page letter to John to make amends.

Music and touring aside, John has also been dabbling in the world of non-fungible tokens (NFTs) – and is doing so in the name of charity.

In aid of dementia and Alzheimer's sufferers, he has created just 100 collectible NFTs from a singular piece of art.

Explaining the inspiration behind it, he says: "Nora loves to watch me draw and paint, and something like this just seems like the right thing to do when you're twiddling your thumbs. A sizeable chunk of the sales will be going to something worthy – anything I can do to take the pressure off people worse off than myself."

Five per cent of sales will be going to The Spitz Charitable Trust, and each NFT is authenticated with Lydon's unmistakable digital signature, in the bottom right-hand corner.

"The Spitz based in Islington, which is my manor in London, and it takes musicians into care homes and day centres and provides live music. I know that with my Nora, her cognitive functions really increase and her brain is more alert with music, so



John Lydon performing with Public Image Ltd (PiL) Picture: ROB BROWNE / PIL OFFICIAL

I'm more than happy to send money their way."

In order to ensure his NFTs are carbon-neutral, John has also teamed up with The Phantom Planter, a self-professed 'Paramilitree' organisation in Northern Ireland, to help offset the carbon produced when creating non-fungible tokens.

"Ireland is my ancestor's country, and over the years I've watched it slowly turn into a golf course. It's not good for the economy or ecology, so I say bring

back the trees, boys and girls. So I'm very happy to be a part of that."

With a slew of music, TV appearances, books, and now NFTs under his belt, I can't wait to see what Mr. Lydon gets up to next.

**Public Image Ltd will be touring the UK this June, and stopping off at Norwich's Nick Rayns LCR on Monday, June 20. Tickets and more information can be found at [pilofficial.com](http://pilofficial.com)**