



THE FUTURE LOOKS BRIGHT

Preston's iconic music venue The Ferret had its long-term future secured earlier this year after it was purchased by the Music Venue Trust. *Ali Gudgeon* finds out what's next for the popular grassroots live music venue. Photography: Michael Porter

Located on the outskirts of the city centre and housed in a centuries-old mill building, The Ferret is the place to catch amazing live music – from rock, indie, and alternative artists spanning around the globe, to local talent at one of their open-mic nights.

Occupying a unique niche in Preston's grassroots live music scene, the 200-capacity venue is known for supporting emerging musicians and artists. Over the years it has

welcomed artists such as Ed Sheeran, IDLES, Alt-J, Catfish & The Bottlemen, Royal Blood and many more. But it was nearly game over for The Ferret following a two-year battle to save the venue from being sold off.

Back in early 2022, a huge bombshell was dropped on the venue. The owners of The Ferret's building had put it up for sale, potentially letting the place fall into the hands of a developer and putting the venue at serious risk of closure.

A huge public campaign followed, trying to drum up the financial support needed to purchase the Fylde Road property, which was helped massively with a £150,000 loan from Preston City Council. Ed Sheeran even supported the campaign, as did many other big names in the music industry.

Thankfully, the venue was saved in May this year after a huge battle and has now been placed into permanent protected status after it was acquired by Music Venue Properties (MVP) under its ground-breaking Own Our Venues scheme.

The campaign to save The Ferret could not have been successful without community involvement and creativity. Social media played a vital role in spreading the word, with supporters sharing personal stories and photos that showcased the venue's impact on their lives. Hashtags like #SaveTheFerret quickly gained traction, uniting music lovers and drawing attention to the cause.

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As the campaign progressed, local media coverage helped amplify the message, bringing even more attention to the cause. The Ferret's story became symbolic of the broader struggles faced by live music venues across the country, resonating with audiences far beyond Preston.

Matt Fawbert, General Manager, said: “The Ferret's commitment to alternative culture in the city of Preston is unparalleled. We see it as our duty to champion new music, and to bring to Preston the kinds of artists that would rarely, if ever, be seen around these parts. Having the support of MVP as

our landlord has given us the security and confidence to invest even more in grassroots music and create something truly special in our city.”

The venue was given a boost last month when Radio 2's Jo Whiley presented live from The Ferret, as part of the radio station's Party in the Park. When Jo was asked how important venues like The Ferret are, she said: “There are communities throughout the whole of the country who are really hungry for music, they want to go out and have a good time and discover bands. Every single city has somewhere that is a hub for creativity and people, who are obsessed with the arts and with music.

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“If you don't have places like The Ferret in Preston, The Roadmender in Northampton, The Great Escape Festival or The Zap in Brighton, then where do those people go?”

So, what can people look forward to at The Ferret? As well as the big names, The Ferret is the regular haunt of the local music community – with new bands and artists learning their craft on its stage, at open mic nights – both acoustic and MC-led, at open decks events for budding DJs, and as support acts for touring artists. Students from the neighbouring University of Central Lancashire run regular live music sessions and have the opportunity to shadow The Ferret's sound engineering team, learning on the job. Local promoters are given chance to host their own events, and previous members of The Ferret team have gone on to work nationally and internationally on

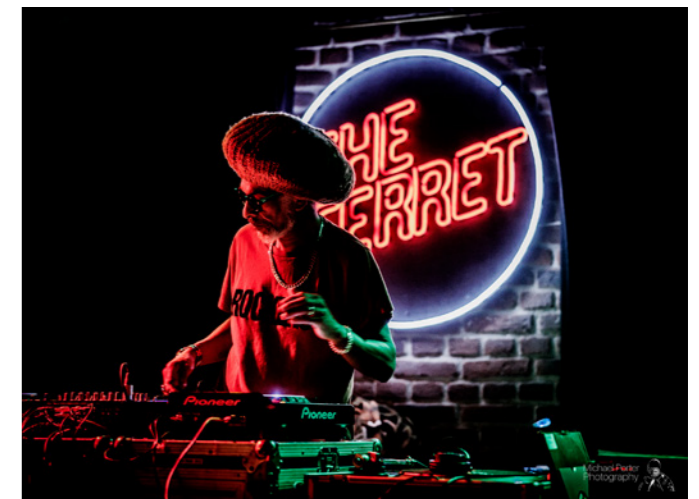


live music promotion and production.

The Ferret now looks forward to a brighter future, one that continues to celebrate the arts and nurture the next generation of musicians. The resilience and passion of its supporters ensure that this iconic venue will remain a

vibrant part of Preston's cultural landscape for years to come. ■

theferret.live



Photography: Kara McCarron

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