

University gets closer to iconic band's swan song

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As a new film about late Joy Division singer Ian Curtis hits cinemas, archives reveal the band's final performance was at the University of Birmingham - a gig which unveiled other musical lasts and firsts.

On 2 May 1980 Ian Curtis, Bernard Sumner, Peter Hook and Stephen Morris (AKA Joy Division) performed at the university's High (now known as Chamberlain) Hall, a recording that would appear on their final album, *Still*. The night also saw the debut of *Ceremony*, which was to become the first single by New Order – the band formed by the remaining members of Joy Division, following the premature death of Curtis. This was the first and last time fans were able to see Curtis take lead vocals on the song as two weeks later the troubled front man took his own life.

Control, which is released in UK cinemas on 5 October, tells the story of Ian Curtis's rise with Joy Division to his suicide in 1980, aged 23. The group have since been acclaimed as one of the most inventive and influential bands of their era.

Dr Peter Webb a lecturer and researcher in Media Studies at the University of Birmingham, said: "Joy Division's influential shadow is writ large over the British music scene today, from groups as diverse as Massive Attack and The Editors we can see the huge homage that is paid to a band that only produced two albums and whose world came to an abrupt end with the suicide of singer Ian Curtis.

"Ian Curtis's lyrics and Martin Hannett's production proved a magical combination that electrified audiences across the Britain and Europe. Curtis was one of only a few lyricists that would get fans from diverse social backgrounds searching for the novels of Dostoyevsky and Ballard that he had mined for lyrical inspiration. Curtis provided many fans with an education and that is a feature of popular music that is sorely missed in the work of lyricists today."

The seminal High Hall gig was featured in University of Birmingham student publication, *Redbrick*. A reviewer, known as Johnny Jewell, wrote at the time: "Their name, and of course the excellent music they play, managed to fill High Hall with both students and non-students. Curtis's voice completes the air of darkness and foreboding brought out by the rest of the band in tracks such as 'New Dawn Fades' where the vocals are as brooding and distinctive as ever.

"The atmosphere at High was superb, a lot of people who'd turned up on the off-chance, amazed at the quality of the music."

Ends

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