



■ Bruce Adams in action at The Velvet Rooms and (inset top) singers Sheila Waterfield and Roy Forbes.

The joy of live jazz

Just look at the sheer concentration on trumpeter Bruce Adams' face as he belts out the blues at the 36th Birmingham, Sandwell & Westside International Jazz Festival. Bruce and the Dave Newton Quartet kicked off the ten-day live music festival that brought joy to venues and their cus-

tomers across Westside and elsewhere between 16 and 25 October. Mike Olley, general manager of Westside BID, said: "Despite all the COVID-19 worries, we had live and safe jazz on Broad Street this autumn which did so much to lift everyone's spirits."

Story and pictures: Pages 2-5



Popular event cheers crowds and wins



Alan Barnes and Dave Newton (left) and Roy Forbes (right) perform in the autumnal splendour of Birmingham Botanical Gardens.

Brum's jazz festival is alive and kicking!

By Tony Collins

Live music was the clear winner as Birmingham's jazz festival overcame all the odds to put on a terrific show in and around the city in late October.

Despite local lockdowns and international quarantine restrictions causing a number of last-minute

withdrawals, the 36th annual festival still managed to conjure up an array of top British jazz talent to entertain fans.

And there was a further boost for festival organisers Big Bear Music when it discovered halfway through the 10-day event that it would be receiving more than £50,000 from the government's Culture Recovery

Fund. Festival director Jim Simpson said: "The money will keep us going until March next year – that was the basis of our application.

"We'll start to work on the 2021 jazz festival from the middle of next week, but this funding allows us to work without pressure," he added.

It is hoped that the 2021 festival will revert to the summer after this year's event was postponed from July due to COVID-19.

Added Jim: "We actually learned a lot because of the virus, such as how to adapt and be more flexible, as well as manage all the restrictions.

"We started off with more than 70 shows in the book but ended up with just over 30.

"We printed the programme as late as we could, but we still had to make 24 programme changes in the last two weeks.

"We never gave up hope of staging a jazz festival this year despite all the difficulties and, in the end, we were able to put on the only live music festival, certainly in this region and possibly in the country."



Bruce Adams and the Dave Newton Quartet at The Velvet Rooms.

WEST SIDE World
BIRMINGHAM

Published on behalf of Westside BID, the Business Improvement District constantly working towards creating a more attractive, better marketed, safer, cleaner and brighter business environment in Birmingham's Westside entertainment area. Westside BID was voted in by 350 businesses in the area in August 2015, with a 99.75% yes vote (the best in the UK). Westside BID is based at 252-260 Quayside Tower, Broad Street, B1 2HF.

Publisher: Dyson Media Ltd.
Editor: Steve Dyson.
Designer: Gary Young of Magic Lantern Media.
Printed by: Print Design Team, 28 Clement Street, Birmingham B1 2SL.

Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of all content, but the publisher takes no responsibility nor accepts any liability for errors or omissions. Please check details with venues if travelling to events.

£50k grant to secure its future in 2021



The Backyard Music Boys set The Canal House swinging during the 36th Birmingham, Sandwell and Westside Jazz Festival.



(Clockwise from top left) The Nitecrawlers, Sheila Waterfield and band, the Chris Bowden Quartet and Alex Clarke at the festival.

Musicians play from behind perspex –



We're safe...

By Tony Collins

The jazz festival live shows, which ranged from venues in Broad Street to two libraries in Sandwell, went ahead after festival organisers bought perspex screens to place between the bands and the audience.

Festival director Jim Simpson said: "Not one of the venues let us down in any way. They were very strict on social distancing, but people took it with great humour."

"I think audiences were so grateful that there was live music on. And all the performers seemed to be really at the top of their game," he added.

What was the 36th Birmingham, Sandwell & Westside Jazz Festival ran from 16 to 25 October and

included film showings, talks and workshops as well as live jazz and blues performances.

Some gigs were streamed from outside the area, including Lancashire band Tipitina, who were unable to attend in person due to lockdown rules.

Instead they live-streamed a concert from Leyland onto screens at The Brasshouse and The Bull's Head. Other performances were streamed live into local retirement villages.

Among the last-minute obstacles to overcome was the enforced withdrawal of The Jim Dandies from Italy who were due to give seven performances.

But among the replacement events was a special tribute to adopted Brummie Spencer Davis who sadly died last week.

The event, which was held at The Bull's Head, included a prized half-hour chat with Pete York, former drummer of The Spencer Davis Group, from his home in Germany.

The festival's live shows began and ended at the Velvet Music Rooms in Broad Street, starting with Bruce Adams and the Dave Newton Quartet on Friday 16th and closing with a performance by Melvin Hancox on Sunday 25th.

● Visit www.birminghamjazzfestival.com for more details.



■ A heartfelt message... Alan Barnes contemplates a jazz festival banner between songs at The Canal House.



■ Dave Newton (left) and Alan Barnes at The Canal House and (right) the duo in action.



anything to ensure the show goes on



and SOUND!

■ A Bruce Adams and the Dave Newton Quartet gig is live-streamed from West Bromwich Central Library and (opposite page, top) the group performs from behind a screen at The Velvet Rooms.



■ Garry Alcock (left) and Bruce Adams (above) are delighted to be making music, while Luisa Huggins of Westside BID and organiser Jim Simpson (right) are simply delighted that the festival has been able to go ahead at all following a summer of COVID-19 restrictions.



Venues draft wish list of support for leaders

By Steve Dyson

Pubs, restaurants and other hospitality venues in Birmingham have compiled a shopping list for the region's political leaders to use in their urgent government lobbying efforts.

Andy Street, the Conservative elected mayor for the West Midlands, has joined up with Birmingham's Labour leader Ian Ward and other council leaders to help the region's businesses to survive.

The city was in the Tier Two 'high' level of government restrictions ahead of the second lockdown.

But Mayor Street has pledged that his cross-party alliance of leaders will be "lobbying vociferously" for "significant financial support" ahead of any possible future move into Tier Three, the highest level of restrictions.

Coun Ward has also asked businesses to take part in his Economic Recovery Strategy consultation to



■ Coun Ian Ward (left) and West Midlands Mayor Andy Street.

find out how to best assist the local economy recovery following the pandemic.

To help Mayor Street and Coun Ward to deliver on their missions, Westside Business Improvement District (BID) has collected the top demands of what hospitality members need from government, and these include:

● Financial support for late-night hospitality venues with an 80% fur-

lough scheme in place to help them.

● Easily accessible business grants to assist with rents and other costs during any closures.

● Funds for a concerted advertising and marketing campaign across various key points in the city to promote a positive message that highlights when and where venues are open safely.

● The ability for councils to be flexible in adapting and reusing

open spaces, without the usual red-tape and elongated planning timescales.

● Proper notice to be given before moving into any higher tier to enable affected venues to reduce short shelf-life stocks like beer and fresh food, preventing needless wastage.

● Ensuring that the safe operating and opening of theatres continues, within lawful guidelines.

Mike Olley, general manager of Westside BID, said: "We applaud Mayor Street's offer to get what the hospitality sector needs from the government, and we hope he will now act on our prioritised shopping list. We also welcome Coun Ward's Economic Recovery Strategy and know that he will make sure BID members' needs are highlighted in the final version."

He added: "The collective, cross-party influence of these politicians lobbying to national government cannot be ignored, and we implore chancellor Rishi Sunak to listen carefully."

Venues A-Z

The A-Z of BID venues with outside space is: All Bar One, Brindley Place; Bank, Brindley Place; Be At One, Brindley Place; Bistrot Pierre, Gas Street; The Brasshouse, Broad Street; The Canal House, Gas Street Basin; Canalside Bar, Gas Street Basin; Cielo, Brindley Place; Cosy Club, Brindley Place; Coyote Ugly, Broad Street; Craft at ICC; The Figure of Eight, Broad Street; Frankie & Benny's, Broadway Plaza; The Gentleman & Scholar Pub, Broad Street; Hilton Garden Inn, Brindley Place; Malt House, King Edwards Road; Marmalade at The REP, Centenary Square; Mr Mulligans, Broadway Plaza; NUVU, Brindley Place; Park Regis, Five Ways; Piccolino, Brindley Place; Pitcher & Piano, Brindley Place; The Prince of Wales, Cambridge Street; Siamais, Brindley Place; The Soloman Cutler, Broad Street; Tap & Spile, Gas Street; York's Cafe, Brindley Place; and Zizzi, Brindley Place.



■ Some of the venues which appear in the video created by Jas Sansi.

Video a breath of fresh air for safer socialising

Westside BID commissioned a special video in October to show off all its venues with outdoor spaces where customers could safely socialise at that stage.

The initiative came after the government moved Birmingham into Tier Two 'high' COVID-19 restrictions earlier this autumn.

Those rules banned people from mixing with other households in any indoor setting, including hospitality venues such as pubs and restaurants. But the video guided the public to more than two dozen venues with outside spaces where meals and

drinks could still be enjoyed with friends and relatives from other households while Tier Two restrictions were in place, subject to the 'rule of six'.

Westside BID general manager Mike Olley said: "While the second lockdown will temporarily close our venues, this great video shows customers how they can safely socialise with other households once hospitality reopens."

"This was useful earlier in the autumn and shows what a tremendous range of pubs, bars and restaurants we have, and the great variety of outdoor space available."



Gimme Some Lovin'... City star for Spencer

Honour for an adopted son of Brum

By Steve Dyson

Birmingham plans to pay its own special tribute to R&B star Spencer Davis, who sadly died in Los Angeles earlier this autumn at the age of 81.

Spencer studied German at the University of Birmingham and worked as a part-time teacher and musician in the city before achieving chart-topping fame.

He then formed The Spencer Davis Group with Brummie brothers Steve and Mervyn (Muff) Winwood and Pete York, after they met at the now demolished Golden Eagle pub on Hill Street, in Birmingham city centre.

Spencer's group is now set to receive a 'Walk of Stars' award from Westside Business Improvement District (BID).

The band achieved number one hits with Keep On Running and Somebody Help Me in 1966, and would have made it three chart-toppers in a row with Gimme Some Lovin' later the same year but for the Beach Boys' Good Vibrations.

Jasper Carrott, the famous Birmingham comedian who chairs Westside BID's 'Walk of Stars' awards committee, said: "I was deeply saddened to hear about Spencer's death."

"Both he and The Spencer Davis Group were very much a part of the Birmingham music scene, and indeed I recall seeing them at the Civic Hall in Digbeth."

"We had hoped to incorporate Spencer and the group into the



■ Spencer Davis (right) and the Spencer Davis Group read up on the local music scene in 1965 – while sitting in the middle of Birmingham's Smallbrook Queensway! Picture: Jim Simpson.

Westside 'Walk of Stars' on Broad Street, and we were in negotiations with band members for the last year or two. Unfortunately, Spencer had been in ill health during that time making it difficult for him to travel to his adopted Birmingham, and recently COVID-19 has made it impossible. But as soon as pandemic restrictions allow, we're

going to make a special tribute by awarding a star to The Spencer Davis Group, and we hope to get as many band members along as possible to receive it."

Jasper added: "While Spencer himself will be sadly missed, his music will very much play on. My sincere condolences to all his friends, fans and loved ones."

Mike Olley, general manager of Westside BID, said he would be contacting band members to discuss the special star award.

Mr Olley said: "A musician of Spencer's calibre deserves proper recognition in Birmingham, and we are determined that his group will receive their star as soon as circumstances allow."

Westside BID teams up with Dinehub to boost venues

Westside BID has invested in a partnership with Dinehub Birmingham to help support its hospitality venues with more targeted publicity.

Dinehub is a popular local food and drink guide with a detailed reach to interested audiences via its bespoke email contacts list and social media channels.

Luisa Huggins, media manager at Westside BID, said: "We believe in making sure we explore all communications channels for our members, and so we're really pleased to be working with Dinehub."

"Dinehub's focus on hospitality brought more attention to Westside's venues as they reopened in the

summer and early autumn, and will help again after the second lockdown.

"Together with our own website, Westside World newsletter and social media channels, we're determined to help our members welcome customers back."

Anita Champaneri, managing director of Dinehub

Birmingham, said: "We are passionate about championing food and drink in Birmingham, especially those businesses in the independent sector, and are delighted to be working with Westside BID and their members' venues."

● For more details and offers, visit the website birmingham.dinehub.co.uk

Tasty future on menu



■ (Above and inset below) Cielo Italian reopened to diners in October for the first time since the COVID-19 lockdown was declared in March.

Cielo opens doors again

By Steve Dyson



■ Giorgio Poidomani.

It was a warm, calm and friendly atmosphere when one of Birmingham's top Italian restaurants reopened to diners.

Cielo Italian enjoyed a busy night on Wednesday 14 October with lots of regulars and other customers booking tables for the first time since the COVID-19 lockdown in March.

And videographers Jenna Danckert and Holly Hewston from Jolly Media were there to capture the delight on diners' faces as they returned to their favourite restaurant.

Giorgio Poidomani, the gener-



al manager at Cielo, said: "We're thrilled to be back after seven months, and it's lovely to see some of our regular customers enjoying our food again."

"We've carefully put everything in place for all the government's guidelines, including 'track and trace' QR codes, which are very important, and hand-sanitisers at various points to keep everyone safe."

Westside BID general manager Mike Olley said: "Cielo is one of the best restaurants in Birmingham and to have it back open and welcoming its loyal customers is a landmark moment for us here on Westside."

● Like all hospitality venues, Cielo will now close from 5 November as part of the government's second lockdown, hopefully opening again for customers on 2 December.

New-look Del Villaggio is a pizza art

A true taste of Italy has returned to Westside following the completion of a major refurbishment project that has transformed Del Villaggio on Broad Street.

The restaurant, which specialises in pasta dishes and hand-crafted pizzas cooked in their own stone bake oven, reopened in October after an absence of several months.

Among the major improvements is a new bar and dining layout both downstairs and upstairs, with a focus on glass railings inside to complement the glass frontage.

Social distancing guidelines will restrict the seating



■ How Del Villaggio looks on Broad Street, following its complete refurbishment.



downstairs to 46 at Del Villaggio, which has been in Broad Street since 2014, with a similar number accommodated upstairs.

General manager Andrew Shipley explained that Del Villaggio is a family-run restaurant that uses a lot of

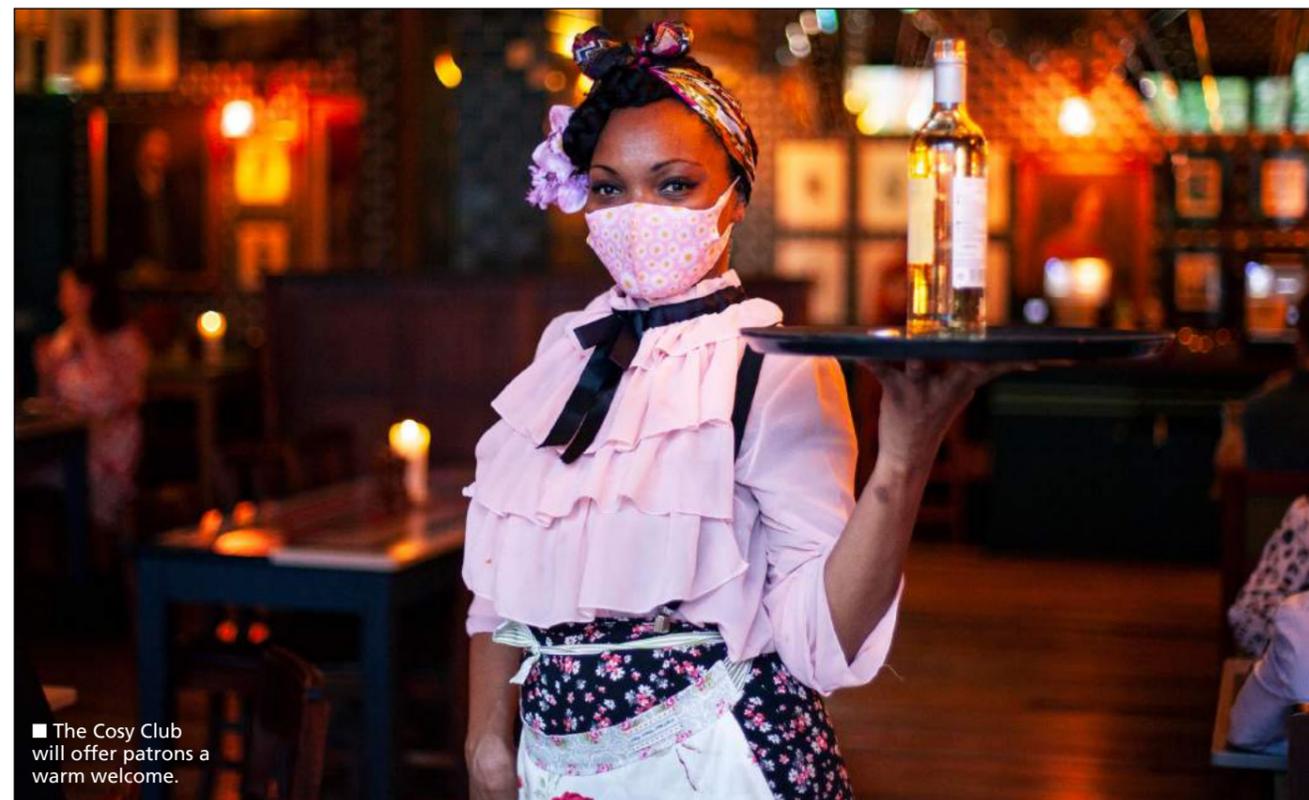
products and wines brought from Italy.

He said: "Our refurbishment was being planned for when the Metro extension was completed, but we brought it forward because of the COVID-19 lockdown."

"It's going to be tough

because of the current situation, but I personally think this is going to be the new norm with table layouts and face masks."

● Del Villaggio closes again from 5 November during the second lockdown, hopefully reopening on 2 December.



■ The Cosy Club will offer patrons a warm welcome.

Cosy Club creates 40 jobs

By Tony Collins

A new restaurant and cocktail bar has defied the coronavirus gloom by opening in the heart of Brindleyplace, creating 40 jobs.

The Cosy Club, situated alongside the canal at The Water's Edge, was originally planned in March which is when the national lockdown began.

The newest addition to the Brindleyplace food and drink scene has occupied the 6,000 sq ft first floor space previously occupied by The Smoke Haus which closed in January 2019.

The new Cosy Club is the second in Birmingham, following on from its sister restaurant in Bennetts Hill which opened in May 2015.

Amber Wood, managing director at Cosy Club, said: "At Cosy Club, we give everyone a rather fabulous experience. There's a real sense of



theatre with a heavy dash of nostalgia – it's like being at a terribly good house party in a mansion owned by a somewhat eccentric relative.

"The opulence of our surroundings and jolly atmosphere are topped off with our excellent food and drinks. The charming personalities of our teams and top-notch service are what makes the experience

tremendously special."

Mike Olley, general manager at Westside BID, said: "It's great news to be welcoming a new member onto Westside, along with their 40 new staff, and this just shows that the sector will regenerate."

Stacey Muir, marketing and events executive at Brindleyplace, said: "We are delighted to welcome

Cosy Club to Brindleyplace and to further expand our great range of bars and restaurants.

"This is great recognition that we remain Birmingham's favourite place to meet friends, socialise and enjoy."

"There is always something new to discover at Brindleyplace and we look forward to experiencing Cosy Club's exciting and unique new venue."

Cosy Club, described as a 'dazzling bar and restaurant chain', is owned by the Bristol-based Loungers pub company.

It will offer comfort food classics throughout the day, extensive brunch, gluten free and vegan menus and a delicious selection of tapas. Drinks vary from fine coffees and smoothies to a range of cocktails.

● The Cosy Club will hopefully be reopening on 2 December after the second lockdown.

Students given warm welcome on Westside

By Tony Collins

Westside venues in Broadway Plaza unveiled a variety of discounts exclusively for thousands of students when they flocked back to universities in Birmingham.

Among the many special deals available was one at the Hollywood Bowl where students enjoyed two games of bowling from £8.55 per person, from 5pm on Sundays until 5pm on Fridays.

A similar discount was available to energetic students at the Rock Up climbing centre, also in Broadway Plaza, where they were able to sign up for the indoor climbing ex-



perience for just £8.50. Of course, all that used-up energy needed replacing, so students were also able to take advantage of a two-for-one offer at Domino's Pizza on Tues-

days. A range of other deals were also available for students, as well as other participants, at venues within Broadway Plaza. They included Nuffield Health

and Fitness, which offered 20 per cent off gym memberships.

Mr Mulligans also had a variety of deals on offer including 'Wicked Wednesdays' with two-for-one spirits, two cocktails for £10, four sourz shots for £5, and five jagerbombs for £12.

Luisa Huggins, communications manager at Westside BID, said: "We realise the Westside district is a popular destination among students, so we were pleased to see that our venues accommodated them with a selection of offers of things to do and places to visit."

● Broadway Plaza venues hope to reopen in December, after the latest lockdown.



■ The socially-distanced spectacle of Birmingham Royal Ballet's Lazuli Sky at The REP.

Coming together – at a distance

The Birmingham Repertory Theatre reopened its doors this autumn to stage a world premiere from the Birmingham Royal Ballet.

Lazuli Sky was presented by Carlos Acosta, director of Birmingham Royal Ballet, who asked choreographer Will Tuckett to help him create a new work inspired by and utilising 'social distancing'.

The one-act ballet ran for five performances at the end of October, each of them selling out within 24 hours of being on

By Steve Dyson

sale. The performance uses architectural forms as part of the costuming that will help 'socially distance' the 12 dancers.

Sean Foley, artistic director at The REP said: "It was a real thrill to be welcoming audiences back to The REP for live performances. A huge thank you goes to all of our audiences who bought tickets, as well as those individuals who have supported our theatre during these challenging times."

● Birmingham Repertory Theatre has been awarded a major grant of £1.38 million from the government's Culture Recovery Fund.

The REP's executive director Rachael Thomas said: "COVID-19 continues to have a devastating effect on our communities, city, and industry.

"We are hugely grateful to The Department for Culture, Media and Sport for the grant announced today for Birmingham Repertory Theatre as part of the Culture Recovery Fund."

Steve hits the road to help youth theatre

One of the leaders at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre stepped out to raise more than £4,000 to help support his creative work with young people.

Steve Ball, associate director at The REP, walked 116 miles from the theatre all the way to Leicester Square in the heart of the London's West End this August. His 'Step for the Rep' mission was completed over seven days and saw more than 120 supporters donating sponsorships totalling £4,145.



■ The REP's Steve Ball strides out.

Steve said: "In my role at The REP I am lucky enough to oversee the theatre's renowned work with children and young people.

"By taking on this challenge, I raised funds which will go towards supporting our wide-reaching programme of important and engaging work with both local and national communities."

The REP's creative learning programme is one of the largest in the UK, engaging with over 70,000 people in the community every year.

Safety is a recipe for success at Craft

By Gary Young

Owners of an acclaimed Birmingham restaurant dubbed 'Brum's safest place to eat' revealed how business was booming with more bookings than ever before the new lockdown.

Craft owners Sam and Emma Morgan say the restaurant managed to flourish earlier in the autumn despite the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic which has wreaked havoc on the British hospitality industry.

One of the reasons for Craft's popularity was its four eye-catching glass dining pods on The Terrace at the International Convention Centre, which offered customers a secure bubble to dine inside.

Sam, who opened the independent restaurant with his wife Emma last summer, said: "We anticipated opening with very little footfall but were doing 600 covers a week – four times more than when we went into the first lockdown."

The couple are determined to put safety first after the new lock-



■ Diners enjoy a glass of wine inside one of the Craft pods.

down, and will maintain a two-metre rule for tables even though official guidelines had reduced it to one metre, and by checking temperatures at the door.

Sam explained: "We'd rather have a restaurant half-full of happy, relaxed people who are confident that we are doing the right thing than rooms packed full of nervous diners."

Westside BID commissioned videographers from Magic Lantern Media to film a night out at Craft in September, with diners enjoying the safe experience.

Diners Lyndsay and Iain Snape,

from Lichfield, visited Craft for the first time after hearing about the restaurant's COVID-safe measures.

Iain had been shielding at home because of health issues and the restaurant visit was the couple's first meal out in Birmingham since the first lockdown was announced.

Lindsay said: "We love going out in Birmingham, but we've been really cautious since lockdown restrictions were eased.

"Going to Craft was like a breath of fresh air. Once we'd had our temperatures taken at the entrance, we felt safe eating outside and the

heaters made it cosy. The pods are also ideal for anyone concerned about mixing too closely with other people, and the widely-spaced tables gave us the confidence to relax. We had a fantastic meal and the attention to detail was superb."

Craft is also able to serve customers at well-spaced tables on its heated outdoor terrace when weather allows, minimising the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

Once the second lockdown is over, the dining pods will offer the perfect environment for people who prefer to isolate still further.

Sam said: "In the dark times we fear for our future along with the rest of the hospitality industry, but we have remained focused on surviving and kept on marketing our restaurant while many other businesses cut back.

"We have to be adaptable and remain positive and I'm confident that coming to Craft will carry no more risk than shopping at Tesco."

He added: "We don't think there's anything quite like us in Birmingham. All of our great food and drink is sourced in Britain and all of the wines we offer are British – I think we are the only restaurant in the UK brave enough to do that."

Craft is based in the ICC unit previously occupied by the Italian restaurant Strada. Its chef is Andrew Sheridan, who rose to fame on the Great British Menu.

● Craft will hopefully reopen in December after the second lockdown.



■ Scenes from the promotional video showcasing the dining experience at Craft restaurant.



■ A CBSO montage celebrates 100 years of the orchestra and the special centenary performance.

CBSO defies COVID-19 for centenary triumph

By Steve Dyson

The largest orchestra assembled in the UK since the COVID-19 lockdown performed a free online concert from a warehouse in Birmingham to mark its centenary.

The City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra's first-ever concert was at 7pm on Sunday 5 September 1920, at the Theatre Royal in New Street, conducted by Appleby Matthews.

Exactly 100 years later, the CBSO 100th Birthday Celebration was streamed online to audiences across the world via YouTube, Facebook and on Classic FM.

The orchestra usually performs at Symphony Hall on Westside, but the special event was performed at a warehouse in Longbridge because it was large enough to house all musicians while adhering to social distancing measures.

Birmingham-born actor Adrian Lester presented the event, and special guests included Sir Simon Rattle, the CBSO's former principal conductor, along with Nottingham-born cellist Sheku Kanneh-Mason and Leicester-born sitar player Roopa Panesar.

The free concert featured music by Elgar that was played in that very first concert in 1920 as well as two pieces by living composers.

The musical treats included Robert Schumann's Genoveva Overture, Edward Elgar's Serenade for Strings, Camille Saint-Saëns's Cello Concerto No.1 in A minor, Hannah Kendall's The Spark Catchers, A. R. Rahman's Slumdog Millionaire and Igor Stravinsky's The Firebird.

Between each piece, online audience watched interviews with all parts of the CBSO family – from players to donors, and from backroom staff to the youth orchestra – with an enormous video wall helping to tell the story of the last 100 years.

Stephen Maddock, chief executive of the CBSO, said: "For 100

years the CBSO has been a source of joy, education and entertainment to audiences across the West Midlands, the UK and internationally.

"We were hugely excited and proud to present this ground-breaking performance to mark our centenary and showcase our vision for the future.

"We hope our audiences enjoyed this much-needed dose of music, joined by our close friends and special guests, as a reminder of why the CBSO is such a remarkable and special orchestra."

● The concert can be still be watched online. Visit cbso.co.uk/event/cbso100 for more details of how to watch it.

Relief as Government stages theatre rescue

The Crescent Theatre has been awarded £215,000 as part of the government's £1.57 billion Culture Recovery Fund.

The lifeline grant will help to save the 30 jobs at the renowned theatre, which is trying to survive by continuing operations despite COVID-19 restrictions.

Andrew Lowrie, chairman of the Crescent Theatre, said: "This is great news for our staff whose jobs will be protected under this scheme and also for the future of the theatre serving the local community with quality theatre at affordable prices.

"The lockdown was so horrible I was almost in tears. One day we

had a vibrant theatre and then, for the next ten weeks, there was only a manager there.

"It was like the Mary Celeste," he added. "But we don't want to be beaten by this. We've got great facilities and our own wardrobe department so we're very self-sufficient and determined to make sure shows are staged right in terms of social distancing."

The Crescent Theatre is one of 1,385 culture and creative organisations across the country which will be receiving urgently needed grants from the Culture Recovery Fund, administered by Arts Council England.



■ Birmingham's Crescent Theatre.

International athlete opens new city gym

By Tony Collins

A former professional athlete with the Nigerian national team is preparing to open his first gym, creating 10 jobs in Birmingham city centre.

Former 100 metres runner Stephen Emelieze is about to open his premises in a former bookmakers' in Islington Row, just off the Five Ways island at the top of Broad Street.

Emelieze, who spent a decade as a professional athlete with the Nigeria national team, said he hoped to open 5Ways Transformation Gym as soon as possible and planned to employ up to 10 people, including six trainers and a masseur.

He said: "I've been working in a commercial gym for quite a while and, because of coming from an athletics background and spending several years as a personal trainer, I now want to create my own training system.

"I want to bring in my own elements because I believe there's an athlete in everyone. I feel I've got this potential and this is the time to

launch this opportunity. That's why I've decided to open a gym now," he added.

Emelieze, who missed out on competing at an Olympics himself due to injuries, began working as a personal trainer after obtaining a degree in sports management.

He is currently doing a Masters in sports coaching at the University of Birmingham, but has temporarily suspended the course to get his new gym off the ground.

Gyms were one of the last businesses to re-open nationally following the easing of the coronavirus lockdown, but Emelieze is not put off by the possibility of a second wave.

He added: "There's been a bit of a delay in opening the gym due to coronavirus, and you do wonder if there's going to be a second lockdown, but I think there's a bigger demand for this type of facility now because of the previous lockdown."

Emelieze coached his younger brother Peter to a place in the Nigeria sprint team at the 2012 London Olympics, which he described as "one of my greatest achievements".



■ Stephen Emelieze (right) and his brother Peter in the gym.

Families rock up for fun

Scores of NHS workers and their families had a great day out 'climbing the walls' on Westside.

The special event at Rock Up, the UK's leading fun family climbing company, was held on Monday 24 August at its various locations, including Broadway Plaza in Birmingham.

After announcing the scheme to thank hard-working NHS staff, all spaces were snapped up at Rock Up's seven locations in just a few hours.

Mark de Quervain, sales and marketing director for Rock Up, said: "The day was a huge success, with everyone reaching 'new heights' and having 'mountains of fun' together! We're so pleased



■ Families of NHS workers enjoyed a day out to remember at Rock Up in Broadway Plaza, Birmingham.

everyone had such a fun time, and it was great to be able to give a huge Rock Up thank you to our wonderful NHS workers and their families. It was the least we could do to say thank you after months

all the of incredible hard and stressful work they've done, often enduring very long hours away from their families and loved ones."

Rock Up is an indoor climbing experience offering fun for

thrill-seekers of all ages, from pre-school to pensioners. Each location, like Broadway Plaza, has a fun climbing arena, and a café serving coffee and food.

● For more details, visit www.rock-up.co.uk



■ Kristof Kintera's amazing installations took over the Ikon and oozed into Oozells Square.

It's the 'End of Fun' at the Ikon

By Steve Dyson

Art lovers have been enjoying an unusual exhibition by Czech artist Kristof Kintera on Westside.

Kintera, acclaimed for his sculptural, energetic and witty works, filled both floors and spilled out into public areas at the Ikon art gallery in Oozells Square.

Aptly called 'THE END OF FUN!', the exhibition was described as "probing the apocalyptic environmental issues we currently face, taking on a new poignancy in today's climate".

The exhibition was supported by the Embassy of the Czech Republic in London, Czech Centre London and the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic.

The Ikon hosted the show after reopening its doors in August following its enforced closure due to COVID-19, and it ran until the gallery was forced to close once more because of the second lockdown.

Jonathan Watkins, director of the Ikon, said: "We were very happy to be back at Ikon, welcoming visitors in the same friendly spirit, but now with the added frisson of



face masks, sanitisers and social distancing."

Looking ahead to when the gallery will hopefully be reopening in December, he added: "The artistic experience we will be offering is as safe as it is exciting.

"We look forward very much to

sharing new adventures in new ways, as it should be with contemporary art."

● Although visitors cannot currently visit the Ikon in person, they can view films, artist interviews and family activities online at <https://www.ikon-gallery.org/>



Fire safety is still a top priority

Businesses in Westside have been urged to make sure that COVID-19 precautions do not increase fire risks at their properties.

The warning was issued by West Midlands Fire Service during the UK's Business Safety Week 2020 in September, following concerns from the National Fire Chiefs Council that organisations' legitimate focus on being 'COVID secure' could compromise fire safety arrangements – putting staff, visitors and premises at risk.

Group Commander Steve Ball, of West Midlands Fire Service's fire safety team, explained that business owners should review their fire risk assessments, taking account of any new measures introduced to limit the spread of coronavirus.

He said: "While all of our efforts are rightly focused on stopping the spread of COVID-19, we also need to do all we can to stop the spread of fire and, should one break out, ensure that people are safe and can escape.

Group Commander Ball urged businesses to ensure that:

- COVID-19 protective screens don't obstruct smoke detection;
- fire doors are kept shut to stop fire spreading, and not propped open to improve air flow;
- they have enough trained staff to support evacuation procedures;
- social distancing arrangements don't impede evacuation plans;
- escape routes are maintained, with extra attention to any one-way systems introduced to counter COVID-19.

Westside BID general manager Mike Olley said: "Fire safety is such a vital concern for any business, so it is especially important that we do not lose sight of that while having to focus on precautions around coronavirus.

"We at the BID fully support the fire service's message for businesses to have an up-to-date fire risk assessment."

● For more advice, visit www.wmfs.net/our-services/fire-safety/, email the fire safety team at firesafety.admin@wmfs.net or call 0121 380 7500.



■ Jas Sansi's weird and wonderful images perfectly complement Mike Olley's blog.

Always look on the bright side of life...

Is it a bird? Is it a plane? No, it's Westside super-blogger Mike Olley, trying to lift members' spirits as we slowly emerge from lockdown. Steve Dyson reports.

"Black Death killed anywhere between 155 million to 200 million of the earth's 500 million population in the 14th century," wrote Mike Olley, Westside BID's general manager, in his regular Olley's Oracle blog.

"Some believed evil spirits carried what was known as the Pestilence, the Great Mortality, and the Plague. Others felt bird-like beak masks stuffed with wildflowers would prevent and protect. The truth was, they really had no idea what was going on and, as a result, folk died in their droves. We know a lot more nowadays, yet still many have and will continue to die from the world's latest coronavirus pandemic, COVID-19. But our chances are far better now."

Calling me to discuss his latest blog, Olley told me that he had commissioned a "magically" produced image from the creative hands of photographer Jas Sansi.

"Just wait until you see it," he said. "You'll be blown away." Indeed I was, as a picture of him wearing an oversized bird-like beak dropped into my emails. But it worked. Instead of just an-

other head and shoulders picture of Olley, here we had an image that would attract internet surfers to our website and social media channels, and one that made sense with his Black Death blog subject.

Another favourite came when Olley's blog began with these words: "When you're chewing on life's gristle, don't grumble, give a whistle."

"It's true," he continued. "There's so much to be down-in-the-mouth over with Birmingham in a Tier Two of lockdown restrictions. You could be getting a little too pessimistic about all this.

"Therefore, let's 'Forget about your sin, (and) give the audience a grin'. Or, in other words, we should think about all the things there are to keep smiling about."

There then followed a long list of reasons to be cheery, from increasing footfall on Westside to

the successful jazz festival, and from the Metro tram's progress to news of more venues reopening.

Olley concluded: "Whatever our woes, there's simply so much good stuff still going on. As that same old song goes: 'Always look on the bright side of life.' Don't you just love Monty Python?"

A quick call to Jas Sansi, and the next blog picture was quickly created, with Olley's mug transposed onto a crucifixion victim in the famous Monty Python film.

Olley's blog has even had him riding the old Bullring Bully statue, surrounded by flying National Lottery balls. This one illustrated all the "bull" we're hearing from statisticians and politicians, leaving much of the country more confused every week.

Not that all of Olley's creations have been as straightforward. Take the one of him wearing an

Australian hat with corks hanging from it... where an earth did that one come from? The answer was a blog about 'home working' during COVID-19 adorned with the headline: "Skippy, Skippy, Skippy the (home-schooled) bush kangaroo..."

Olley had remembered that the Skippy TV series from Australia starred a schoolkid called Sonny, who "lived an adventurous life gallantly assisted by his pet kangaroo" while being home-schooled over the radio in complete isolation.

"In short," Olley wrote, "working (on his lessons) from home, never stopped Sonny (or Skippy) having successful adventures out in the bush." And, Olley's argument followed, home-working therefore shouldn't stop UK businesses from being successful.

Confusing? Maybe, but all worth it for that picture of Olley dressed as an Aussie, and for a headline that had me singing the tune for the rest of the day.





New York East Side? No, Brum Westside!

Leading Birmingham photographer Jas Sansi took this picture of Westside in late October and tweeted it on his social media channels. "I snapped this yesterday," Jas said. "And Broad Street

reminded me a little of a New York avenue."

Have you got a good picture showing an area of Westside in all its glory? Send it to steve.dysonmedia@gmail.com and you could win a prize if it's used.

Do you have a story for Westside World? If you have something to tell us about, or if you would like us to highlight the work of your business in our next edition, please contact luisa.huggins@westsidebid.co.uk