‘A Chink of Light’: Rory Gallagher, Youth Fandom and Musical Refuge in Early 1970s Belfast

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Introduction

> Imagine no concerts. Imagine no transport at night. Imagine reading about brilliant performances by bands just over the water and those bands never coming to Ulster. What do you do?

These are the thoughts of journalist Roy Hollingworth in a 1972 article for *Melody Maker*.[1] For many young music fans in Belfast, Northern Ireland, during the early 1970s, Hollingworth’s provocation was painfully real. Following the outbreak of the 30-year ethnonationalist conflict known as ‘the Troubles’ (1968-1998), the live music scene had all but collapsed, with only a handful of international artists continuing to perform in Northern Ireland. Among them was Irish blues-rock musician Rory Gallagher, whose unwavering commitment to playing Belfast annually offered an invaluable cultural lifeline.[2]

To date, scholarship on popular music in Northern Ireland has typically focused on how the Troubles were articulated, either through lyrics or performances that directly addressed the conflict or promoted cross-community dialogue and resistance.[3] Much research has also focused on two pivotal moments in the region’s musical history: the 1960s beat scene centred around Belfast’s Maritime Club and the punk explosion of the late 1970s.[4] In both cases, music is framed as one of the few shared cultural practices that

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[1] Roy Hollingworth, ‘Music for Belfast’, *Melody Maker* (8 January 1972).

[2] Lauren Alex O’Hagan, ‘“It’s always nice to head for home”: Music-Making, Sense of Place, and Corkonian Identity in the Rory Gallagher *Irish Tour ’74 Documentary*’, *Journal of the Society for Musicology in Ireland,* 17 (2022), 47–77.

[3] See, for example, Bill Rolston, ‘“This is not a rebel song”: The Irish Conflict and Popular Music’, *Race & Class*, 42/3 (2001), 49–67; Stuart Bailie, *Trouble Songs: Music and Conflict in Northern Ireland* (Belfast: Bloomfield Press, 2018); Tim Heron, ‘“Rotting in the Suburbs”: Voicing Working-Class Deprivation in 1970s Northern Ireland Punk Songs’, in Romain Garbaye and Gérôme Guibert (eds), *Musical Scenes and Social Class: Debating Punk and Metal* (Berlin: Springer, 2024), 85–103.

[4] Sean Campbell and Gerry Smyth, ‘From Shellshock Rock to Ceasefire Sounds: Popular Music in Northern Ireland’, in Colin Coulter and Michael Murray (eds), *Northern Ireland After the Troubles* (Manchester:

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brought together Protestant and Catholic youth. However, a surprising gap exists in the historiography regarding the early 1970s, with Gallagher's consistent presence in the North often overlooked. Furthermore, as Ciarán Ryan[5] notes, Irish music scholarship tends to focus on music producers rather than participants, leaving fan experiences and DIY practices largely unexamined. This omission is especially significant in the context of the Troubles, given that mainstream discourses about Northern Irish youth often reproduce the trope of the 'troubled teen'—either as victim or threat—thereby flattening the rich diversity of youthful experiences into narratives of trauma or delinquency.[6]

This article addresses these gaps through a twofold aim. First, it challenges the dominant perception that punk was the chief musical space to foster cross-community interaction during the Troubles by using press coverage, fan testimony, and archival materials to foreground Rory Gallagher's role in sustaining cultural continuity in Belfast's early 1970s music scene. Second, it examines how Gallagher's music and visits were experienced, remembered, and materially preserved by one young Belfast fan, Carol Clerk, through scrapbooking, exploring how this creative practice transcended fandom to become a vital form of cultural refuge and resistance, offering stability amid intense unrest. In doing so—and in line with Lucy Newby—this article seeks to recover the heterogeneity and complexity of young people's lives during this period, showing how music offered surprising and agentic ways to unsettle, resist, and reimagine systems of control and navigate the social, political, and emotional pressures surrounding them.[7]

To frame the analysis, I follow Timothy Heron's study of punk in Belfast, which draws on Michel de Certeau's concept of 'tactics'—the subtle, everyday practices through which individuals creatively navigate, resist, or adapt to dominant power

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Manchester University Press, 2008), 232–52; Gerald Dawe, *In Another World: Van Morrison & Belfast* (Newbridge: Marrion Press, 2017); Noel McLaughlin and Joanna Braniff, *How Belfast Got the Blues: A Cultural History of Popular Music in the 1960s* (London: Intellect, 2020); Martin McLoone, 'Punk Music in Northern Ireland: The Political Power of 'What Might Have Been', *Irish Studies Review*, 12/1 (2004): 29–38; Timothy Heron, 'Alternative Ulster: Punk and the Construction of Everyday Life in 1970s Northern Ireland', *Popular Culture Today*, 19 (2015): 1–17; Feargus Roulston, *Belfast Punk and the Troubles: An Oral History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2024).

[5] Ciarán Ryan, 'A Destabilising Pleasure: Representations of Alternative Music in Irish Fanzines', *Ethnomusicology Ireland*, 5 (2017), 101–16.

[6] Lucy Newby, 'Troubled Generations? (De)Constructing Narratives of Youth Experience in the Northern Ireland Conflict', *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, 14/1 (2021): 6–24.

[7] Newby, 'Troubled Generations?'; Gerry Smyth, *Noisy Island: A Short History of Irish Popular Music* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2005).

structures.[8] Tactics operate not by confronting power head-on, but by working within and around imposed constraints, making space through acts of agency and creativity. I also take up Jennifer Curtis’s call to explore community in Belfast through Raymond Williams’ ‘structures of feeling’—the lived, affective experiences that emerge in particular historical moments before they are fully articulated in dominant cultural forms.[9] In this context, both Gallagher’s decision to continue performing in Belfast and Clerk’s act of scrapbooking can be understood as tactical responses to the restrictive and violent realities of the Troubles. Viewed through a material-historical lens, these individual and collective engagements with music offer valuable insights into how this cultural practice operated as a neutral or shared space—one that enabled young people to resist sectarian binaries, reconfigure their identities, and dare to imagine an alternative future.[10]

This article, thus, uncovers the profound social and political significance embedded within musical experience and memory, emphasising its indispensable role in both historical understanding and ongoing peacebuilding efforts. With increasing recognition of the role music can play in reconciliation and emotional recovery, particularly within the victim-survivor sector, capturing and preserving these music memories becomes crucial, both in safeguarding Northern Ireland’s cultural heritage and supporting processes of healing.[11]

Popular Music and Cultural Space in Pre-Troubles Belfast

In the decades preceding the Troubles, Belfast fostered a vibrant popular music scene that provided a dynamic space for youth culture and creative expression.[12] The arrival of US forces stationed in the city during World War Two contributed to the development of a flourishing jazz tradition in the 1950s and early 1960s.[13] This momentum encouraged a number of local musicians to abandon the relative safety and commercial

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[8] Heron, ‘Alternative Ulster’; Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

[9] Jennifer Curtis, ‘Community and the Re-Making of 1970s Belfast’, *Ethnos*, 73/3 (2009), 399–426; Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

[10] Eileen Hogan, ‘Music in Ireland: Youth Cultures and Youth Identity’, in Mark Fitzgerald and John O’Flynn (eds), *Music and Identity in Ireland and Beyond* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 259–71.

[11] See, for example, Katy Radford, ‘From Major to Minor – The Therapeutic Role of Music in Northern Ireland’s Victim/Survivor Sector’, *Shared Space*, 3 (2006), 19–31; Amy Green, ‘Art and Music Therapy for Trauma Survivors’, *Canadian Art Therapy Association Journal*, 24/2 (2011):14–19.

[12] Heron, ‘Alternative Ulster’.

[13] Noel McLaughlin and Joanna Braniff, ‘How Belfast Got the Blues: Towards an Alternative History’, *Popular Music History*, 10/3 (2017), 207–40.

appeal of showbands—popular dance bands that performed cover versions of well-known hits in dancehalls across Ireland—and form R&B and beat groups.[14]

By the 1960s, Belfast had earned the title of Ireland's 'rock capital', developing a distinctive musical identity and an energetic beat movement centred on the city's Maritime Hotel.[15] The Maritime is most famously associated with Van Morrison and his band Them, but it also provided a stage for other significant acts, including the Wheels, the Aztecs, and the Alleycatz.[16] Indeed, as Noel McLaughlin and Joanna Braniff emphasise, the narrative of 'how Belfast got the blues' has too often been reduced to Morrison, while earlier artists such as Ottilie Patterson remain under-recognised in accounts of the period. [17]

Belfast's broader cultural vitality during this era was further marked by the launch of the Belfast Festival at Queen's University in 1962—an ambitious student-led initiative that would soon attract international acts such as Jimi Hendrix, Joan Baez, and Ravi Shankar, alongside theatre productions, film screenings, and literary readings by both established and emerging writers.[18] The city also hosted landmark performances by the Rolling Stones at the Ulster Hall in 1964 and Bob Dylan at the ABC Cinema in 1966.

According to Sean Campbell and Gerry Smyth, the music of the late 1960s had a profound impact on popular consciousness in Northern Ireland, promoting values of individuality, love, and respect—values that, they argue, already contained the seeds of post-conflict reconciliation.[19] This view is echoed by May McCann, whose study of the 1960s folk revival highlights how this period fostered an 'oasis of non-sectarian music-making' in Belfast, providing shared cultural spaces that facilitated intercommunal interaction and allowed young people to engage beyond the constraints of religious or political identity.[20]

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[14] Rebecca S. Miller, *Are You Dancing? Showbands, Popular Music, and Memory in Modern Ireland* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2025).

[15] Noel McLaughlin and Martin McLoone, *Rock and Popular Music in Ireland: Before and After U2* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2012), 49.

[16] Heron, 'Alternative Ulster'.

[17] Noel McLaughlin and Joanna Braniff, 'Irish Lady Sings the Blues: History, Identity and Ottilie Patterson', in Áine Mangaoang, John O'Flynn, and Lonán Ó Briain (eds), *Made in Ireland: Studies in Popular Music* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 97–109. See also Sean Lorre, '"Mama, he treats your daughter mean": Reassessing the Narrative of British R&B with Ottilie Patterson', *Popular Music*, 39/3-4 (2020), 482–503.

[18] Heron, 'Alternative Ulster'.

[19] Campbell and Smyth, 'From Shellshock Rock to Ceasefire Sounds'.

[20] May McCann, 'Music and Politics in Ireland: The Specificity of the Folk Revival in Belfast', *British Journal of Ethnomusicology*, 4/1 (1995), 51–75.

Yet, this cultural optimism existed alongside growing social and political tensions, which became increasingly visible from 1968 onwards with the outbreak of the Troubles. While sectarian segregation had long existed—shaped by employment patterns, lingering rural connections, and recurring cycles of violence—the Troubles intensified and reshaped these divisions through displacement, forced movement, and urban redevelopment.[21] As acts of terror became a grim daily reality, fostering a pervasive atmosphere of fear and control, Belfast's urban landscape was dramatically transformed: the city's commercial centre became encircled by a 'Ring of Steel', with access tightly controlled through curfews and bag searches.[22] In this climate, dogma and ideology supplanted the expressive potential of popular culture, and music's role as a form of personal or collective engagement was profoundly compromised.[23] As Curtis argues, the concept of 'community' emerged as both a protective shield and an exclusionary force, acting as shorthand for competing visions of statehood, identity, and legitimacy, including paramilitary governance.[24]

As Heron notes, public cultural life in the city 'came to a standstill almost overnight', with young people bearing the brunt of this upheaval.[25] International artists were reluctant to perform in Belfast, and although traditional Irish and country music remained active and showbands continued to tour across Ireland, these scenes primarily appealed to older audiences. Consequently, urban nightlife retreated into safer, more sanitised spaces such as hotel cabarets and rural ballrooms.[26] Young people yearning for the excitement of cutting-edge pop and rock, thus, became 'starved of first-class entertainment'.[27] Nevertheless, Campbell and Smyth argue that the historical legacy of the showband circuit should not be dismissed altogether as it demonstrates music's ability to transcend cultural borders, resist territorial norms, and anticipate a more open and inclusive society.[28]

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[21] David McKitterick and David McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles: A History of the Northern Ireland Conflict* (London: Penguin, 2000).

[22] Sunjay Mathuria, 'Walking, Storytelling and Melancholy Survivals: Memorialization of the 'Troubles' in Belfast City Centre', *Cultural Geographies*, 31/2 (2023), https://doi.org/10.1177/14744740231203710

[23] Campbell and Smyth, 'From Shellshock Rock to Ceasefire Sounds'.

[24] Curtis, 'Community and the Re-Making of 1970s Belfast'.

[25] Heron, 'Alternative Ulster', 4; Newby, 'Troubled Generations?'.

[26] Miller, *Are You Dancing?*

[27] Sean O'Neill and Guy Trelford, *It Makes You Want to Spit! An Alternative Ulster 1977-1982* (Dublin: Reekus, 2003), iii.

[28] Campbell and Smyth, 'From Shellshock Rock to Ceasefire Sounds'.

Youth Tactics and Alternative Musical Identities in Sectarian Belfast

From the onset of the Troubles, young people in Belfast found themselves increasingly problematised in public discourse. Their visibility in public spaces became fraught, as they were often seen as either vulnerable victims of political violence or as impressionable targets for paramilitary recruitment.[29] Against this backdrop of instability and surveillance, they developed their own ways to navigate everyday life, carving out spaces for cultural expression. As Newby observes, some teenagers reimagined the conflicted urban landscape as a type of playground, where moments of joy, transgression, and humour could erupt despite the omnipresent danger.[30] Others coped by treating the constant threat of violence more as a 'common nuisance'—an unfortunate but normalised disruption to daily life.[31] While some formal peacebuilding initiatives were in place, such as those led by the Corrymeela Community (a Christian organisation founded in 1965 to promote dialogue and mutual understanding across political and religious divides through its residential centre and programmes), Stewart argues that more effective 'unofficial reconciliations' took shape through music and sport.[32] Even in the absence of a robust live music scene, these spontaneous and organic approaches to peacebuilding enabled youth to forge connections across sectarian divides and construct alternative identities beyond political and religious binaries.

These dynamics can be productively understood through de Certeau's distinction between 'strategies' and 'tactics'.[33] Strategies, in his terms, belong to institutional powers (e.g. governments, city planners, official organisations) who seek to order and regulate public space. In Belfast, strategic interventions included curfews, surveillance, and the securitisation of everyday movement. Tactics, by contrast, are the improvised and opportunistic practices of those without power. They operate within—rather than against—strategic frameworks, seizing moments and spaces in ways that are often fleeting and unsanctioned. In the context of the Troubles, cross-boundary travel and creative reappropriations of urban space can be read as tactical interventions that quietly undermined spatial segregation and cultural control from within. These

[29] Newby, 'Troubled Generations?'.

[30] Newby, 'Troubled Generations?'. For similar findings with the Blitz, see Gabriel Moshenska, 'Children in Ruins: Bombsites as Playgrounds in Second World War Britain', in Bjørnar Olsen and Þóra Pétursdóttir (eds), *Ruin Memories: Materialities, Aesthetics and the Archaeology of the Recent Past* (London: Routledge, 2014), 230–250.

[31] Newby, 'Troubled Generations?', 17.

[32] Francis Stewart, '"Alternative Ulster": Punk Rock as a Means of Overcoming the Religious Divide in Northern Ireland', in John Wolffe (ed), *Irish Religious Conflict in Comparative Perspective: Catholics, Protestants and Muslims* (Berlin: Springer, 2014), 76–90.

[33] De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 29-30.

everyday tactics also resonate with Williams' concept of 'structures of feeling'—the shared, affective experience of a particular historical moment, which may not yet be codified but is widely sensed.[34] In early 1970s Belfast, this structure was shaped by fear, fatigue, and fragmentation, but also by imagination, creativity, and a desire for connection. For many young people, music became a medium through which these latent sensibilities could be expressed and shared.

In the context of de Certeau's tactics, the arrival of punk in Northern Ireland in 1977—galvanised by British DJ John Peel's late-night show on BBC Radio One—is often cited by scholars as a pivotal moment of youth-led cultural resistance.[35] This movement saw the emergence of local bands like Rudi, The Undertones, Stiff Little Fingers, and The Outcasts, each cultivating a more melodic, pop-inflected sound that distinguished them from the rawer, more aggressive style of English punk. Young people began to cluster around venues such as The Pound and The Harp and Terri Hooley's Good Vibrations record shop, which served as heterotopias—'alternative cultural spaces' operating outside the grip of mainstream politics and sectarian binaries.[36] Punk created conditions for a range of tactics. For example, young people would cross territorial boundaries for band practice, house parties, or gigs, physically disrupting the spatial segregation of Belfast with their own presence – just as had happened before the outbreak of the Troubles.[37] Other improvisational tactics included booking hotel function rooms for gigs, using school photocopiers to produce fanzines, and converting wartime shelters into rehearsal spaces.[38] Through this musical (re)coding of place and identity, young people were prompted to develop new ways of identifying with Belfast.[39]

As Heron notes, it was punk that enabled 'amicable cross-community interaction at a time of intense sectarian tensions and allowed young people to imagine and sing about an "Alternative Ulster"'.[40] It provided an alternative to the hostility, violence, and

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[34] Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 129.

[35] Heron, 'Alternative Ulster'; Roulston, *Belfast Punk and the Troubles*.

[36] McLoone, 'Punk Music in Northern Ireland'.

[37] Andrea García González, 'Out of the Box: Punk and the Concept of 'Community' in Ireland', *Liverpool Postgraduate Journal of Irish Studies*, 1/1 (2016), 39–52; Fearghus Roulston, 'Everyday Experiences of the City in Memories of the Belfast Punk Scene', *Oral History*, 51/1 (2023), 48–58.

[38] Heron, 'Alternative Ulster'.

[39] Rachel Smith and Janet Banfield, 'Grab It and Change It, It's Yours: Affect, Attitude and Politics in 1970s Northern Irish Punk Music', *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 41/5 (2023), https://doi.org/10.1177/23996544231165460

[40] Heron, 'Alternative Ulster'.

division of everyday life, opening what Martin McLoone calls a 'third space', which allowed young people to construct lives that challenged and sometimes subverted the dominant cultural codes of the Troubles.[41] The power of this defiance is captured poignantly in the 2012 film *Good Vibrations*, where a van carrying two Belfast bands made up of Protestants and Catholics is stopped by an army patrol, prompting the soldier's wry remark: 'You ever think of setting up a political party?'[42] Heron has argued that outside of punk, only boxing, greyhound racing, and the Belfast gay scene offered similarly cross-community spaces during this period.[43]

However, it is important to recognise that the punk scene was not without its tensions. As Jim Donaghey and Fearghus Roulston show, the movement did not fully transcend social divisions.[44] Their studies complicate the romanticised image of punk as wholly anti-sectarian, noting how class hierarchies persisted and that it was not always a welcoming space for women. This mirrors patterns observed in other punk scenes internationally, where women often faced exclusion or marginalisation.[45] In Northern Ireland, punk certainly broke down some of the Protestant–Catholic dichotomy, but its unifying effects were often confined to particular sites and scenes. Rather than overcoming sectarianism, the movement facilitated 'acts of camouflage, concealment and avoidance', where participants carefully navigated what to say, what to ask, and how to perform their identities.[46]

Although punk deserves its place in this story of cross-community musical resistance, its mythologisation should not eclipse other manifestations of intergroup solidarity through music. A small body of scholarship has explored the 1980s, for example, highlighting the continuation of this cross-community ethos. Campbell examines the period between the 1981 IRA Hunger Strikes and the British Government's

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[41] McLoone, 'Punk Music in Northern Ireland'.

[42] Lisa Barros D'Sa and Glenn Leyburn (directors), *Good Vibrations* (London: Universal Pictures UK, 2012), at 00:43:44.

[43] Heron, 'Alternative Ulster', 8.

[44] Jim Donaghey, 'Punk in Belfast, Northern Ireland: Critical Perspectives on the Troubles and Post-conflict "Peace"', in George McKay and Gina Arnold (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Punk Rock* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 332–56; Roulston, *Belfast Punk and the Troubles*.

[45] See, for example, Lauraine Leblanc, *Pretty in Punk: Girl's Gender Resistance in a Boy's Subculture* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999); Lucy O'Brien, 'The Woman Punk Made Me', in Roger Sabin (ed.), *Punk Rock: So What?* (London: Routledge, 2002); Jennah Rouse, '"Punks Are Not Girls": Exploring Discrimination and Empowerment Through the Experiences of Punk and Alt-Rock Musicians in Leeds', *Punk & Post-Punk*, 8/1 (2019), 73–88.

[46] Roulston, *Belfast Punk and the Troubles*, 150.

1988 'broadcasting ban', focusing on bands like Easterhouse and That Petrol Emotion,[47] while Michael Walsh's study of Mama's Boys shows how their concerts in Northern Ireland brought together fans from both sides of the sectarian divide during the decade.[48] Even less studied is the period between the collapse of the beat scene in the late 1960s and punk's emergence in 1977—widely regarded as the bloodiest years of the Troubles—when only two major rock acts consistently included Northern Ireland on their annual tours: Horslips and Rory Gallagher.

In his study of Horslips (1970-2012), John O'Flynn argues that the band understood the political importance of local gigs in sustaining Irish audiences.[49] Horslips's performances in Belfast created fleeting non-sectarian spaces that elided deeper societal divisions and allowed youth from both communities to share a common passion. The same can be said of Rory Gallagher. His repeated appearances at the Ulster Hall throughout the darkest years of the Troubles merit attention as small-scale enactments of cultural resistance. Reclaiming this narrative challenges the myth that punk alone forged alternative cultural spaces around music. Instead, it reminds us that punk was part of a longer, ongoing process of youth tactics and musical solidarities already in motion.

Music Across the Divide: Rory Gallagher and Belfast

Rory Gallagher grew up with deep ties to both sides of the Irish border. His father, Daniel, hailed from County Derry in Northern Ireland, where, particularly in the city, a Catholic majority lived under unionist political control. His mother, Monica, came from County Cork, one of Ireland's southernmost regions and a stronghold of Irish republicanism.[50] Gallagher himself was born in Ballyshannon, County Donegal in 1948 and spent his early childhood in Derry, before moving to Cork with his mother and younger brother Dónal in 1956, following his parents' separation.[51] Thus, from a young age, he was acutely aware of the competing viewpoints that shaped the cultural, religious, and political divisions between north and south.

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[47] Sean Campbell, '"Agitate, educate, organise": Partisanship, Popular Music and the Northern Ireland Conflict', *Popular Music*, 39/2 (2020), 233–56.

[48] Michael J.K. Walsh, 'Mama's Boys, Celtus, and the Troubles in Northern Ireland', *Rock Music Studies*, 2/1 (2015), 46–60.

[49] John O'Flynn, 'From Celtic Rock Heyday to "Extended Family": Changing Legacies and Identities for Horslips and Their Fans', *Rock Music Studies*, 12/1-2 (2025), 1–17, (4).

[50] Julian Vignoles, *Rory Gallagher: The Man Behind the Guitar* (London: Collins, 2018), 5.

[51] Lauren Alex O'Hagan, '"Rory played the greens, not the blues": Expressions of Irishness on the Rory Gallagher YouTube Channel', *Irish Studies Review*, 29/3 (2021), 350.

Gallagher's early exposure to blues, folk and rock 'n' roll came through listening to Radio Luxembourg, the BBC, and the American Forces Network.[52] By age nine, he had begun learning guitar and playing at small functions around Cork. At 15, he turned professional by joining the Fontana Showband, later renamed the Impact,[53] performing across Ireland, as well as in Great Britain and an American Air Force base in Spain.[54] This showband experience provided valuable training that prepared Gallagher to form his own band, Taste, in 1966, alongside Protestant bandmates Norman Damery and Eric Kitteringham, also from Cork.[55] As a devout Catholic, Gallagher was already breaking new ground by playing in this cross-community band—a trend he would continue throughout his career.

Aware of Belfast's vibrant music scene and thriving R&B clubs, Taste decided to relocate there in 1967, promptly securing a residency at the Maritime Club. According to Dónal Gallagher, Rory's brother and manager, '[Rory Gallagher] was looking for a place where he felt he was at one with the music and Belfast offered that'.[56] Belfast audiences quickly connected with Taste's raw energy and experimental blues, earning Gallagher the status of 'local treasure'.[57] When Damery and Kitteringham were replaced by popular local musicians Richard McCracken and John Wilson, Gallagher's place as Belfast's 'adopted son' was secured.[58]

Taste's concerts at the Maritime Club served as a liminal space where sectarian divisions were temporarily altered, allowing youths from both communities to come together around a shared love of music. This liminality echoes Micera Eliade's concept of the 'threshold'—a doorway where the ordinary (profane) world meets the extraordinary (sacred).[59] This is exemplified by an incident when Gallagher stepped outside the club one night after his set and was approached by a group of youths asking

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[52] 'Rory Gallagher interview, 1991', futsal1958 (pseud.), uploaded 22 May 2023. Interview with Gallagher for *Young Guitar* magazine (Tokyo) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fNpaun5s1CE

[53] Oliver Tobin, *A Star Was Born in My Brother's Band* (Moneymore: Choice Publishing, 2009).

[54] By summer 1966, the Impact had dissolved. Gallagher and two former members performed at the Big Apple club in Hamburg as part of a three-piece band billed as The Fenderman.

[55] Mark McAvoy, *Cork Rock: From Rory Gallagher to the Sultans of Ping* (Cork: South Bank Press, 2016).

[56] 'Rory Gallagher Statue Granted Planning Permission in Belfast', *Hot Press* (19 October 2016), https://www.hotpress.com/music/rory-gallagher-statue-granted-planning-permission-in-belfast-19023018

[57] Lauren Alex O'Hagan, '"It's always nice to head for home": Music-Making, Sense of Place, and Corkonian Identity in the Rory Gallagher Irish Tour '74 Documentary', *Journal of the Society for Musicology in Ireland*, 17 (2022), 51.

[58] O'Hagan, 'It's always nice', 71.

[59] Micera Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harvest, 1957).

for a cigarette. Upon replying that he did not smoke, his southern accent marked him as an 'outsider' and he was violently attacked. Terrified, he ran back into the club, where regulars—recognising what had happened—stepped outside to confront and drive off the attackers, declaring that although Gallagher was a Southern Catholic, he was considered one of their own.[60] Similar stories collected in interviews by Roulston in his study of punk in Belfast—where concertgoers left the safety of the venue only to face abuse or violence—reveal the vulnerability that coexisted with the sense of freedom and possibility music generated within the cityscape.[61]

As Taste grew more successful, they relocated to London in 1968, but Gallagher remained resolute in his commitment to return to Belfast and perform, which he regarded as his 'second home' and a city 'dear to [his] heart'.[62] Following the band's break-up in 1970 and Gallagher's emergence as a solo artist, he formed a new band that again transcended the political tensions of the time, recruiting Belfast musicians Gerry McAvoy and Wilgar Campbell. He played twice at the city's Ulster Hall in 1971 (June and December)—the same year the British Army launched Operation Demetrius, which involved the mass arrest and internment of suspected members of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA). He returned the following year for two more concerts (January and December) during one of the most violent periods of the conflict, marked by the Bloody Sunday massacre and the imposition of direct rule from London following the suspension of Stormont. This pattern of regular performances continued throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s.[63] Gallagher's final gig in Belfast took place in 1988, after which ill health prevented him from returning.[64]

Gallagher's decision to perform in Belfast was met with a mix of bemusement and respect by the British music press. He repeatedly played down the significance of his act, arguing that he did not 'see any reason for not playing Belfast'.[65] 'Gigs are A, B, and C on a sheet, Belfast may be a B, I saw no reason to think it any different than from A or C', he explained in a 1972 interview with *Melody Maker*.[66] In his pragmatic view, apart from 'the odd explosion in the night', performing in Belfast was no different from

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[60] Garth Cartwright, 'The Rise and Acrimonious Fall of Rory Gallagher's Taste…', *Classic Rock* (28 November 2019), https://www.loudersound.com/features/rory-gallagher-taste-sensation-1

[61] Roulston, 'Everyday Experiences of the City in Memories of the Belfast Punk Scene'.

[62] Vignoles, *Rory Gallagher*, 62; Hervé Muller, 'An Irishman in Paris!' *Rock & Folk* (1974), https://www.roryon.com/paris178.html

[63] For a full timeline of Gallagher's concerts, see https://www.roryon.com/time.html

[64] Lauren Alex O'Hagan and Rayne Morales, *Rory Gallagher: The Later Years* (London: WP Wymer, 2024).

[65] Hollingworth, 'Music for Belfast'.

[66] Hollingworth, 'Music for Belfast'.

anywhere else.[67] This acceptance of violence as an everyday reality was not nonchalance on Gallagher's part; it was a coping mechanism for his 'strong emotional feelings' about Ireland and a way to do what he described as 'help[ing] the peaceful element in the Irish state'.[68] Newby found similar sentiments in her study of youth experiences during the Troubles, where interviewees explained how they 'just got on with everyday life no matter'.[69] In this way, bombs were regarded as little more than an inconvenience to daily routines.

Nonetheless, Gallagher was keen to stress that his performances were an 'anti-political move' rather than a political statement.[70] Although privately supportive of a united Ireland, Gallagher tactfully avoided airing these views publicly, consistently adopting a diplomatic stance and brushing off questions with remarks such as, 'I don't think making extreme comments about the situation will help'.[71] Equally, when asked about writing politically motivated songs, he made clear that he '[doesn't] think that would be good for anybody'.[72] While Hermann Haring claims this caution was to avoid alienating fans and protect commercial viability, McLaughlin and Braniff rightly point out that it was also a necessary measure given the political and physical dangers of taking a public stand while continuing to perform in Belfast.[73] Gallagher himself acknowledged that 'it is too dangerous to align politically with one side or the other'.[74]

However, even without making public statements, Gallagher—like many other Irish musicians—was frequently the target of unfounded rumours simply because of his nationality, including claims that he supported the IRA and was a pallbearer at Bobby Sands's funeral in 1981.[75] Resonating with Newby's analysis of oral history interviews with Belfast youth from the 1970s and 1980s, Gallagher often relied on humour to diffuse

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[67] Don Waller, 'Ireland's Powerhouse Blues Man', *Happytimes* (1 December 1976).

[68] 'Rory Gallagher Ruisrock Festival 1975', Frankenhooker (pseud.), uploaded 18 July 1911. Interview with Gallagher at Ruisrock https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5L_OkRfHep4&t=4s; Waller, 'Ireland's Powerhouse Blues Man'.

[69] Newby, 'Troubled Generations?'

[70] Waller, 'Ireland's Powerhouse Blues Man'.

[71] Colin Irwin, 'An Independent Man', *Melody Maker* (18 November 1978).

[72] 'Rory Gallagher Ruisrock Festival 1975'.

[73] Hermann Haring, 'Rory Gallagher: Our Fellow Worker from Cork', *Sounds* (June 1975), https://www.roryon.com/fellow184.html; McLaughlin and Braniff, *How Belfast Got the Blues*.

[74] Raj Babadur, 'Gallagher Uses "Natural Approach"', *Northeastern Ohio SCENE* (3 December 1975).

[75] Ivan Little, 'Rory Gallagher was forced to deny he was pallbearer at Bobby Sands' funeral', *Belfast Telegraph* (8 October 2020), https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/rory-gallagher-was-forced-to-deny-he-was-pallbearer-at-bobby-sands-funeral-39599191.html. Accessed 15 December 2022.

these tensions: for example, when asked during a 1972 radio interview in Cleveland 'what's a lad from Ireland doing over here?' he joked, 'I'm over here to collect bombs for the cause'.[76] As I note elsewhere, by performing this expected stereotype, Gallagher offered an 'ironic compromise' to the dominant view of the Irish at the time, exposing the superficiality of such rigid 'codes' of Irishness.[77] Yet beneath this humour lay legitimate concerns: Gallagher had schoolfriends from Derry arrested during Operation Demetrius, was subject to a xenophobic incident at a casino when on tour in Australia, and, in an interview following the Harrods bombing, expressed fears that Irish people in Britain might be issued with ID cards.[78]

While many media accounts of the Troubles were censored, banned, postponed, or cut, music magazines—as Campbell notes—served as a crucial space to narrate and frame the conflict through a different lens.[79] These reports, nevertheless, often employed dramatic spatial imagery, using the cityscape as a stark backdrop to the conflict. *NME*'s account of Hawkwind's 1973 concert at Queen's University, for example, informed readers matter-of-factly that 'it was obvious the whole city was a war zone'.[80] Similarly, *Sounds* and *Melody Maker*'s coverage of The Clash's 1977 visit to Belfast showed the band in close proximity to armed British soldiers and Royal Ulster Constabulary officers, armoured vehicles, steel barricades, and barbed wire fences.[81] Against this charged media environment, Gallagher's repeated choice to perform in Belfast appeared particularly bold and unconventional.

The British music press drew intense attention to Gallagher's Ulster Hall performance on 1 January 1972, recognising its powerful symbolic resonance amid the escalating tensions in Northern Ireland. Journalist Roy Hollingworth recalls the shock of receiving the invitation to report on the gig and how he and his photographer Barry Wenzell 'prepared ourselves for war […] both scared as shit'.[82] Their apprehension and sense of danger stood in stark contrast to Gallagher's calm demeanour, which reflected

[76] Newby, 'Troubled Generations?'; Rory Gallagher, *Cleveland Calling, Part 1* (Chess Records, 2020), vinyl record.

[77] Lauren Alex O'Hagan, '"Rory Gallagher's Leprechaun Boogie": Irish Stereotyping in the International Music Press', *RISE*, 5/2 (2023), 38–72.

[78] See O'Hagan, '"Rory Gallagher's Leprechaun Boogie"'.

[79] Sean Campbell, 'NME's "Irish Troubles": Political Conflict, Media Crisis and the British Music Press', *Études irlandaises*, 46/1 (2021), 11–54.

[80] James Johnson, 'The Sonic Warlords in Belfast', *New Musical Express* (24 March 1973).

[81] See Giovanni Dadomo and Caroline Coon, 'Clash in the City of the Dead', *Sounds* (29 October 1977); Ian Birch, 'Clash Lose Control…', *Melody Maker* (29 October 1977).

[82] Roy Hollingworth, 'Gunpowder, Guinness, and Guitars', *Hit Parader* (March 1975), https://www.roryon.com/gun.html.

a pragmatic resilience forged through a lived familiarity with the conflict. Hollingworth vividly describes the journey from London to Belfast on New Year's Eve: after the army commandeered Belfast Airport, he and Wenzell were obliged to fly to Dublin, where they hitched a ride across the border with a man who made a detour at a checkpoint to drop a mysterious bag at a house.[83] Such tension is carried through into Hollingworth's evocative snapshot of the city's physical and psychological landscape upon arrival:

> Every now and then, along a line of houses was a plot of bare, scorched earth. It's where the pubs used to be, they blew them up. These gaps in the lines of houses like missing teeth in an old man's mouth. Cobblestone streets, troops with fixed bayonets walking in twos. Night falling, few lights to be seen. Poor sods who live here.[84]

Such anecdotes serve to dramatize the perils of the trip and to amplify the significance of Gallagher's decision to perform in Belfast, casting him as an heroic figure for willingly entering what was widely perceived—particularly in British media—as a risky and abnormal space.

Hollingworth met Gallagher at his guest house on Cromwell Road and went together to a New Year's Eve ball at Queen's University, where Gallagher agreed to give an impromptu performance. While backstage, there was 'a sickening explosion that shook the windows'—one of twelve bombs detonated by the IRA in an abandoned cinema to mark midnight.[85] According to Hollingworth, Gallagher—unfazed—continued tuning his guitar and grinned. One local girl joked that she had two brothers, one in the IRA, the other a doctor: 'One blows them up, the other patches them up!' The following afternoon, Gallagher and his band performed at the Ulster Hall. A matinee slot was scheduled in an attempt to reduce the risk of violence, and an informal assurance was received from the IRA that no harm would come to those attending. Security was tight: doors were locked, and audience members were searched on entry. Hollingworth reports that backstage, they hear a distant bomb which 'tightens [his] stomach muscles'. A female steward reassures him, 'Don't you worry now. You have to get used to it'.[86]

These vignettes convey not only the persistent presence of political violence within and around the spaces of youth culture in Belfast, but also the ways in which individuals coped through routine, resilience, and dark humour. As Newby observes, many young people met the intrusion of conflict with ironic detachment and a kind of weary

[83] Hollingworth, 'Gunpowder, Guinness, and Guitars'.

[84] Hollingworth, 'Gunpowder, Guinness, and Guitars'.

[85] Hollingworth, 'Music for Belfast'.

[86] Hollingworth, 'Gunpowder, Guinness, and Guitars'.

pragmatism.[87] Such accounts unsettle dominant narrative frameworks that cast the Troubles primarily in terms of catastrophic rupture or exceptional suffering. Instead, they suggest an alternative affective register: one in which violence was experienced as an ongoing irritant—intrusive, unpredictable, and destabilising, yet also integrated into the rhythms of everyday life and social relationships. However, the vignettes also reveal the discomfort of an ‘outsider’ unfamiliar with the local context and how to navigate it. Hollingworth reflects in a later piece that, in addition to fear, he also felt great embarrassment: ‘[…] just over the water in England we could do anything we wanted to at night. See a couple of concerts a night if we wished. Here there was just the pubs - and they’re blown up at the rate of a couple a week’.[88] Framed in this way, his words underscore the importance of Gallagher’s appearance as a rare and momentary reprieve for a city where normal social and cultural life was heavily constrained by violence.

Indeed, this Ulster Hall concert has since become the stuff of legend, commemorated by a statue unveiled outside the venue in January 2025. The statue pays homage to the iconic photograph of Gallagher that appeared on the front cover of *Melody Maker* the next week, alongside Hollingworth’s (1972) article capturing the atmosphere in the hall and its significance for attendees:

> I’ve never seen anything quite so wonderful, so stirring, so uplifting, so joyous as when Gallagher and the band walked on stage. The whole place erupted, they all stood and they cheered and they yelled, and screamed, and they put their arms up, and they embraced. Then as one unit they put their arms into the air and gave peace signs. Without being silly, or overemotional, it was one of the most memorable moments of my life. It all meant something, it meant more than just rock n' roll, it was something bigger, something more valid than just that. You just wanted to take the lid off the walls from around this hall and put it on a huge platform, raise it above the city and let just everyone see it, and hear it. Two thousand people together as one, with no minority, no troublemakers, no inhibitions.[89]

Hollingworth subsequently named Gallagher ‘Musician of the Year’ in *Melody Maker*’s 30 December 1972 issue, stating, ‘I shall remember that day for the rest of my life […] For two hours nothing else mattered in this bloody world’.[90]

This concert exemplifies how live music spaces functioned as spatially and affectively differentiated from the violent realities of Belfast’s streets during the

[87] Newby, ‘Troubled Generations?’

[88] Hollingworth, ‘Gunpowder, Guinness, and Guitars’.

[89] Hollingworth, ‘Music for Belfast’.

[90] Roy Hollingworth, ‘Roy Hollingworth’s Greatest Hits’, *Melody Maker* (30 December 1972), https://www.roryon.com/roy226.html

Troubles.[91] Gallagher's concerts provided Belfastians with temporary relief from the fears and divisions that tore their city apart. Within the concert hall, notions of Irishness were reconfigured in ways that transcended the rigid binaries of geography, politics, and religion that otherwise defined Northern Irish identities. Instead, a polysemic Irishness was performed—fluid, malleable, and deeply rooted in shared musical and collective memory. It also shows how young people used their own bodies to 'break with the uniformity of their neighbourhoods' and actively disrupt the spatial control imposed by sectarian divisions.[92] By physically moving into these alternative spaces, they contested and transcended the implicit opposition to the 'other' community, creating moments of encounter and hybridity that challenged entrenched social boundaries.

In the weeks following the gig, Gallagher characteristically dismissed the praise heaped on him by the English press and their portrayal of his concert as 'some great heroic deed'.[93] 'I think it was our duty to play there' he later told *Sounds*, although he did acknowledge that it was 'a real we-shall-overcome kinda night.'[94] While Gallagher recognised that playing in Belfast 'won't stop the Troubles', he believed that music possessed the power to 'clear the air a bit […] brighten things up […] and give the kids something to cheer them up'.[95]

This complex interplay between the inside and outside world—or 'threshold', to use Eliade's term—is powerfully captured in a scene from the *Irish Tour '74* documentary, filmed at the Ulster Hall during Gallagher's 1973-74 Christmas tour of Ireland.[96] The scene opens with Gallagher on stage playing the introduction to 'Goin' to my Hometown' on mandolin, accompanied by his own voiceover:

> In an Irish Tour, I always try and include Belfast and the north of Ireland. After all, I lived there for a while and I learned a lot playing in the clubs there, so I have a certain home feeling for it. It's always a great audience there. Pretty much almost no one else goes to play there.[97]

The film then shifts abruptly to footage of Belfast city centre, depicting a starkly contrasting reality: armoured cars patrol the streets with British soldiers gripping

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[91] Smith and Banfield, 'Grab It and Change It, It's Yours'.

[92] García González, 'Out of the Box', 44.

[93] 'Rory Gallagher: Blues Boy Beats The Sequin Set', *Circus* (1972), https://www.roryon.com/sequin333.html

[94] Haring, 'Rory Gallagher: Our Fellow Worker from Cork'; Liam Fay, 'Tangled up in Blues', *Hot Press* (Anniversary Special no. 3, 1992), https://www.roryon.com/Tangled.html

[95] 'Ulster: What the Music Men Say', *Melody Maker* (21 August 1971), https://www.roryon.com/flare205.html

[96] Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 25.

[97] *Irish Tour '74*, directed by Tony Palmer (1974), film.

assault rifles, while the camera pans over buildings scarred by bullet holes and bomb damage on North Street and Dock Street, as well as the barbed wire and 'peace walls' separating Catholic and Protestant communities. This bleak external landscape is then sharply contrasted by a return to the vibrant atmosphere inside Ulster Hall, where young people clap, cheer, hug, stamp their feet, and sing along with palpable joy and unity.[98] It is a potent visual display of a 'third space' beyond the fixed binaries of opposing forces, creating new spatial expressions and suggesting the possibility of a different future.[99]

Beyond the praise in the music press, Gallagher's decision to continue playing Belfast held profound significance for fans. As the *Irish News* later reported, it was not unusual for Northern Irish fans to become 'choked up' when recalling its impact.[100] This sentiment remains prevalent within the Gallagher fan community today, as evident in my study of comments on the Rory Gallagher YouTube channel.[101] The 2024 documentary *The Rory Gallagher Story* also features a poignant scene with two Northern Irish fans sharing their personal experiences. Barry McGivern, one of the leading figures behind the campaign to erect a statue of Gallagher outside Ulster Hall, reflected on the personal importance of those concerts:

> Really it was a chink of light. We got that for two nights of the year when Rory was here and then it just went back to madness outside […] I remember coming out of here in 1976 which was the height of the murder gangs that were running about. There wasn't a streetlight on here, there were no taxis and I had to get down in the country 30 miles away. I got home at 7 o'clock in the morning. I was only 17. My dad beat me around every room in the house. He thought I'd been murdered. I told him a lie about getting out the concert. And I said to him, 'I'd do it tonight again!'[102]

McGivern's account once again highlights the tension between the 'chink of light' found inside the concert hall and the harsh realities outside, marked by 'murder gangs' and his father's fear that he had been murdered. At the same time, it reveals a defiant spirit in his teenage rebellion: despite the dangers, he would risk it all again. Attending Gallagher's concerts gave McGivern fleeting experiences of liberation and excitement as he navigated Belfast, yet these moments were always tinged with the persistent risk of

[98] See O'Hagan, 'It's always nice to head for home' for a full analysis of this scene.

[99] McLoone, 'Punk Music in Northern Ireland'; García González, 'Out of the Box'.

[100] 'Tony Bailie, 'In Love with the Blues', *Irish News* (13 June 1998).

[101] O'Hagan, '"Rory played the greens, not the blues"'.

[102] *The Rory Gallagher Story*, directed by Brian Reddin (2024), documentary.

violence, reflecting themes identified in Roulston’s research on punk culture in the city.[103]

Cut, Paste, Resist: Scrapbooking as Creative Refuge for Belfast Music Fans

Gallagher’s performances in Belfast during the early 1970s stand out as rare and powerful live musical events amid the fraught environment of the Troubles. With concerts by international acts exceptional rather than routine, young music lovers sought alternative means to engage with music throughout the year. Unlike the later punk era, which developed communal ‘safe spaces’ such as the Good Vibrations record shop or the Harp Bar, such venues or scenes did not yet exist.[104] Instead, fans turned to DIY practices to channel their restless energy and sustain their musical engagement, such as designing their own clothes, creating fanzines or—most relevant here—assembling scrapbooks.[105] While Chris Atton highlights fanzines as responses to mainstream media neglect or misrepresentation of subcultural interests, scrapbooking functioned as a deeply personal, practical means of staying connected to the music world.[106]

Fan scrapbooks have a long history, dating back to late nineteenth-century theatre and the 1920s Hollywood boom. As embodied, material sites, they allowed young people to preserve and share ephemeral moments of fandom.[107] These intimate, creative archives, thus, reveal how fans actively invested in vernacular cultural production, expressing emotional connections to music while forming their own musical identities.[108] For young people in Northern Ireland, however, scrapbooking was about more than personal fandom: it was a vital cultural practice of refuge, offering stability amid social upheaval and a way to ‘regain a measure of agency over a life that spun away from [their] grasp’.[109]

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[103] Roulston, ‘Everyday Experiences of the City in Memories of the Belfast Punk Scene’.

[104] Heron, ‘Alternative Ulster’.

[105] Ciarán Ryan, ‘Fit for Consumption? Fanzines and Fan Communication in Irish DIY Music Scenes’, in Áine Mangaoang, John O'Flynn, and Lonán Ó Briain (eds), *Made in Ireland: Studies in Popular Music* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 207–24.

[106] Chris Atton, ‘In Search of Cultural Politics in a Fall Fanzine’, in Michael Goddard and Benjamin Halligan (eds), *Mark E. Smith and The Fall: Art, Music and Politics* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 169–80.

[107] Diana W. Anselmo, ‘Bound by Paper: Girl Fans, Movie Scrapbooks, and Hollywood Reception During World War I’, *Film History*, 31/3 (2019), 141–72.

[108] Lauren Alex O’Hagan, ‘Scrapbooking as Sanctuary: Embodied Music Fandom, Affective Attachment and Female Cultural Labour in Early 1970s Belfast’, *Cultural Studies* (forthcoming).

[109] Diana W. Anselmo, ‘Picture Pain: Anti-Heteronormative Female Fandom in Early Hollywood’, *JCMS: Journal of Cinema and Media Studies*, 62/1 (2022), 34.

One such example is Carol Clerk, a teenage girl growing up in Cherryvalley, an affluent, predominantly unionist district in East Belfast. Between 1970 and 1973, from the ages of 16 to 18, Clerk created four Rory Gallagher scrapbooks, now housed in Belfast’s Oh Yeah! Music Centre. At the time, these scrapbooks were kept private, reflecting a meticulous, personal engagement with Gallagher’s music rather than a performative display for others. The precision and care evident in the volumes suggest that scrapbooking was more than a casual pastime for Clerk; it served as an arena of practice in which she cultivated the skills and sensibilities of a budding journalist. In fact, the cessation of her scrapbooking only came about because she had taken her first step into professional journalism: on 23 May 1973, she published her first article in *Melody Maker*, entitled ‘Bombs, Boredom and No Bands’—a diary-style reflection on a week in her life amid Belfast’s sparse music scene. Clerk went on to pursue journalism full-time, moving to London and joining *Melody Maker*’s staff by 1980. Over the following decade, she interviewed Gallagher multiple times and earned a PPA award for her coverage of Live Aid in 1985.[110]

Clerk’s scrapbooks meticulously document Gallagher’s career, from the break-up of Taste and his emergence as a solo artist through to the release of *Blueprint* (1973). Comprising four A4 volumes of around 40 pages each, the scrapbooks reject stereotypical ‘girlish’ fandom aesthetics, such as hearts, doodles, and romantic fantasies, instead offering a serious, semi-journalistic chronicle of Gallagher’s career. At times, the work appears entirely self-directed and reflective; at others, it anticipates an audience—perhaps a future self—as indicated by cues like ‘PTO’, which imply an imagined reader and a desire for narrative continuity. In this way, the scrapbooks act as liminal zones where public memory meets private expression, and archival logic coexists with creative authorship.[111]

Framed against the backdrop of the Troubles, the scrapbooks exemplify how young people constructed cultural lifeworlds within the constraints of their physical and political environments, as well as reflecting the powerful emotional and cultural resonance Gallagher held for youth navigating life amid conflict. They also speak to the gendered dynamics of music fandom at the time: men/boys typically enjoyed greater freedom of movement and social legitimacy in public music spaces, particularly within the 1970s rock scene, while women/girls were more likely to encounter sexism,

[110] Colin Irwin, ‘Carol Clerk Obituary’, *The Guardian* (31 March 2010), https://www.theguardian.com/media/2010/mar/31/carol-clerk-obituary

[111] Sara Cooper, ‘Radcliffe’s Strongest Woman: The Bricolaged Body in One Progressive Era Women’s College Scrapbook’, *Rhetoric Review*, 41/2 (2022), 95–115.

harassment, and exclusion on the basis of gender.[112] As a result, females often turned to more intimate forms of fandom, such as zines, journaling, bedroom culture (e.g. posters), and scrapbooking.[113] In Belfast, where active dangers in public spaces combined with parental restrictions on girls’ movements, these practices took on added significance, enabling alternative and creative forms of participation in the local music scene. Having access to Clerk’s voice through these pages offers a rare female voice and valuable counter-narrative to dominant cultural representations of the ‘troubled teen’ as either victim or threat, thereby highlighting the heterogeneity of youth experiences in 1970s Belfast.[114]

The scrapbooks are primarily composed of press clippings from British, Irish and French music publications, suggesting that Clerk avidly consumed any Gallagher-related news she could find. As Leigh Ina Hunt observes, the act of cutting out and rearranging press material is an active compositional practice of ‘bricolage’ that physically assembles diverse media fragments into a new artefact.[115] Clerk’s scrapbooks, thus, impose order on a fragmented media landscape, setting disparate articles into dialogue and reshaping how Gallagher’s early solo career was represented in the media. Some clippings are so large that they must be folded in place, inviting future readers to physically unfold them—an embodied act that evokes Clerk’s own bodily interaction with the material and transforms spectatorship into a tactile, shared experience.[116]

At a time when much of everyday life in Northern Ireland was marked by uncertainty, restriction, and division, Clerk’s detailed, immersive engagement with Gallagher’s press coverage offered a parallel world—one shaped by music, creativity, and translocal connection. Additionally, the inclusion of clippings from outside Northern Ireland signals a desire to participate in broader cultural flows beyond the immediacy of the conflict, offering a mediated sense of normalcy and continuity. These physical interactions—cutting, arranging, unfolding—also carry symbolic weight, embodying small, everyday acts of care and meaning-making amid a fractured social landscape. Through preserving and presenting Gallagher's mediated presence, Clerk

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[112] Norma Coates, ‘Teenyboppers, Groupies, and Other Grotesques: Girls and Women and Rock Culture in the 1960s and Early 1970s’, *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, 15/1 (2003), 65–94.

[113] Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber, ‘Girls and Subcultures’, in Stuart Hall (ed.) *Resistance Through Rituals* (London: Hutchinson, 1978), 177–89.

[114] Newby, ‘Troubled Generations?’, 13.

[115] Leigh Ina Hunt, *Victorian Passion to Modern Phenomenon: A Literary and Rhetorical Analysis of Two Hundred Years of Scrapbooks and Scrapbook Making* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 2006).

[116] Cooper, ‘Radcliffe’s Strongest Woman’.

cultivates a space of affective refuge: an analogue sanctuary that quietly resists the encroachments of violence and division and offers an alternative musical identity.

While Sharon Marcus found that theatre scrapbooks enabled fans to expand their sense of what counts as performance, Clerk’s scrapbooking acted as a *substitute* for live music, recreating the affective charge of concerts on the static page.[117] Images of Gallagher are sometimes pasted in whole, but often cut out through precise découpage, separating his live figure from its original background (Figure 1). This manipulation of performance imagery collapses spatial and emotional distance, fostering a sense of immediacy and intimacy between fan and star.[118] In Clerk’s case, the meticulous contouring of Gallagher’s silhouette creates a layered visual narrative that animates the page and gives him kinetic presence, simulating the energy of his live performances. This careful visual work becomes a means of conjuring Gallagher’s presence despite his physical absence, transforming the scrapbook into a site of imagined performance and affective proximity. Through this intimate aesthetic labour, Clerk restores a sense of access, continuity, and vitality that the conflict-ridden cultural landscape frequently denied.

[117] Sharon Marcus, ‘Theatrical Scrapbook’, *Theatre Survey*, 54/2 (2023): 283–307.

[118] Marcus, *The Drama of Celebrity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

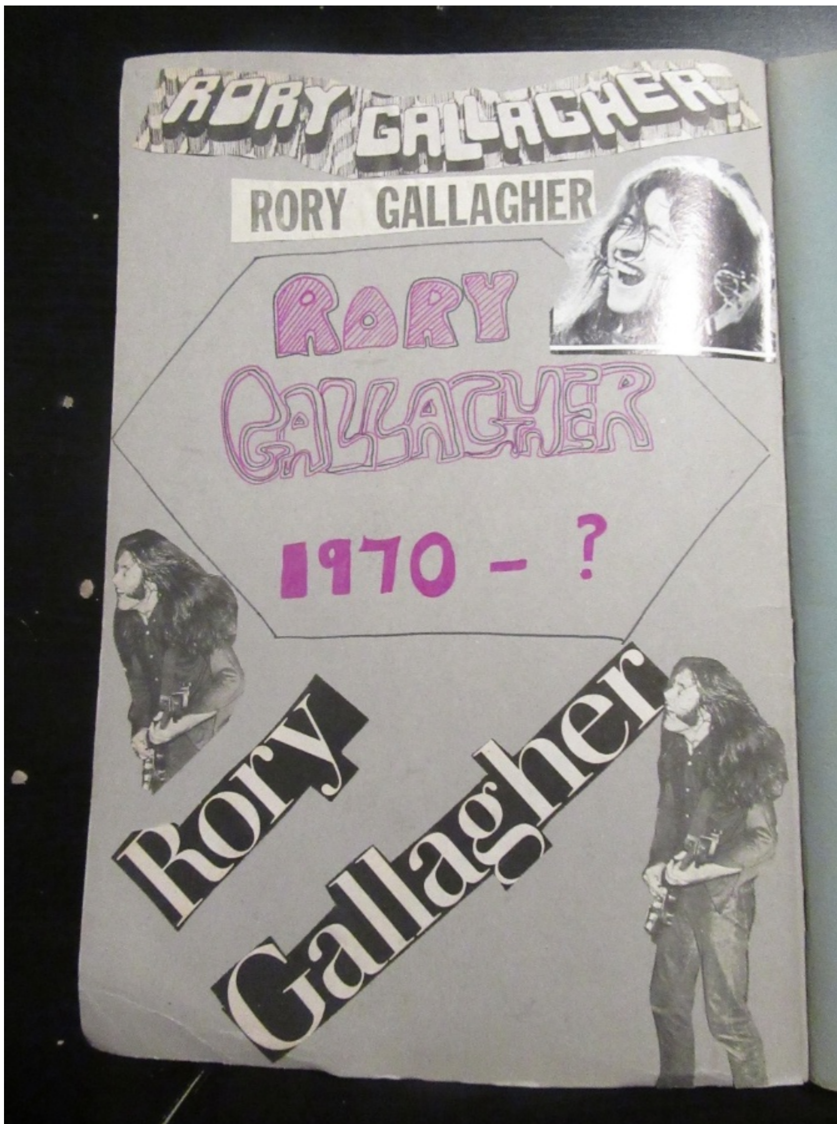

Figure 1: Decoupaging Gallagher in Carol Clerk’s Scrapbook (Volume 1)
Held at the Oh Yeah Music Centre, Belfast
Photograph by the author

In addition to press clippings, Clerk’s scrapbooks are punctuated with promotional materials from Gallagher’s record label, Polydor, most notably typed press releases and glossy photographs (Figure 2). A surviving envelope tucked into the fourth volume reveals that Clerk initiated direct correspondence with the label, actively requesting such materials—a practice that echoes early Hollywood fans’ efforts to sustain intimacy

with stars through mail.[119] Diana Anselmo interprets such correspondence as a yearning for mutual intimacy and a disruption of modern temporal structures: within the closed loop of mailed letters and autographed photographs, the linear march of industrial time is temporarily arrested, replaced by a slower, more affectively charged rhythm.[120] Within the context of the Troubles, this correspondence also reflects a fan’s determined effort to maintain cultural connection and access in a cultural landscape where local scenes were disrupted or decimated. Clerk’s scrapbook, therefore, becomes a site of ‘translation’,[121] connecting the industrialised music world faraway in London with a fan’s intimate, embodied experience in Belfast. In doing so, she asserts a form of cultural resilience, sustaining a connection to Gallagher that transcends the constraints of the Troubles and transforms absence into an embodied, affective presence.

[119] Anselmo, *A Queer Way of Feeling: Girl Fans and Personal Archives of Early Hollywood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2023).

[120] Anselmo, *A Queer Way of Feeling*, 65.

[121] Bruno Latour, *Pandora’s Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 87.

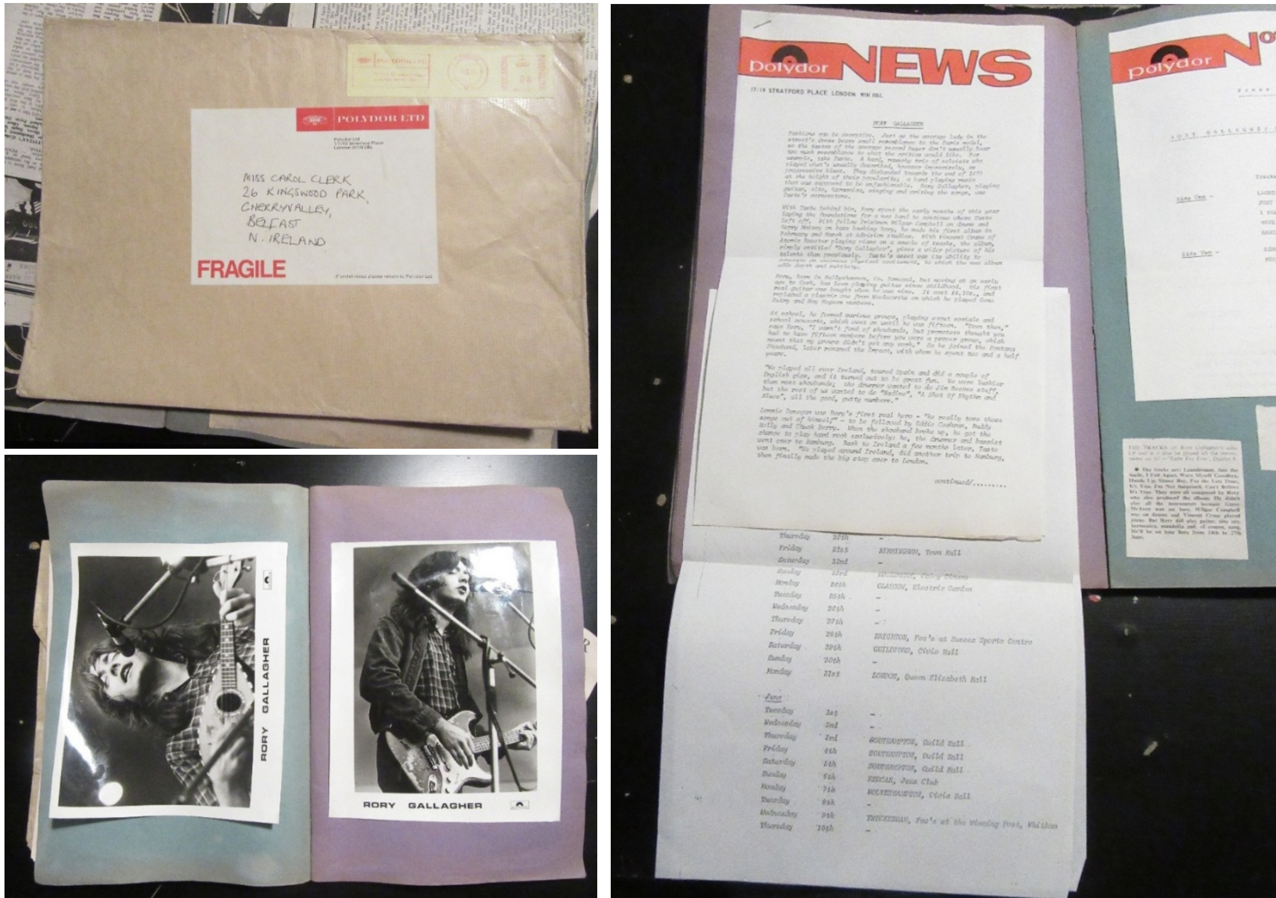

Figure 2: Clerk's Correspondence with Polydor (Volumes 4 and 1)
Held at the Oh Yeah Music Centre, Belfast
Photographs by the author

Clerk also sought to maintain her connection with Gallagher by painstakingly tracking his album positions in the weekly charts and documenting his broadcast appearances, often annotating them with detailed notes (Figure 3). As Anselmo argues, such practices enable stars to permeate fans' domestic spaces, fostering ongoing, embodied connections that extend beyond the limited window of live or broadcast performances.[122] For Clerk, this mediated engagement was especially significant given the near absence of live music in early 1970s Belfast. Through her diligent actions, she sustained a vigilant link to Gallagher's evolving career, countering the fragmentation and disruption of the local music scene. Her notes usually appear directly beside

[122] Anselmo, 'Bound by Paper', 167.

relevant television and radio schedule clippings, but sometimes are hastily scribbled in biro or pencil on torn scraps of paper, reflecting an ‘opportunistic urgency’ to capture fleeting moments of musical engagement otherwise inaccessible within Belfast’s constrained cultural landscape.[123] Later volumes contain loosely inserted A4 sheets with fuller programme details, presenter remarks and even precise descriptions of Gallagher’s stage attire, reflecting Clerk’s determination to capture every detail and relive the experience as vividly as possible.

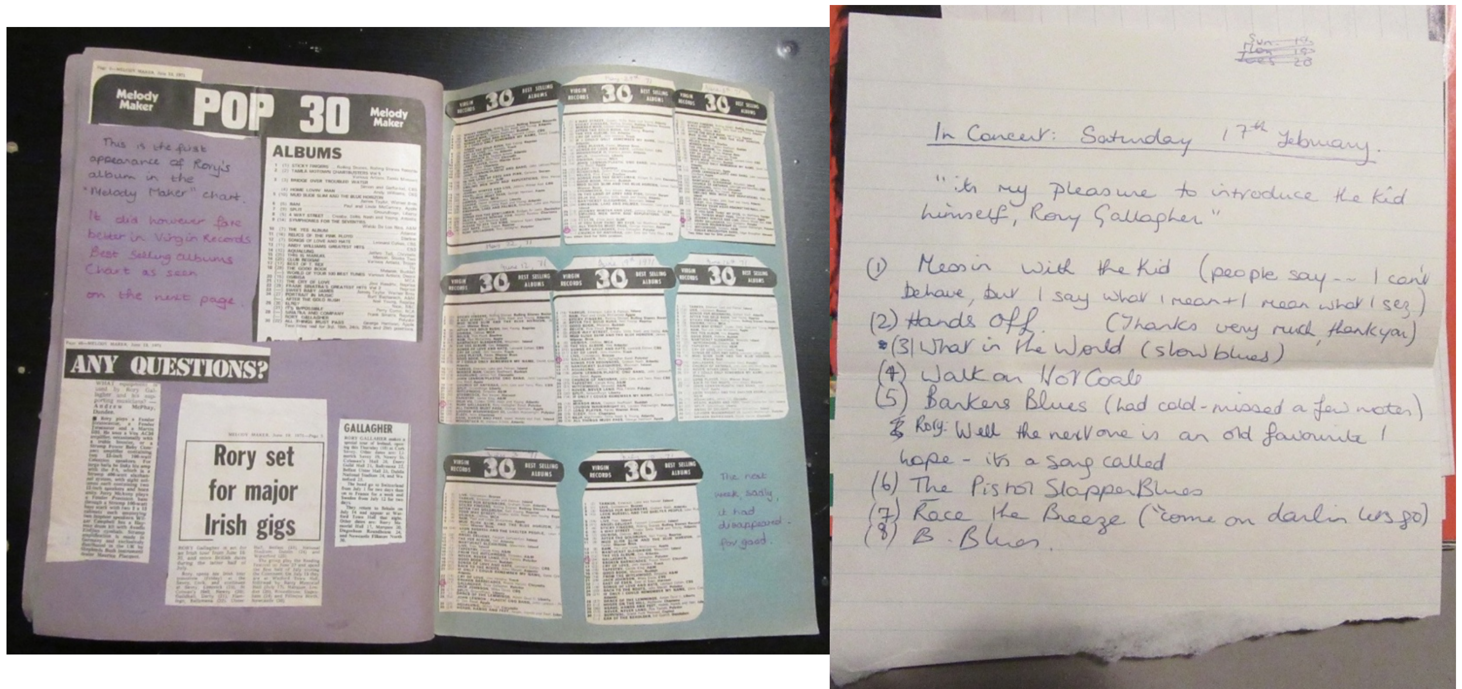

Figure 3: Clerk’s Tracking of Album Charts and Gallagher’s Television Appearances (Volumes 1 and 4)
Held at the Oh Yeah Music Centre, Belfast
Photographs by the author

Perhaps unsurprisingly, a significant focus of Clerk’s scrapbook centres on Gallagher’s activities in Ireland, fastidiously collating articles, interviews, and tour advertisements. Even the smallest references to Gallagher are carefully included, with his name often underlined, underscoring Clerk’s attentive and deliberate engagement

[123] Anselmo, ‘‘I Want to Be Good:’ Morality, Faith & Female Spectatorial Pleasure during World War I’, *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 22/1 (2024), 13.

with every available detail.[124] Of particular interest here are the frequent inclusion of debates and deliberations surrounding the possibility of Gallagher playing in Belfast, played out in letters to the editors. As Campbell notes, the letter pages of music magazines provided Northern Irish youth with a rare and valuable platform within the British mediascape to voice opinions on the Troubles.[125]

'People across the water think we riot night and day. Only one percent of the population riot and then only on isolated occasions', writes 13-year-old R. McAdams. 'A lot of people here would love to see a good concert', adds David Pauley of Newtownabbey. By gathering and pasting this selection of letters into one space, Clerk actively contests the pervasive perception of Belfast as irredeemably violent and inhospitable to music, assembling a type of grassroots counter-archive that builds a body of evidence for why artists like Gallagher should continue to visit. Clerk likely recognised herself in the voices of her peers, equally invested in reclaiming Belfast's cultural legitimacy during a time of intense scrutiny and neglect.

A particularly powerful use of the scrapbook comes in Clerk's third volume, where she pastes a large article from *Ireland's Saturday Night* (dated 13 November 1971) listing the many artists who had cancelled shows in Belfast due to safety concerns, Gallagher among them. In bold blue block capitals, Clerk adds her own handwritten annotation beside the article: 'DESPITE THIS REPORT, A DATE WAS FINALLY ARRANGED FOR THE BAND TO PLAY BELFAST'. Beneath this, she pastes an advertisement for Gallagher's forthcoming Ulster Hall gig on 1 January 1972. Anselmo argues that handwritten interventions in scrapbooks function to bridge the gap between fan and star by positioning the compiler as an 'insider'.[126] Here, Clerk's annotation acts as both a bridge and a correction, subtly challenging the article and emphasising Gallagher's commitment to his Belfast audience.[127] This juxtaposition produces a 'ruptured textual fabric',[128] which is further emphasised by Clerk's inclusion of Gallagher's name, cut in oversized type from another article and pasted beneath the original piece. The dramatic visual scale of the letters elevates him above the other artists mentioned, spatially signalling the exceptionality of his act. This playful resistance to mass media's

[124] See Sarah Glosson, *Performing Jane: A Cultural History of Jane Austen Fandom* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2020) for similar findings with Jane Austen fans.

[125] Campbell, 'NME's "Irish Troubles"', 15.

[126] Anselmo, 'Bound by Paper', 160.

[127] For similar arguments, see Mark Ittensohn, 'Frankenstein and Romantic Scrapbook Culture', in Antoinina Bevan Zlatar, Mark Ittensohn, Enit Karafili Steiner, and Olga Timofeeva (eds) *Words, Books, Images, and the Long Eighteenth Century: Essays for Allen Reddick* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2021), 151–67.

[128] Ittensohn, 'Frankenstein and Romantic Scrapbook Culture', 155.

straightforward narrative of cultural withdrawal generates a dialogic tension between official discourse and personal testimony, positioning Gallagher as a figure of defiant presence.

Clerk was not merely documenting the events surrounding the Ulster Hall concert as a passive observer; she was there—an active participant in a moment she had long anticipated, having finally obtained permission to attend a Rory Gallagher concert. While we lack Clerk's own account of the circumstances surrounding her attendance, interviews with other female fans indicate that strict parental rules were common, and it is reasonable to assume similar constraints applied to her: they were typically dropped off and collected at set times, required to stay with friends throughout the concert, and briefed not to speak to strangers or linger outside the venue. Such guidelines underscore the constraints on girls' participation in the scarce live music events in 1970s Belfast.

On the same scrapbook page as the *Ireland's Saturday Night* article, Clerk pastes her concert ticket and, most strikingly, a preserved packet of Wrigley's Doublemint chewing gum, annotated with the line: 'It was at this concert that he accepted a piece of chewing gum from the packet below, leaving 1 bit' (Figure 4). Within the affective logic of fan memory, the small gesture of Gallagher accepting a piece of gum becomes a profound moment of connection. As Toija Cinque and Sean Redmond argue, objects that come into physical contact with a star are often imbued with a sense of 'magical contagion', carrying a residual 'aura' that collapses the distance between fan and idol.[129] However, this embodied engagement should not be read as the mark of an 'obsessed' or 'hysterical' fan; rather, as Joli Jensen states, such acts of fandom are ways of making sense of the world in relation to one's historical, social, and cultural context.[130] In Belfast—where opportunities for celebrity proximity were rare—such embodied encounters took on even greater significance. The gum, thus, acquired a symbolic weight beyond its material value, functioning as a visible imprint of her lived experience at the concert.

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[129] Toija Cinque and Sean Redmond, *The Fandom of David Bowie: Everyone Says "Hi"*. (Basingstoke: Springer, 2019). See also Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (London: Penguin, 2008).

[130] Joli Jensen, 'Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterization' in Lisa A. Lewis (ed.), *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media* (London: Routledge, 1992), 9–29.

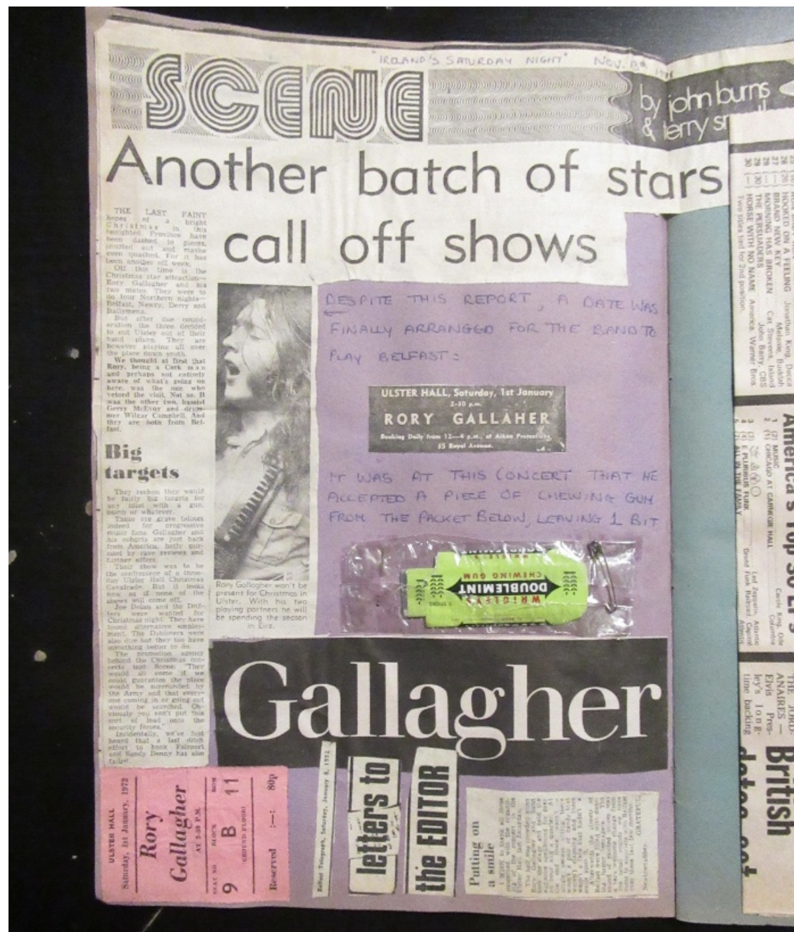

Figure 4: Keepsakes from Gallagher’s Ulster Hall Concert on 1 January 1972 (Volume 3)
Held at the Oh Yeah Music Centre, Belfast
Photograph by the author

Clerk preserves the gum inside protective plastic, fastened with a safety pin, constructing both a shrine and a shield: a gesture that secures the object’s authenticity while controlling access to its affective charge.[131] Through this act of preservation, Clerk savours the encounter, distilling its essence and amplifying its emotional resonance in what Sarah Glosson terms a process of ‘decoction’.[132] She, thus, embeds herself into

[131] For similar practices, see Anselmo, *A Queer Way of Feeling*.

[132] Glosson, *Performing Jane*, 13.

Gallagher's own narrative, sustaining a psychological tether to him and asserting her presence within his world.[133] In this way, the gum packet becomes a mnemonic device, prompting nostalgic reflection through its tangibility.[134]

Over the next two pages, Clerk pastes the iconic 'Music for Belfast' *Melody Maker* article by Roy Hollingworth, discussed earlier in this article. While Phil Wickham argues that scrapbooks offer 'history without hindsight'—a record of lived experience captured in real time—there is a distinct sense that Clerk grasps the historical gravity of this concert.[135] Her careful curatorship suggests a future-facing impulse: preserving not only for personal reflection, but for posterity. This archival sensibility is further reflected in how she proceeds to gather and paste in a series of letters to editors from across the music press, capturing the emotional aftermath of Gallagher's Ulster Hall performance and building a collective fan testimony.

One fan from Newtownabbey, writing under the name 'Grateful', describes in the *Belfast Telegraph* the 'elation' in the venue and how the streets outside were filled with 'dancing happy teenagers' and 'excited voices', which was 'a very welcome change from the usual sounds we have come to associate with Belfast'. Here, the 'third space' offered by the Ulster Hall spills out into the usually hostile surrounding streets, as the bodies of young fans momentarily reclaim the city centre from the logics of fear and surveillance.[136] In another deeply affective letter to *Disc and Music Echo*, Stewart Gourley of Milebush recounts shaking Gallagher's hand twice at the end of the encore: 'as I did, tears clouded my eyes because I knew deep down in my heart Rory will always play Belfast and never let his Irish fans down'. Writing to *Sounds*, William Gibbons of Rathfern thanks Gallagher and asks, 'When are other artists going to realise kids still live here and are hungry for music?' Clerk's inclusion of these letters constitutes a deliberate act of cultural memory work, capturing a fan-led counter-discourse about life in Northern Ireland. The emotional tenor of these accounts, carefully preserved alongside journalistic reportage, turns the scrapbook into a layered affective archive, which reveals dimensions of youth experience beyond victimhood and violence. It also highlights the vital role Gallagher's music played in offering hope, joy and a different sense of 'community' amid the Troubles.

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[133] For similar findings, see Georganne Scheiner, *Signifying Female Adolescence: Film Representations and Fans, 1920-1950* (Westport: Praeger, 2000).

[134] Jessica Helfand, *Scrapbooks: An American History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

[135] Phil Wickham, 'Scrapbooks, Soap Dishes and Screen Dreams: Ephemera, Everyday Life and Cinema History', *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 8/3 (2010), 315–30.

[136] See also Roulston, 'Everyday Experiences of the City in Memories of the Belfast Punk Scene'.

Conclusion: Music, Tactics and Structure of Feeling in a Divided City

This paper has sought to reframe dominant narratives that position punk as the principal musical catalyst for cross-community engagement during the Troubles by reasserting the cultural and emotional significance of Irish blues-rock musician Rory Gallagher. Nearly a decade before punk emerged in Northern Ireland, Gallagher's decision to perform in Belfast—most notably at the Ulster Hall in 1972—offered young people an alternative mode of social participation and emotional expression. Drawing on press coverage, fan testimonies, and archival materials such as Carol Clerk's fan scrapbooks, this study has argued that Gallagher's presence—and the practices it inspired—constituted forms of everyday resistance and cultural reimagining that were both tactical and affective in nature. In particular, it has aimed to recover the heterogeneity and complexity of youth experience in this period—an aim that comes into sharp focus when viewed through the dual lenses of Michel de Certeau's concept of 'tactics' and Raymond Williams's notion of 'structures of feeling'.

For de Certeau, tactics are practices by which those in low positions of power 'reappropriate the space organised by techniques of sociocultural production'.[137] In other words, individuals already 'caught in the nets of discipline' use 'tactical and makeshift creativity' to manipulate, divert or change the organisation of space.[138] Applied to the context of this study, Gallagher's decision to continue playing in Belfast during the height of the Troubles was a tactical choice. Belfast's cityscape was shaped by larger strategic forces, such as sectarian violence, state surveillance, and the securitisation of public space. Moreover, institutional forces such as governments and media framed Northern Ireland as a warzone, which led to widespread avoidance of the region and discouraged many bands from performing there due to safety concerns. Yet, Gallagher defied this narrative through his presence, working within the constraints of a fractured environment to stage concerts at Belfast's Ulster Hall. As a Catholic from the South, Gallagher's presence at the hall challenged and subverted the dominant logics of fear and abandonment by briefly transforming the venue into a shared cultural zone. This was especially significant given that, while well-known as a music space, Ulster Hall also came to be associated with loyalist politician and Protestant religious leader, Ian Paisley, who held sermons and private rallies there throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

Gallagher's tactical reclamation of Ulster Hall was mirrored by the young people who attended his concerts. Located in the city centre within the 'Ring of Steel', the venue encouraged fans from both Protestant and Catholic communities to cross the city and

[137] De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xiv.

[138] De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xv.

come into contact with one another in new ways. In doing so, they 'foil[ed] the other's game',[139] tactically reclaiming urban space and uniting through a shared love of music. In some cases, this communal spirit even spilled out of the protective 'third space' of the venue into the streets, with young people joyously celebrating Gallagher's music together, thereby transforming the space in a city otherwise controlled by division. Thus, Gallagher's concerts became sites of informal resistance where youths from divided communities could momentarily explore alternative identities beyond political or religious affiliations. This perspective moves beyond portrayals of youths as victims or perpetrators, showing them instead as individuals striving to live and enjoy life, much like their peers everywhere.

As de Certeau notes, tactics rely on 'making do' within the cracks of power structures, using cultural resources creatively.[140] This concept extends to the scrapbooks of Gallagher fan Carol Clerk, which can be seen as an act of 'poaching' in the way that she brings together disparate materials and puts them into dialogue with one another to create an affective narrative for her own purposes. Her choices in layout, the order of clippings, and handwritten annotations all serve to transform institutional texts into tactical expressions of fandom. However, they also serve to rewrite the story of the Troubles through the margins of everyday youth life by situating it within a personal and cultural context.

We see this through the way that scrapbooking often stood in for the absence of live musical performances: decoupaged images of Gallagher seem to transmit kinetic energy, while meticulous tracking of his albums and TV/radio appearances provided a way to maintain connection and sustain enthusiasm despite physical distance. Letters to editors also served as a tactical tool, building a collective voice of young people crying out for live music in a city increasingly cut off from touring acts. These letters, often placed alongside news articles reporting cancelled gigs and absent artists, create a striking backdrop against which Gallagher's decision to play at the Ulster Hall in 1972 becomes all the more poignant. This is made even more powerful when viewed through the scrapbook's material traces—Clerk's concert ticket and stick of chewing gum—that offer tangible evidence of her presence at an event that functioned as both musical gathering and symbolic act of solidarity. That this is followed by more letters to the editor thanking Gallagher and praising the gig only reinforces the cultural weight of his performance.

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[139] De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 37.

[140] De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 29.

Viewed in this way, Clerk's scrapbooks become a form of resistance, resilience, and cultural refuge—a tactical response to deprivation. They offered a way not only to cope and channel musical passion, but also to assert a sense of belonging to a wider music world from which her city was increasingly excluded. While Gallagher's tactics were rooted in presence—showing up, performing, taking up space—Clerk's scrapbooks operated through absence, preserving, and curating traces of music that could only rarely be experienced live. While concerts might seem minimal against the broader landscape of the Troubles, they held profound significance for young people. In moments like these, Clerk's scrapbooks intervene, asserting her presence—alongside her peers—within the cultural narrative and ensuring that youth voices are not excluded.

At the same time, Raymond Williams's concept of 'structures of feeling' helps us grasp the affective, often pre-verbal registers through which this resistance and hope manifested for Gallagher and his young fans. Williams describes 'structures of feeling' as meanings and value that are actively lived and felt in everyday experience. These affective elements of consciousness and relationships represent emergent, in-process ways of being that bring about a change in presence, but remain largely unrecognisable until they are later formalised and understood in retrospect.[141] This is clearly evident here. During the unfolding of the Troubles, Gallagher's concerts and Clerk's scrapbooking took place amid great uncertainty. People experienced a complex mix of emotions—fear, anger, confusion—but many were also learning how to navigate the cityscape and maintain a semblance of normality despite the surrounding violence. This is reflected in the earlier examples of dark humour, pragmatic acceptance, and reframing of events as mere inconveniences, such as Gallagher grinning and continuing to tune his guitar as bombs exploded nearby or the stark contrasts between the safety inside venues and turmoil outside. These affective dispositions enabled people to navigate the trauma and unpredictability of the Troubles while maintaining everyday social bonds and cultural practices.

Gallagher's Ulster Hall concerts were praised at the time for fostering a sense of commonality in the face of conflict and providing young people with a space to experience and negotiate their social realities beyond the confines of formal politics or sectarian ideology. Identities, therefore, became fluid and contested, evolving through lived negotiation rather than remaining fixed or predetermined. Through music, the city could be reimagined not solely as a battleground but as a space of connection, hope, and possibility—a counter-story that subtly but powerfully reframed how young people related to their environment and each other. However, it is only in the post-Troubles

[141] Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 132.

era, with the benefit of hindsight, that the full significance of these concerts has become clear. In recognition of the 'chink of light' his concerts offered, fan-led efforts have been central to commemorating Gallagher's impact. Belfast's collective memory bears witness to this, notably through the plaque and statue outside Ulster Hall honouring Gallagher's legacy and the role his performances played in bridging divided communities.

Gallagher's deliberate avoidance of explicit political statements—his emphasis on performing in Belfast as an 'anti-political move'—can itself be understood as an expression of these structures of feeling. By remaining silent on his personal political views, he adopted a 'way of operating' that preserved his appeal across the sectarian divide, while also shielding himself from having his music tied to any particular political or religious identity.[142] Additionally, the media's portrayal of Belfast as a 'war zone' and Gallagher's defiant choice to perform there reflect the tension between external representations and internal experiences. While the British press framed Belfast as exceptional and dangerous, Gallagher's lived familiarity and pragmatic resilience exemplified a different structure of feeling—one rooted in ongoing life, music, and community despite conflict.

Overall, Gallagher's musical presence in Belfast during the Troubles offers a powerful case of how music functioned as both a tactic of everyday resistance and a locus of emergent structures of feeling during a time of entrenched political violence. His performances demonstrate how cultural practices can operate within—and simultaneously challenge—the constraints imposed by sectarian political systems, creating rare spaces where young people from both communities could come together. Equally, Clerk's scrapbooks, while ostensibly apolitical, offer material traces of the desire to carve out cultural and emotional space beyond the rigid binaries of sectarian identity. Through her tactile, affectively charged curatorship of Gallagher's image, Clerk participates in an emergent structure of feeling that privileges music, memory, and emotional expression as modes of resistance and self-formation. Created largely in the absence of live performances and under the shadow of conflict, her scrapbooks offer a valuable lens for understanding how music fandom provided young people with alternative forms of belonging, meaning-making, and connection in a deeply fractured society.

Taken together, Gallagher's performances and their reception illustrate how individuals forged zones of autonomous meaning within dominant systems. These moments offered 'spaces of encounter' where entrenched binary oppositions were

[142] De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 29.

temporarily suspended, disrupting the spatial and social segregation that structured everyday life in Belfast. Such narratives are not only vital to Northern Ireland's cultural heritage but also serve as essential touchstones in the ongoing journey toward reconciliation and emotional healing.

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