



## **A report / a story / an audio montage**

**To get the most from this please wear headphones and click through the links where you will hear voices, music, and seagulls. The audio tracks will open on a separate page and you will then be able to navigate between this PDF and Soundcloud.**

**Andy Barrett / August 2026**

## Saturday July 4th

I arrive in Seaton at 10.30 in the morning to another calm sea and another blue sky. It's going to be a long hot day. One or two people are swimming, there's a flotilla of kayaks, and Seaton's Sunshine Samba band are beginning to assemble at the wonderfully named Fisherman's Gap as an open top bus pulls up and people look down wondering what is about to happen. Over a dozen sambistas appear and [Louise tells me](#) they practice at the Masonic Hall but that none of them are Masons. The town has some great venues for music, she tells me, it just needs *some funky bands to fill the seats*. That the cover bands, good as they are, aren't enough. The festival is *a blooming great idea – we really, really need something*.

Interest is being aroused and I ask those who are beginning to sit on the wall in the centre of the roundabout if they are aware of what is happening. It seems that more do this morning, one couple having arrived from Ottery after seeing the festival advertised on a beermat; *we thought follow the beermat and here we are*. Those that don't know seem really interested in the offer of free music at the Jurassic Stage, and I'll end up seeing many of them throughout the day.

There's a lot of lifting and carrying and technical work taking place as The Gateway, the Tram Station, and the Hideaway are set up. For [Harry, who runs the Daybreak Audio sound system](#) and is dusting off the speaker box this festival is a godsend. He's an electrician by trade but sound systems, events and parties are a passion *born out of a lack of scene, a lack of anything around here in East Devon ... it's always been missing something. The Grove was closing as I came of age so this was set up of necessity*. He's 29 now and from 18 onwards he remembers nothing happening; *it makes people move out ... being a young person in a town that's got no nightlife, no scene, it's depressing really*. When people head off to university, he tells me, they don't come back.



Harry built the sound system in a spare room in his house. His family have a smallholding where parties would be thrown. The sound system has been on the back burner for a few years because of life commitments; spaces and venues aren't easy to find. *It's very important for a town like Seaton to have East Devon Soul. It's sparked something back in me ... when you get an opportunity like this it makes you want to kickstart what you had before. I've got a really good feeling about this and I'm sure a lot of the town do.*

He tells me that festivals are disappearing, that grassroots festivals like this are 'super-important'; that he knows trying to get a festival off the ground is a long-term project, that things need time to build, that there will be a lot learnt from this year. But he's optimistic. *I've seen how much work they've put in and it's massive.* But for all the banners on the side of the road, all the social media and beer mats *word of mouth is more important in a small town like this.*

The sun is beaming; people are gathering for breakfast; they're all plugged in and the first records start playing. *It's such a nice vibe*, someone calls out to me as I leave. *What better space to have a music venue.*



I head down to the Jurassic Stage where Blow My Own Trumpet are about to start the day's programme. It's a wonderful amphitheatre space where a small stage has been set up in the middle. The sound is great and people are slowly beginning to arrive. A huge Tesco's is around the corner but doesn't seem to draw in many onlookers. Trams pass by and passengers look down as they wait to enter the shed where the stage is being built for the jazz programme this evening, curated by the London based Tomorrow's Warriors, the music education and artist development organisation that has launched Sons of Kemet, Moses Boyd, and Ezra Collective amongst many others. It's a huge achievement for a festival in its debut year to bring such talent to the town.

[Maria Nicol](#), the next act here, is an Exeter based jazz singer who, having played all around Devon and the South West, is in Seaton for the first time. She tells me it's been a challenging time as venues have been facing increased costs and so a festival like this is really important. *Live music connects people and musicians who want to express their ideas.* Like all of the musicians I speak to it's the mix of genres at this festival that fascinates her; the possibility that paying audience members and passers-by alike might discover something new.

After some sunny tunes from Bossa Belessa, the crowds now picking up, an electronic duo [Vacant Shores](#) play a really well received set of original material. They formed in 2012, stopped for a while, and then started playing again a year ago and have been *going mad writing music since*. Simon had seen them online and asked them to play. *Because we're electronic, we don't tend to fit in with the general aesthetic, especially the Bristol indie scene* and so opportunities like this need to be grabbed.

It's a mixed audience, mainly older people but some family groups as well. A few wear festival t-shirts. Some were out last night and some are moving on to other venues whilst others want to stay to hear as much as they can. Some are from the town, some have travelled from nearby, and some are those who have come further afield. [All are happy to talk.](#)

*We were quite surprised to find it here actually. As we came in on the tram, we heard the music so we thought we'd come and join everyone else.*

*People love live music – it's the atmosphere, the fact that you can actually watch the people playing, it's completely different to just listening to streaming or CDs.*

*When you get events like this put on here there's a sense of warmth and vibrancy that maybe can be lacking in more-high end, commercial, money-making events in big cities.*

*I love the fact that Seaton has live music. We have the venues and I want to support this as much as I can. We danced the night away yesterday.*

*I just want to wander around and drop in on whatever appeals. I like the fact that you have a pass and aren't bound to any one event; you can just come and go as you please.*

*We've been here about three years and it's good to see the way things are changing. There could still be a lot more, particularly for the kids. It's very sleepy for young people.*

I have [an interesting conversation](#) with a family group who tell me about the recent Band Together event at the Gateway that Sonny mentioned, which brought in a lot of younger people *who are obviously interested in live music, and they were all saying they wanted to see more.* The son tells me he's been listening to a lot of Tom Waits recently. He travels to Exeter to see live music, and plays guitar. I ask him if there was more of a scene here if he would like to form a band. He would.

Over at the Tramway the [young jazz musicians](#) who Tomorrow's Warriors have high hopes for are beginning to arrive. Emma, a saxophonist, is playing with the collective Ankora for the first time today. They play *energetic modern jazz with a hard bop sixties influence*. Ursula is a bass player who will also play in a trio with Klara Devlin, *doing some Monk tunes*. This is their first time in Devon and the first time they've played in a venue with tracks running through it, with people climbing onto and off of a tram *to go on a little journey*. They presume this won't be happening when they are playing, but it's clear from the way they are smiling that actually they hope that it will.

It's getting busy at The Gateway too, as Dr Meaker and David Kayode run through their sound checks. Some of the band members have their children with them. They are impressed with the space, and the tech teams are doing a great job. The Egg have arrived at the Old Picture House and started their soundcheck. The town is filling up and it's clear that something big is happening.

I [catch up with Andy](#) at the Hideaway. He tells me how taken aback he was with Friday, at having two venues *with completely different music and demographics but everyone dancing*. This is what he wants, what East Devon Soul wants, bringing people together, a festival that has something for everyone. *About showcasing all the different spaces, all the different music, and you can come and you know that there'll be something there for you and you'll stumble across something that you probably didn't know but you're going to be blown away by it.*

But it's not easy. The corporates have swallowed up a lot of the competition. Forty independent festivals have cancelled this year. *People at the grass roots have been on the same wage for the last 15 years. It doesn't trickle down*. But here, in Seaton, he's confident that a truly thriving festival can emerge. *It's about using the spaces we have here. We have power, we have water. There are a lot of local scenes that have difficulty to get a decent platform to showcase their music. We're going to build something amazing.*

But this will do for starters, and [everyone I speak to](#) - sitting in deck chairs, outside their beach huts, at the café tables, down on the beach below - agrees. Claire tells me it's better than she was expecting. She's come from the amphitheatre for *some drum and bass ... whatever it is, it's great*. Next year she'll make sure she gets a wristband for the whole festival. Paul thinks the town needs *lots of creative people like this turning up and doing stuff*. He's clearly impressed and can sense there's something in the air. And he's not the only one.

*You don't need to be on holiday in the Costa del Sol when you've got weather like this, the most stunning beach on the Jurassic coast, a great sound system playing, a really nice bar behind you, you can't ask for more ... it's as good as Café del Mar.*

---

David Kayode and his band are on early at The Gateway, 5pm, and there has been some concern about getting the crowd the band deserve, [but by the time Simon introduces them](#) the hall is filling up as people gather their wristbands and festival t-shirts begin to sell. It's a huge stage, the lighting looks great, and it's a venue that's crying out for music of this quality. The band go down a storm and they are all clearly [enjoying themselves](#).



*We've been driving all day to get here and we're so happy we made it. You guys have been amazing. What a beautiful day this is. I hope we can come back again!*

It's clear from [everyone I spoke to](#) – all thrumming with the energy of an incredible band – that nobody knew what to expect. *They should be top of the bill ... young kids, wonderful ... It's such a treat for Seaton.* (I hear this word a lot – that the town has been treated). A couple of women have come back early from their holiday to catch them. *They're going places and we might not get the chance to see them here again.* Seaton is always *nearly* they tell me, always apparently on the cusp of something that never quite appears, and that *this is fantastic*. Groups of people gather round the band, sat outside in the sun, to talk to them, to thank them, to tell them how good they were. It's lovely.

[Emma Marsh](#), the conga player for the band started playing when she was 6 or 7. That's when her life changed, all the way back then. I ask her about technique, being a part-time percussionist myself. *What's more important is that you immerse yourself in the music because you are contributing equally in that way by being involved in it, being a body and a soul that that music reaches and just feeling it. Because if you feel music, you can hit the drum with your elbow and it will sound good.*

She's speaking of soul, of the essence of this festival which has now burst wide open into bloom. She hadn't bought her trunks but managed to get a swim in anyway and is off to play at the Love Supreme festival tomorrow; *just travelling and reaching people.*



As [The Guns of Navarone](#) take to the stage – with Simon clutching his trombone and becoming, like co-organiser Andy, a festival performer – the dancing moves up a notch. Here are songs, and this is not the case for most of the festival, that are familiar to the audience; that trace the shape of their lives as music can do in a way that little else can.

I head down to the Tramway, where the trams have been tucked away for the night and a jazz venue has appeared in their place. Many of those who are sitting around the tables have bought a ticket specifically for this event, and are planning to watch all three bands across the evening. What comes across in conversation with so many of them is how excited they are to hear musicianship of this quality in Seaton. That – and again this word – it is a real treat.

[Betty Accorsi on saxophone and Andrea Martelloni on guitar](#) are spellbinding, my musical highlight of the festival, original compositions drawing on Pat Metheny, John Surman, and English folk. They usually play around the Brighton area and would come back again to Seaton at the drop of a hat. Betty can see how this festival is *very community inspired*. She loved the space - *it's very resonant* – but next year would love to play to audiences as they travel together on the trams.

Their fan base, Andrea tells me, is generally over sixty-five and they noticed this one was a bit younger, thanks to people coming down from other venues to have a listen. Jazz, he says, is becoming a conservatoire driven genre. It's a matter of outreach – how do you speak to a younger audience? But the further away you are from the cities and towns where there are plenty of venues and musicians the more likely you are to get a different audience. *People are more curious; there is a commercial and cultural opportunity to run a good venue and a good programme of music. There's a good balance between the offering and the demand.*

Kayla Painter has started the evening off at the Old Picture House, playing an ambient and experimental electronic set accompanied by visuals, as the Kaya Fayeh crew are still to arrive and a crowd of people of all ages assemble. I catch up with [Louise Cole](#), one of the directors of Sidmouth Coastal Community Hub who have been running Sidmouth Seafest for the last ten years. They also lead the Sea Spot Network for grassroots music organisations and festivals to *come together to kind of learn, share, share resources, have a moan together because it's bloody hard.*

She's impressed by the arts and culture support they've been getting from East Devon District Council and although *it's really small in the grand scheme of things, in terms of the actual economic value it's a brilliant start. There's benefits to the economy, to the residents and visitors. You need cultural tourism; you need to have well-being through music in your local population ... so please keep supporting.* And what she can see – what I can see – is the *absolute thirst* not just amongst young people, but those in their fifties and sixties who want to connect or re-connect with music. Everyone I have spoken to, and by now I have spoken to a lot of people, are full of joy and energy and wanting to talk to me. I think this is what 'buzzing' looks like; whether you're 18 or 80.

By 9pm every venue is in full swing and the town looks packed. [Andy gets to introduce](#) one of his favourite bands, Dr Meaker. *Hello everybody, thank you for inviting us to Seaton. But please, don't be seat-en, please stand up. Yes, that's what you're dealing with.* They sound great, the best live drum and bass band around and the perfect festival experience wherever you are.

Mickey Bliss is playing a funk, soul, and disco set at The Vault to crowds inside and out. The Klara Devlin trio have started their Thelonius Monk infused set at the Tramway, and the crowd at the Old Picture House are waiting for The Egg to ramp up the electronic dance vibe, more visuals playing behind them. They can be found at a lot of festivals, are often at Glastonbury (as can be seen by the amount of band t-shirts in the crowd) but [Paul Marshall](#), the bass player, can see there's something very unique about this one, *a smaller intimate festival built on community, where people come back each year and make friends or reconnect with friends ... being in the town is a bonus*. Again, the spread of musical styles is applauded (*what an open-minded place this must be*). They have a new guitarist and so have rehearsed more than they usually do and can see this festival *taking off; providing something new*.

---

*This has opened my heart completely. I feel so happy that finally something is happening here that really relates to me.* [Megan is 28](#) and moved from West Wales where she was a drum and bass DJ and is now a chef for an eastern fusion food truck. She heard Dr Meaker was playing and then *discovered all the different genres of DJs, happening everywhere*. She wants to get involved, to get her foot in the door with this festival if she can. She wants to make people happy through music. *The streets are dead most of the time but when something happens everyone is there. The crowd is ready waiting for you.*

[Neil](#) was promoting music events here many years ago, but couldn't get things to stick somehow. *It needs consistency, people who can bring bands and DJs in ... it needs a push*. It's got quieter in town, he thinks; there's not even the same tourist trade as there used to be. *And music is key to everything because it brings people together; everyone listens to some kind of music. It's a beautiful part of the world and needs a boost and from what I've seen today this is it.*

[Two friends of Sam](#), otherwise known as DJ Sortah, tell me that the event is bringing everyone together. *It's a very rare thing to have something going on in Seaton that isn't a tiny event that lasts an hour or two, but a proper festival. It gets everyone out, all ages.*

All ages. That really is what I'm seeing. People, many, many people, of all ages. Some have seen (their definitions) bossa nova, electronic music, and surf music. Some afro-jazz, ska, and dance music. There have been trumpets and laptops, drums and trombones, record decks and clarinets, electric guitars and double basses. Played by young musicians, older musicians, established musicians, emerging musicians; all with soul.

(Tomorrow I will be told by James, the owner of The Hideaway of the moment a woman came up to a DJ to tell him she recognised the classical music he was playing, just as the beats behind it kicked it. *I've never heard it like this before*, she told him, *but I love it.*)



I head down to see how things are at The Vault. [Mickey Bliss](#) has finished a two hour set of funk, soul, disco, and house, having done a back-to-back with Andy. *The most important thing is this beautiful setting; it's important to play the soundtrack for that.* He can see the festival can turn this sleepy seaside town into something more. And he also loved the surf rock band.

As Dr Meaker finish to a huge ovation and the final t-shirts are sold, most of the crowd spills out to head for one of the sound systems or the Tramshed [where Ankora are playing](#).



*I've never really listened to jazz before but I enjoyed it; the way it all came together. I thought I'd just try and experience the other sounds that are around this weekend ... It was really mellow after seeing Dr Meaker ... I've seen the surf group, the lady who sang the bossa nova, the ska band and the other jazz band but there was something particularly impressive about this young group this evening ... It's an excellent idea for Seaton to try and continue.*

I head down one final time to Cliff Corner with Sam, AKA Sortah, the Seaton based drum and bass DJ who played after Dr Meaker. It's his first gig in the town even though he's a resident DJ for a company and plays across the area. *It's huge for Seaton, [he and his friends tell me](#), I don't think I've ever seen as many people out in Seaton in one time.*

The crowd ahead looks huge, and the sound builds as the bass bounces off of the cliffs and away into the sea, bothering nobody but the fishes. A lit-up boat is sitting close-by; someone I later learn who having stumbled across Cliff Corner earlier, and knew he wanted to party here for the night, drove back to Beer (the next village along the bay) to sail over and dance for three hours before heading back. We enter into a huge ball of energy.



*Seaton needs this ...there is nothing that goes on here. This is the first thing that's happened in years. This weekend is really, really special. I can see my mates having a good time; I can see my mate's mum having a good time. This is so special for a town that is normally so sleepy and I think it should be cherished and I think it should be built upon.*

My microphone is struggling to cope. People come up to me to tell me how wonderful this is. How it has brought everyone together. How there hasn't been any kind of trouble at all. Something I hadn't even thought of as I drag myself (it's been a long hot day and I've not drunk enough water) for the final event of the festival, the 'junglist' Kaya Fyah at the Old Picture House.

The band have had a tough schedule, coming from Swansea via an afternoon gig in Brighton. They haven't been able to sound check, there are technical challenges, but the crowd are on their side, enjoying their energy and their music. Because they don't want this weekend to do what weekends always have to do.

There will be an after-festival beach party, a morning cook-up is planned at the camp site, and it looks like everyone sat outside of the venue, deep in bubbling conversation, will be holding onto this feeling for as long as they can.