

George Michael's estate brings John Lennon's 'Imagine' piano to Liverpool's Strawberry Field to mark Lennon's 80th birthday

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The world-famous piano that John Lennon used to compose and record one of the great peace anthems of the 20th century is on loan to Liverpool's Strawberry Field exhibition courtesy of the estate of the late George Michael.

The piano has been delivered to the Liverpool institution to mark what would have been Lennon's 80th birthday today (October 9th 2020).

It was always George's intention that the iconic musical instrument should be enjoyed by the people of Lennon's home city. "It's not the type of thing that should be in storage somewhere or being protected, it should be seen by people," said George to journalists at time of purchase. The upright Steinway piano, purchased by the singer songwriter in 2000, is now one of the most valuable musical instrument in rock 'n' roll history.

John Lennon's sister Julia Baird who is now Honorary President of Strawberry Field says, "Bringing John's piano to Strawberry Field for the first time to mark what would have been his 80th birthday is a wonderful gesture - one that will bring joy to the hundreds of thousands of people who visit Liverpool every year to get closer to the history of The Beatles and John's legacy.

"Strawberry Field played a pivotal role in the John's childhood as one of the first places that sparked his young imagination whilst living on nearby Menlove Avenue. It's fitting therefore that this piano should find a new home here where The Salvation Army continues to do such good work with young adults with learning difficulties."

The piano, which was toured globally by George Michael as a symbol of peace in the early 2000s, has never before been placed in a location so steeped in John Lennon history. One of the most cherished musical instruments of all time, archive film footage from 1971 shows a relaxed Lennon at the piano composing 'Imagine' before he turns to his keyboard player to remark : "That's the one I like best."

The Estate of the late George Michael comments,

"The George Michael Estate is proud to be associated with Strawberry Field and the work that the Salvation Army do at the centre to help young adults with learning difficulties acquire the skills and experience they so badly need to get employment which work is even more vital today than it was when the Centre first opened . Estate representatives have visited and been shown around the centre and the site, met with the staff and learned a great deal about the work which is done there and did not hesitate to agree to the loan of the iconic John Lennon "Imagine" piano as part of the permanent exhibition they have on site especially as this is just the type of association that George would have wanted for this unique piece . We know that the piano will be a source of hope and inspiration to all who come to see it and to the young people who attend Strawberry Field not only during these difficult times but for many years to come in the same way that it inspired George since he bought it some 20 years ago."

Liverpool's Strawberry Field holds a special place in the hearts of Beatles fans the world over for inspiring the song 'Strawberry Fields Forever'. The song is based in part on Lennon's childhood memories of visits to the Salvation Army children's home to play in its suburban gardens.

George Michael, a huge fan of The Beatles and John Lennon, composed on and played the piano which can be heard on the title song of his Patience album. And it's fitting that the piano should now take centre-stage at Strawberry Field where all funds raised by paying visitors to the exhibition will be used to help change the lives of young people with learning difficulties.

Strawberry Field has been in the care of The Salvation Army since the 1930s as a place that supports vulnerable young people and a site of spirituality and inspiration. This legacy continues with The Salvation Army's redevelopment of Strawberry Field in order to give young people with learning difficulties in Liverpool the chance to succeed in realising their career aspirations.

Major Kathy Versfeld, Mission Director for Strawberry Field, says, "Since The Salvation Army first acquired the property in 1934, Strawberry Field has been a place of refuge and peace for all those who, like John, sought sanctuary beyond its beautiful red gates. We are absolutely delighted to be able to place on display in our exhibition this wonderful 'instrument of peace', sharing as we do with its owners an enduring passion for peacemaking and the transformation of communities and individual lives. We are grateful for this generous loan and know that it will make a huge difference to the work that we are able to do within our Visitor Centre, not just with our Steps to Work trainees but also as we offer a place of inspiration and hope to all visitors through the gates."

With a visitor exhibition exploring the site's history and links to John Lennon, a cafe as well as gardens for spiritual reflection, the Strawberry Field site weaves together educational, cultural, heritage and spiritual elements in one site to continue inspiring future generations to come.

In 2019, Strawberry Field was reborn as a place that provides sustainable employment opportunities for young people with learning difficulties. The new hub offers training, skills and valuable work placements, so as to ensure real employment prospects. Both young people and their families are offered support, time to socialise, develop aspirations, help to break down barriers and achieve their full potential.

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For more information, images, interview requests please contact Richard Hector-Jones at Creative Concern on 07966 378 968 or richard@creativeconcern.com

NOTES TO EDITORS

The Salvation Army is an international Christian church and registered charity, which has been transforming lives for more than 150 years. Working in 131 countries worldwide, The Salvation Army offers friendship, practical help and support for people at all levels of need. In the UK and Republic of Ireland this work includes more than 750 community churches and social centres. Registered Charity Nos. 214779, 215174 and in Scotland SC009359, SC037691. For more information visit the website www.salvationarmy.org.uk

FACT SHEET

Visiting Strawberry Field

The centre is a welcome addition to Beatles tourism in the city, with responsible tourism at its heart. It is home to a brand new visitor experience, complete with visitor exhibition, café, shop and gardens, as well as a Steps to Work programme, which aims to help young adults with learning difficulties and other barriers to employment into work.

Tickets to the visitor exhibition must be booked in advance. More details available at www.strawberryfieldliverpool.com

The site is a short walk away from John Lennon's childhood home in Menlove Avenue where he lived with this Aunt Mimi.

Strawberry Field is open and accessible to everyone, thanks to its Changing Places toilet facilities please see our recent release: <http://www.strawberryfieldliverpool.com/news>

Visiting during Covid-19

Free admission with ID for NHS worker and guest – Strawberry Field is participating in Britain Unites – A nationwide initiative to thank our NHS, from the UK travel & tourism industry <https://www.britainunites.co.uk>

The popular Imagine More Café at Strawberry Field is open but with a difference. Tables must be booked in advance by calling 07407088968.

Health and Safety

We're GOOD TO GO - Strawberry Field has been awarded Visit England & Visit Britain's industry wide health & safety standard for visitors known as "GoodToGo"

Visitors must book ahead to enable the team to control capacity across the exhibition, garden and shop. Social distancing of 2m must be adhered to on site. The site is currently operating limited visitor numbers.

Temperature checks are being conducted upon entry.

In line with the current UK government guidelines regarding wearing of masks, all visitors to our exhibition and retail store are kindly asked to wear a face covering in these areas.

Media guides are disinfected before each use and touchscreen bags and disposable ear covers are available.

Sanitising towers are available throughout the building.

All facilities including toilets undergo strict cleaning throughout the day.

Full details of health & safety standards can be found on the website <https://www.strawberryfieldliverpool.com/visiting-us-during-coronavirus>

The Salvation Army and Strawberry Field

Strawberry Field was purchased by The Salvation Army in 1934. The organization opened the site as a children's home in 1936 and for nearly 70 years the site supported some of Liverpool's most vulnerable children until it closed in 2005.

A young John Lennon lived nearby and played in the grounds. It eventually inspired him to write the song Strawberry Fields Forever.

The Salvation Army is a church and charity, working in 131 countries around the world, demonstrating Christian principles through practical support and friendship to people of all ages, backgrounds and needs.

The grounds and interactive exhibition

Visitors through the exhibition learn about the site's history and connection with The Salvation Army, including exclusive insights into the former Salvation Army children's home, John Lennon's childhood and the writing and recording of the famous song, as told by John's close friends and family. The Imagine More Café offers a tempting menu including breakfast, lunch and afternoon tea, sourced from local producers.

The shop stocks a wide range of exclusive Strawberry Field memorabilia. An online shop is also available <https://store.strawberryfieldliverpool.com>

The gardens, where John Lennon used to play as a child, offer a calm space for reflection and a place to explore spirituality.

Responsible Tourism

Profits from the Visitor Centre help to fund the Steps to Work programme, which supports local young people, aged 18-25 with learning difficulties and other barriers to employment. The programme aims to remove barriers and support trainees into employment. The 12-18 month employability programme includes an 8 week 'work readiness course' followed by 3, three month work placements with local employers, which could include the Strawberry Field shop, visitor exhibition, café or garden. These work placements include two days a week at work and two days a week at The City of Liverpool College.