



[Manchester Jazz Festival 2012](#)

Some reflections by **[Charlotte Starkey](#)** July 2012

“After silence, that which comes nearest to expressing the inexpressible, is music.”

(Aldous Huxley,
Music at Night and Other Essays
, 1931)

“If you find a note tonight that sounds good, play the same damn note every night.”

(Count Basie - recalled by Harry ‘Sweets’ Edison, trumpeter in
Count Basie’s Orchestra
)

In a key policy for urban renewal UNESCO defined a vision for humanising the city at the turn of the millennium, placing the individual at the centre of public policy and realising opportunities for cooperative action in the urban space (Brigitte Colin, *Unesco's Vision for Humanising the City* – 14th June 1996). Whilst she was a specialist in Unesco's involvement in the Arabian region, the vocabulary occurs frequently in discussions of urban regeneration globally: 'inclusiveness', cosmopolitanism, cultural access, the significance of the 'informal spaces' within the city environment – those spaces, events and situations where the initiatives arise from individual and group aspirations, rather than through recognised official and semi-official regulated social, political, educational and/or cultural formal arrangements.

This is not a new cry; it echoes concerns that reach back to nineteenth century social theorists. Outside the Town Hall, as the music played on the opening Saturday of the Jazz Festival, I read the blue plaque commemorating Alfred Waterhouse, the designer of the building completed in 1877; and I was reminded of an early influence on him, Augustus Welby Pugin who had published *Contrasts* in 1836. Pugin's manifesto forcibly articulated the dehumanising effect of cramped city spaces during the Industrial Revolution. He contrasted images of the nineteenth century city with its medieval counterpart, arguing for a return to Gothic style design. There we were last week, outside a triumphant example of a Gothic Revival building, one of the finest in Britain, endowed by merchants some of whose wealth in cotton was inextricably linked to the slave plantations of America.

Outside, in Albert Square the inheritors of the music and techniques of those slaves who created the blues resonated in rhythms and distinctive modes with those beautiful 'crushed notes'. As the jazz moved and swayed, the guitars, saxophones, trumpets and percussion were playing next to, within earshot of, the statue of Oliver Heywood, a wealthy Victorian philanthropist. He was not involved with slavery but it reminded me that the banking ancestors of the Heywoods, those of Liverpool, made their fortune in the 1700s in the transportation of slaves as the demand for cotton and other goods increased. In contradictory aspirations, embedded in the wealth of the cotton industry, the architecture of the Town Hall reflected that Victorian celebration of wealth combined with attempts to humanise the urban space of the Victorian industrial city.



<http://www.manchesterjazz.com>