

Up!

JANUARY 2024

YOUTH



Making the world a better place
one page at a time

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Up Front!

Welcome to 2024!

We write this introduction in the wake of the UK's first storm of the year - Storm Isha. Hopefully she hasn't left too much chaos in her wake for you, wherever you are.

So here we are, in the youth of a new year with all its promise ahead. We don't know about you, but here at Up! HQ we are hoping for a brighter and kinder year this year. Speaking of youth, welcome to our specially themed 'Youth' edition. Inside this month's magazine you'll find inspirational stories of young people who have followed their dreams and somehow managed to turn them into reality. There's also some great articles from our regular contributors, plus SIX whole pages of poetry!

Turn the page to get started!

Bridget & Harry x

Word Up!

YOUR POEMS ON THE THEME OF YOUTH

One thing I remember from my childhood home

was craning my torso out of my bedroom window,
twisting round to look up at the eaves,
where a small mud cup, simple and perfect
as a tribal village hut, was glued high up on the wall,
and from its tight round doorway, house martins
plopped like toothpaste from a tube, as if a big thumb
had gently pressed the nest, I mean they seemed
squeezed out, only taking sleek bird form
by virtue of emergence; and by some miracle
found their crescent wings in time to save themselves
from gravity, and chittering in glee swung away
above the roof.

Hanging half out the window

I watched them disappear from view, knew
they would be back, like Monday mornings,
like dad returning from his work and meals on the table.
Funny, how wild things seemed so dependable
in those days, and I was the one who would spread my wings,
leave home and not return.

Rose Lennard

Old Year, New Year

Our grandson visits as the old year ends.
His wife's by his side, unfurls their future.

Canada, for scholarship; a Doctorate,
at a parkland campus in downtown Toronto.
Two weeks holiday, first, and a rail ride
across the Oresund Bridge
from Malmo to Copenhagen.

Exciting but chilly we laugh.
They don't feel the cold
in their thrift store, brown suede,
fur collared coats - 70's vintage,
like those we wore fifty years back.

They promise to send photos
while we hunker in the warm,
remember the time
we quick-stepped through stations,
caught inter-city trains,
shook snow off our boots,
let it melt on our hair.

Sheila Jacob

beat generation

black tights
vast black polo-neck
parental disapproval
weird American poetry
that was all it took

Mandy Macdonald

Tune Up!

ALEX KIRTLEY

There's many a good tune played on an old guitar ...

As a long time associate of ours, we first met when you were a sixteen year old lad, who turned up at a session, playing early blues guitar like you were born to it! When did you first take up playing?

When I was about 12 or 13.

I started taking group guitar lessons younger than that, in primary school, purely as a way to get out of language lessons, I didn't learn much, they were classical lessons, and I've never cared much for that style, they all tell me I play wrong because I only use thumb and index for the most part, one lesson a friend at the time had figured out how to play Smoke On The Water and the whole session was thrown into chaos.

I did the same in high school, to get out of lessons, but didn't learn anything. At around 12/13 I started teaching myself banjo, a little later started learning guitar, I've played banjo on and off since then, guitar fairly consistently since I first figured out how to fingerpick.

Growing up, who were your musical influences?

I was one of the last generations who didn't grow up with a smart phone or the internet, so initially when I was a kid I would just listen to whatever was on the radio. Mainstream radio in the early to mid 2000's was questionable at best, I don't think I even knew who Bob Dylan was at this stage, at least not well. I would record cassettes of whatever piqued my interest on the radio, of course always missing the first 10 seconds before



I pressed the record button. I would take myself to markets to buy stacks of records before the record boom, when you could buy records for 10p each, regardless of title, there'd be Dylan and Springsteen in the same box as 'That's What I Call Music', and I did a lot of musical exploration there.

When I was about 10 years old we (my mum and I) got our first house computer and cable internet. It just so happened to be installed in my bedroom, so I would be on there constantly on an early incarnation of YouTube and found a lot of the people who would become my main influences: old blues guys and fingerstyle guitarists initially, Reverend Gary Davis, Merle Travis, Lightnin' Hopkins, Mance Lipscomb and Doc Watson being notable ones, then I would eventually find songwriters like Dylan, Steve Earle and the likes.

As well as being an ace guitarist, you also make and repair the things! How on earth does one learn to make a guitar?!

I developed a love of vintage and interesting old guitars in my mid-teens, these guitars always need work. The first guitar I bought with my own money was a 70's Yamaha, around the same time I got an old 12 string from the 50's which was whipped.

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ALEX KIRTLEY

I've had hundreds of guitars through my hands over the years, only a couple I've never had to at least tweak for my liking, and I figured out pretty soon that relying on a luthier to maintain this new found habit was going to be expensive, so I started figuring out what made them tick, what constituted a good set-up initially. Later curiosity taking hold I found myself wanting to figure out more and more, reverse engineering and dismantling multiple cheap guitars, modifying others, shaving the braces until the top couldn't hold tension anymore and making mental notes. Turns out, if you're a bit obsessive, a bit handy and do it



for long enough you can eventually make a guitar. My first guitar was built largely on the front room floor of my rented flat in Nenthead, Cumbria, the table saw lived in the hallway!

You've now built up a serious reputation as a luthier among respected pro musicians. What's it like working with your musical heroes?

I've worked with some interesting people. I've had a fair number of the members of Lindisfarne show up at my door, I had a promoter who used to book a lot of the folk acts like John Renbourne, Stefan Grossman and Bert Jansch up and down

A poster for a concert. The top part has a dark blue background with white text: "Martin Stephenson & The Daintees" and "+ special guest Alex Kirtley". Below the text is a black and white photo of a man playing an acoustic guitar. In the background of the photo, there are logos for "HAPLESS MUSICAL WORKERS" and "POP". At the bottom of the poster, on a dark blue background, is white text: "Pop Recs Ltd, Sunderland", "Saturday 28th October 2023 7.30pm", "£20 (+ booking fee)", and "www.seetickets.com".

the country, I frequently play with and have done work a lot for Martin Stephenson who has been around a fair bit. I enjoy the stories, I struggle to remember a lot of them at any one time, but I love a good tale!

Famously, BB King's darling guitar was named Lucille. Tell us a bit about your own favourite creation to date...

I was cursed with a love of vintage Gibson guitars in my teens, most people hate those skinny necks, I love them. I played a 1967 Gibson J50 as my main live guitar for years, I

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have a couple other 60's Gibson I play now, but I like a good time at a gig, and sometimes I play some unpredictable venues, so taking a guitar that's worth more than some of the cars in the car park is a foolish thing. I almost lost that j50 once. I decided I didn't want to risk it so made a highly personalised guitar in 2021 and another more ornate one in 2023 that couldn't be stolen and wouldn't be the end of the world if it got broken. Fender has the Stratocaster, I have the T**t-o-caster, a blend of some of my favourite vintage guitars, all tied together with a lovely dark sunburst (I spray a good sunburst!) and sprinkled with plenty of pearl inlay, my name up the fingerboard and a bird on the headstock of which I have a matching tattoo on my hand. This makes reference to a song I wrote a number of years ago and which has been pretty good to me. That's my 'go to' guitar and probably my favourite one I've built, certainly the most ornate - it looks like it belongs on the Grand Ole Opry in the 50's. Perfect!



Lastly, your phone rings and it's your dream client. Who's calling you and what do they want you to make for them?

It's always the same answer, whether it's who you want to have dinner with, have a drink with, jam with etc, it's always Tom Waits. He's mad, and so am I, we're two peas in a highly volatile and unpredictable pod. Whatever we would come up with, you can guarantee it'd be inspired by the 30's and be like something found in a Mississippi pawn shop and tripped over by Robert Johnson.



You can find out more about the amazing range of guitars and other instruments Alex creates here:

Kirtley Guitars
alexanderkirtley@hotmail.co.uk

Word Up!

YOUR POEMS ON THE THEME OF YOUTH

A Frosty Day In The Nineteen-Sixties

Mum walks down the front path,
treads a frost-white pavement
before she turns uphill;
foot-sure, in fleece-lined,
mock-sheepskin boots
that fasten up the middle.

She says I can borrow them,
later, when I go out,
plan to mooch in the record shop,
buy a few singles
from the Reduced for Sale rack.

Too frumpy, I think;
let my toes chill, the soles
of my shoes slip-slide –
skid, fall, cry my way home,
empty handed, tell Mum
the wind stung my eyes;

wish I'd stepped
into the worn warmth of her,
zipped it round my ankles.

Sheila Jacob

Let's hear it for the girls

Lochwood High

I'm out, Toilet Pass again,
that teacher never notices.
Now get that door locked fast,
who knows who'll come in.

James H has the bluest eyes

Lean back, enjoy the quiet in here,
do that zen thing. Imagine the loch.
Pity these cubicles are such a mess.

Mark S is the Best

Wish it was peaceful at home.
Wish Dad would just go away,
stay away, leave Mum & us alone.

*But we all know Mark
hands everywhere*

Stop reading the stupid graffiti,
you've heard all the gossip.
Same old, same viscous old.

Rob's really fit

Think instead about last night
in the cafe. Those dark eyes,
that sweet mouth. Such silk hair,
the curve of her breast and
those words, those words.

Finola Scott

Growing Up!

STEVE LOWE

Back to the future with Up!'s Outdoors Man

Last week, I was gazing at a portrait of myself, dressed up in denim jeans, studded boots, an Anti-Nowhere League T-shirt and hair spiked into thick peaks. Not for nostalgia, although that was the effect, but because my sister had gifted me a copy of "Beserker"- the life story of Adrian Edmondson, also known as Vivien in the Young Ones. I was a spitting image, complete with stars on the forehead.



Also pictured are three of my former nursing colleagues, similarly attired as members of "The Young Ones", gathered around an old hospital bed at Wallsend Rising Sun park having just completed a fund-raising "bed-push" to raise money for equipment for the new Rake Lane Hospital. I can't remember if we won, but we had a laugh and we all really looked the part.

Nowadays, I have more skin on my bonce than hair, but the photo sparked many recollections of many of the stupid/daring/interesting/worthy things that formed part of my youth. No computers then, but TV and Film media as well as the inevitable music certainly went into the cocktail stirrer of the most formative part of my life - my Youth.

Thinking back (yes into school days) it is now obvious just how much of the current ME was as a result of those early years and how it could so easily have been different depending upon the circumstances. I am a Baby Boomer, born in the Swinging 60s. This will be a surprise to many of my mates as they all think I was formerly employed as a Victorian sweep's boy or perhaps went to sea as a midshipman with Nelson, as most young people in previous decades. But no - I managed to evade world wars, grew up with pop and rock music, with sci-fi, Star Wars and disco, long hair, loons and star jumpers. In the days when a Mars Bar cost a few pennies and was a proper mouthful and early mornings were full of newspaper or milk rounds, whatever the weather.

This was undoubtedly the time that my own environmental awareness was sparked to life. I don't know who was responsible for that - it



may have been Blue Peter (very worthy), Magpie perhaps (more hip) or even I-Spy books.

Outdoors was encouraged and I recall saying goodbye to mum at breakfast then spending the rest of the day climbing trees, damming rivers and pestering great crested newts or grasshoppers next to the railway line where the trendy new diesel engines gradually replaced the smoky steam trains.

Growing Up!

STEVE LOWE

I recall vividly, however, joining Watch and tramping down to a local stream to pull out old bikes and other bits of rubbish, catching insects and using them and other things to check on the quality of local water courses. I am really pleased that Wildlife Watch, as it is now known, is still going strong and mounts regular campaigns on similar issues. This provides one easy way into becoming involved and engaged in environmental issues. As do a growing number of other groups and organisations including the Scouts, John Muir, DoE and lots more.

Because the world we live in needs more people to help than ever before and in my experience, it is the young people who see this and advocate for change more coherently than many of my own contemporaries. And many are more willing to DO rather than talk about doing.

I am really fortunate, in my various roles, to work with young people a lot. Their energy, passion and commitment can act in a very



positive way, usually to mutual benefit. We can all take real inspiration from the establishment of Wild Inigue who have the strapline of 'inspire-educate-rewild'.

I have known these three young people, Heather, Cain and Phil for some time. In fact, Cain was at school with my own son and we became friendly due to shared interest in wildlife, mainly birds. They set up *Wild Inigue* as a Community Interest Company and over recent years it has grown to become a well established and innovative movement, involving landowners and others in new approaches to caring for the environment. Heather states, *"I absolutely love creating fresh ways to share the enchantment of nature with others, enticing people away from their usual routines - which we're all guilty of becoming a little trapped in - in place of an adventure in the wilds. After all, who can resist a night of bat watching, pizza making and marshmallow toasting over a night of telly?"*

"I wanted to inspire and engage people through ethically captured photography and film of our British wildlife, to ultimately encourage them to journey just a little further into the wilds; whether urban or rural" is Cain's motivation and this has seen him working around the world, but most notably his local work such as the Tyne Kittiwakes brings a local flavour and passion.

For Phil, *"every day becomes an adventure and nature presents you with a gift!"*

Indeed - pizza and bats! I know how well received their work is and how inspired people have been by their activities. They currently have a focus on urban areas and, as this is where most people are likely to have wildlife encounters, it's perhaps more important to raise awareness in these areas. For many schools no longer have the time to include real experiences of the outdoors because of timetabling pressures and a million and one other constraints, not least of which is

Growing Up!

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safeguarding. Yet I have seen young people learn more in a Forest School activity than endless tests and exams will provide them. I am a huge advocate of outdoor learning.

Another fabulous example of this is Northumberland's "Young Adventurers", who are based in Seahouses, but operate across the county. Meeting regularly at weekends, they assist existing projects with a wide range of



Is a FREE and exciting new project brought to you by Seahouses Development Trust. It is aimed at 13 to 18 year olds.

You can expect some practical conservation work as well as FUN activities, that can be physically and mentally challenging. It all takes place in and around Northumberland. It is a good chance to meet new friends, try new activities and gain some life experience.

for more information please contact Jane
Email: jane@seahouses.org
Facebook: @seahousesyoungadventurers
Tel: 01665 721 868



environmental activities from tree planting to removal of invasive species. They have also done water quality testing (there is a theme) and lots of other activities always with a smile and a joke. It is entirely voluntary, and they are eager to learn and share

their own experiences too, so these are always days that I look forward to. Most importantly, the leaders treat everyone as equal, so the individuals are equally involved and motivated. Definitely one for your own young people if the chance arrives!

Two small examples of local initiatives, where the "Young Ones" have taken the initiative. I know there are many more out there, including those previously mentioned from my own Youth, but many where action and change is the aim, like Surfers Against Sewage and their clean beaches initiatives.



Young Adventurers

Given that "your youth" is the melting pot for your future life experiences, I personally believe the global, national and local society should work much harder to facilitate and support young people to play their vital part in developing solutions and options for their, and their offsprings', futures.

Don't leave it to the rest of us (tank tops/mullets/millionaire footballers/the Smurfs).



An experienced wildlife professional, Steve currently works freelance with Northumberland Rivers Trust as well as undertaking work with volunteers on local heritage and archaeology projects.

His hope is to leave the world a better place.

Word Up!

YOUR POEMS ON THE THEME OF YOUTH

Colour of Sixty-Two

Late November: tall rangy girl
loups ahead of me along the high street,
coat the colour of coconut ice, brazening it out
against the grey of an English afternoon,

and zing! on my unpainted lips
the taste of Revlon 'Love That Pink', kisses
on the university lawn, the perfect heat
of a Sydney summer smiling down
on me eighteen and away from home
and buying my own make-up
and courting occasions of sin
in 1962.

Mandy Macdonald

Alchemy

Still they try to find it,
the secret of eternal youth,
the women with their heavy made-up masks,
the men with their toupees,
the nip and tuckers,
the stretchers and smoothers.
Like the alchemists of old searching
for the secret of turning base metal to gold,
they're searching,
searching,
searching,
endlessly searching
magic and science
as they get older
and older
still.
And still
the fountain of youth eludes them.
And all the alchemists are dead.

Lynn White

Youths

We were all unfriendly youths once,
whether or not we wanted to be;
bootfalls bristling the shopkeepers,
blowing nice families to the other side of the road
with teenage glee shrieked from a blackjacked tongue.
Who knew what horrors haunted our backpacks?
Paper-wrapped bangers, filched Sylvia Plath.
But one thing, as we slowed from our running
in the dust hung in the low sun on the tracks,
a kind eye—or one looking back—might catch:
all that loitering on street corners
was really about puzzling out a path.

Megan Pattie

Sing Up!

HECTOR GANNET

The Fog on the Tyne is all his, all his. Meet a songwriting rising star.

Thanks for agreeing to talk to Up!, Hector. It's great to see someone from own backyard meeting with such acclaim. Do you think coming from the post-industrial heartlands of the north-east influences your music? And if so, how?

Most definitely. I've always tried to be true to myself as an artist, even down to just singing in my own accent, as it comes naturally, otherwise it would just feel insincere and a bit meaningless to me. I was born and grew up in North Shields, surrounded by immensely proud, hardworking people, a family with strong ties to the history and heritage of the town, and I reckon those values were instilled in me at a very early age.

The place and the people around me have undoubtedly made me the person I am, both the good and bad bits, so naturally it influences the art that I create, it's unavoidable really but like I say, that's what keeps it honest, the fact that it all comes from a very real, human place is what gives it substance. That said, I wouldn't say that I'm conscious of it when I'm writing or that I make an effort to write about the area in particular, I never really sit down with the intention to write about anything actually. I find songwriting to be a pretty strange process really, I have to get myself into a sort of meditative state, like opening a valve, all this random stuff drips out but when I come to piece it together I can usually trace it back to things I've heard or seen, experiences I've had but often not given much thought to until it works its own way out of my head. In that sense, it's impossible for me to write about anything but the places and the people I've been exposed to.



Did you have a particularly musical or performance upbringing?

No I wouldn't say I did really. I was certainly encouraged to pursue it and I was really fortunate that my Mam and Dad recognised that I was doing something that I loved, but the rest of my family weren't particularly musical, just really supportive!

My uncle did play the guitar and he showed me a few things, and I had a handful of lessons with a local teacher but to be honest I was always more interested in finding my own way around it, and creating something of my own rather than being told what to do. I'm probably technically a terrible guitarist because of it - I'd be hopeless playing in someone else's band, I don't really have any idea what I'm playing most of the time, so if someone asked me to play something in a specific way I'd really struggle.

My own songs are full of chords that I've just stumbled across when I've been messing around, I couldn't tell you what they are, I'm lucky that the lads in the band know how to decode it and make sense of it all, they're proper musicians! As far as a performance upbringing goes, that came about when I started playing in a band with my mates from school, one of which, Jack Coe, still plays drums in my band today. We used to get together and play covers, we got pretty good and managed to get some gear together to go out and play live in

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HECTOR GANNET

pubs and venues around the north-east. That was an education in itself and looking back I'd say I owe a lot to that period. We cut our teeth performing in rowdy pubs when we were still at school, about 14



or 15 years old, playing to punters who were out on the lash, who didn't necessarily come out to listen to you, and who would let you know if they weren't keen on the noise you were making. I definitely learned a few things about performing there that I don't think you'd get at stage school.

Tell us about your musical influences growing up ...

The earliest memory I have of really enjoying music is of sitting in the back of my Dad's car and listening to a Rolling Stone's compilation CD that he had, I couldn't have been more than 7 year old. Just a tremendous sound, it's amazing to think it can have that affect on someone so young isn't it? It's like a primal thing or something, magical. I was properly hooked, all I wanted to do was make



a racket. Once I had a guitar I was off and running. Hundreds of influences came and went, but the big one came when I was about 14. The Clash were and still are my favourite band, I loved absolutely everything about them. I couldn't tell you what sparked it really. Strummer's lyrics were a massive influence on me, not just as a someone learning to write songs, but as a human being, it gave me an identity and a ideology that I really believed in right when I probably needed it most, and it opened the door to so much incredible, inspirational music. It's just a shame I was 30 odd years late to the party.

Would you say your influences have changed or developed over time?

Like I say, The Clash are always there, and there are a few other constant inspirations that I don't think will ever fade. I suppose that's the power of music and art, you find that you can continuously return to the same place, there's definitely something comforting in the familiarity of it, but at the same time, I find I can always pull something new from it. My influences on a whole definitely shift and wander down different avenues as time and mindset moves on, and my output changes as a result. Alan Hull is certainly another pillar of inspiration for me. I suppose it's been fairly well documented now that I'm a huge fan. I really adore everything about his music, it's the truth, like all my favourite artists, when he opens his mouth I believe everything he's saying and you can feel the honesty and passion in there. That's really what inspires and influences me now, it not so much about the genre, it's certainly not about the clothes they wear or the place they're coming from, if I can tell that they mean it, then I'm listening.

Sing Up!

HECTOR GANNET

A difficult question to answer, we know (but we thought we'd ask all the same!). What is it that motivates you to sit down and write a song? Is it a burning notion, or a particular hook or something else?

That's something I've asked myself a lot to be honest - what is it that drives us to put all this effort into it? It would make for a far easier life if I didn't feel the need to spend so much time obsessing and pouring over music. I honestly don't think I could stop writing if I tried, it's constantly happening whether I like it or not.



Like I said earlier, I usually have to get myself into a sort of meditative state and allow the subconscious to take over for a while, most of the time I'll be sat going over the same repetitive chord pattern for hours on end and a line or vocal melody will inevitably appear that sticks around. Sometimes though, ideas arrive at totally inconvenient and inappropriate times. I find myself zoning out of conversations with people, probably

making myself look unbelievably ignorant because something has happened or something's been said that I know would make for a great starting point. If it's an idea for a lyric then I'll be pulling it to bits in my head trying to find all the different roads I can go down with it, what it means on the surface and how it could be taken metaphorically. If it rings true for me and I have some sort of emotional response to it then I know it's worth exploring. I really can't help it, for some reason there's this need to paint a picture of it all. I think it's like that for most artists, perhaps it's therapeutic, a way of making a bit more sense of the world and how it all relates to us.



Lastly, what are your hopes for 2024?

I'm focusing on writing at the moment and we'll hopefully be back in the studio very soon, which is really exciting. A bigger release should be in the pipeline shortly to follow on from the recent single 'The Minute Hand' which came out at the end of 2023. To further celebrate that release we're heading out for a few live dates at the end of January/ beginning of February: Shields, Manchester, Leicester, Stockton and Carlisle. Then a few more local dates throughout the year, tickets for all of which can be found at hectorgannet.com!

Look Up!

Thought you knew about young people? Try this quiz, just for fun (answers on page 21).

1. Who was the UK's youngest ever Prime Minister?
2. How old was the youngest ever marathon runner?
3. Who was England's youngest ever Monarch?
4. In 2018, who broke the record for being the youngest ever 'Time person of the year'?
5. Last year 4 year old Saeed Rashed AlMheiri of Abu Dhabi became the youngest person to ever do what?
6. In 2011, what was unusual about 17 year old Marc L. Griffin of Greenwood, USA?
7. Kate Bush wrote her hit song *Man With The Child In His Eyes* at what age?
8. Which leader began conquering other lands at 18 and died at 32, never having lost a battle?
9. At 17 I had a commanding army role, chopped off my hair, wore men's clothes and went into battle, beating the enemy and becoming a national hero in the process. I was executed two years later and later canonised. Who am I?
10. Who wrote his first symphony aged 8 and died insolvent at 35, leaving behind over 600 works?



Youth has no age.

Pablo Picasso

I hope to continue to inspire our nation's youth to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering, and math so they, too, may reach for the stars.

Ellen Ochoa

Worse than not realizing the dreams of your youth, would be to have been young and never dreamed at all.

Jean Genet

There is a Fountain of Youth: It is your mind, your talents, the creativity you bring to your life and the lives of the people you love. When you learn to tap this source, you will truly have defeated age.

Sophia Loren

Word Up!

YOUR POEMS ON THE THEME OF YOUTH

Benjamin Button

It's your birthday on Sunday and I've bought you a watch to replace the Rotary you found at that flea market near Episkopi. Last week the winder broke, and you were having trouble reading its gold face, dashes where numbers should be. So I gave you your gift early: a bold Armani with big numbers, easier to read. You like it, but fine motor tasks challenge you these days: you need help opening Kitkats, doing up zippers, matching buttons with holes; and you struggle buckling the new leather so I strap the watch to your wrist, ask what time is it and you tell me. You are a small, happy child again and I remember when we first met. I worked with children, had a quick eye for laughter; you had a grown-up job, all stiff suits, air of responsibility. I invited you to my house for dinner on your birthday that year, felt you needed to loosen up, find your inner child. I made spag bol, jelly and ice cream, a cake with many candles. You blanched at the sight of the spaghetti, unused to messy eating. They taught me how to hold a knife properly at the Officers' Mess in Brize Norton, you said. I've never eaten a main course with a spoon. You relaxed more with the jelly and ice cream, said red jelly and Walls vanilla used to be my favourite and I said it can be again. I sang Happy Birthday as you blew out the candles. We ate great slices of cake in front of the fire. I toasted you with ginger beer. That night you saw how fun life is for a child; but you've taken it too far. I have to cut up your meat these days, check your shoes are on the right feet.

Rachel Davies

Next month's theme is: RELATIONSHIPS

Feel free to interpret the theme as you see fit
and send up to 3 poems to:
admin@positivelyup.co.uk

Full submission details can be found on our
website: [https://positivelyup.co.uk/poetry-
submissions](https://positivelyup.co.uk/poetry-submissions)

Coast Up!

JENNIFER C WILSON

Up!'s resident marine biologist is all at sea - the Baltic Sea

There are, as always, so many angles I could take on the theme 'youth.' From early childhood memories of shuggy-boats and chip-stealing gulls, to gratuitous images of adorable baby marine critters; there's a lot going on.

My choice though, has been to think of the oceans as almost sentient beings, and talk about the possible baby of the bunch: the Baltic Sea.

I say 'possible,' since there are other contenders. It's estimated that the Baltic Sea formed 10-15,000 years ago, as the Scandinavian ice sheets gradually melted. The Baltic basin filled until it overflowed ~11,700 years ago, forming the initial sea.

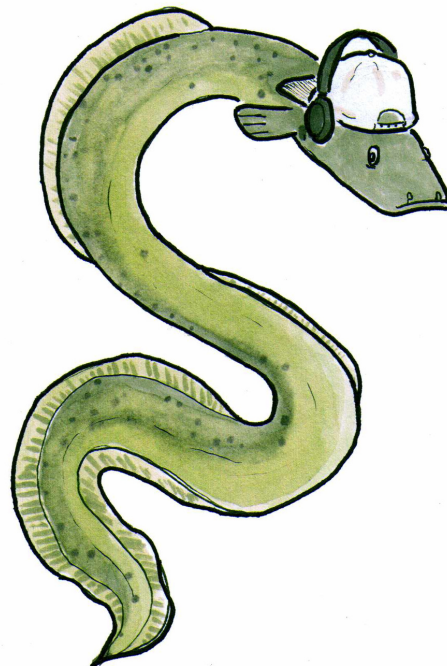
The Black Sea potentially formed only 5-7,000 years ago, based on geological evidence, but analysis of its flora and fauna has shown that it's actually substantially older than this.

Besides, as somebody who has recently spent a LOT of time studying part of the Polish Baltic coastline, I feel a certain affection for this peculiar sea.

Why peculiar, I read you ask? Because the Baltic is the world's largest inland brackish sea, with salinity levels much lower than most oceanic waters. This, in hydrological terms, is due to the large volumes of freshwater running into the basin, but sticking with the theme of 'youth,' I quite like to imagine it instead as a bit of a teenager, neither fully fresh nor fully saline, still finding its place in the world.

Also, 'brackish' sounds sufficiently like 'brattish,' so that works.

Having been researching the biological communities offshore of the proposed site of Poland's first nuclear power station, there is also some potentially teenaged behaviour in its eel populations. For those who don't know, European eels are diadromous, i.e., they spend part of their lives in freshwater (rivers / lakes), and part in the sea's saline waters. (If you really want to be pedantic, this makes eels specifically catadromous, in that they spend most of their lives in freshwater, migrating to the sea to spawn.) Or rather, they should be. In the Baltic, the signals detected by eels to help them identify their home river (often through currents; they have no homing instinct like other diadromous species such as salmon), are often not strong enough to show differentiation between the river and the 'sea.' As a result, much like disgruntled teenagers, they simply do not return home as expected, and instead, hang out in the Baltic main.



An illustration of this newly-discovered juvenile eel stage (potentially not 100% zoologically accurate, but I'm a marine biologist, so you'll just have to accept what I say at this point!) has been provided by Oscillating Brow (previous contributor to the Heroes edition in August 2023).

Coast Up!

JENNIFER C WILSON

One thing which surprised me about the Baltic is just how popular a beach destination it was. I mean, coasts always attract tourists, regardless of temperature, there's just something about all that blue, but I mean actual beach holidays. Just look at those endless white beaches, crystal clear waters (very little suspended sediment / pollution in there), and gorgeous sand dunes backing the beaches. Without wanting to accidentally turn into the Polish Tourist Branch, I was very much looking forward to going on a site visit and seeing the place up close. Sadly, it never happened.



So, there you go; a youthful sea, and hopefully a new insight for you, into an area that I had certainly been picturing wrong all these years, assuming it was a highly-saline, freezing-cold, and not-very-exciting patch of water. I was happily wrong.

And perhaps that's the point at which I can turn to the moral point of the article, and say that we shouldn't make assumptions about the 'youth of today' (and yes, at thirty-nine years old, I have indeed found myself saying that, not in an ironic way, which is depressing).

Just because the Baltic Sea is young, and full of potentially-confused eels, it's still a fascinating and exciting area, full of opportunities and thrill.

Alright, I've probably stretched the metaphor of the Baltic Sea as a teenager as far as I can now and will stop.

As always though, there's a Bigger Picture Plan in mind, and I've left time to talk about / share images of some of the cutest little marine critters out there.

I've said this before, that I think the Arctic is blessed with some of the most aesthetically-pleasing juvenile creatures, with seals, Arctic foxes, and polar bears. On that basis then, for no other reason than them being adorable, do enjoy these gorgeous images: guaranteed endorphins for all! I mean, unless you're something which their mums and dads might consider prey to keep their cuteness levels going...



*As well as being a full-time marine biologist,
Jennifer also writes historical fiction.*

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Word Up!

YOUR POEMS ON THE THEME OF YOUTH

University - Week One

Like Rapunzel, she is locked in a tower.
She doesn't want a Prince to save her:
She wants friends and her familiars.

She rides the lift,
Stares back at herself.

She could sing karaoke like a caged bird
She could play pointless pool
She could tread mill the days away
But she chooses not to
Because these are foreign places
Which speak only of far away and not of home.

She stares down into a courtyard
Where stone sofas seem hard and unforgiving.
She is both restless and still,
Still waiting for her release.

In the distance, peaks peep above the city's shoulders
Echoes of the home hill, the city seems to shrug them off.
They fade in the damp dazzle of bright lights and opportunity.

Oh Rapunzel, my Rapunzel, let down your hair
And see the steps to the future that are there for the taking.

Sarah Russell

Escape!

Tyres and heart hard-wired & pumped,
chain & second-skin gloves fastened tight,
I acrobat-throw my leg over the top tube,
slip in cleats, sweet and neat and I'm off!

Bump bouncing the kerb, racing the cycle lane,
I ignore buses & tooting, swearing white vans.
I am rubber plastic elastic, free, furious and laughing,
laughing. My head's high and helmetless.

No panniers, lights or horn. I own it all, invincible.
Eager to scoop mountains on midnight trails.
Muscles firm - gluteus maximus, quadriceps, calves.
Bring it on. Tomorrow is now!

Finola Scott

Youth

Sometimes brief,
sometimes unique,
a spring in evolution,
a beautiful transformation
where a body
and a mind
are roots
absorbing
the universe,
searching
for energy and meanings.

Adriana Rocha

Read Up!

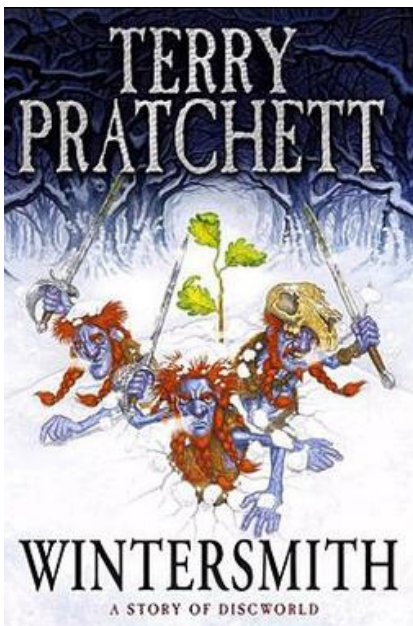
JENNA WARREN

In the world of literature, youth isn't always wasted on the young



As this month's theme is 'youth', I thought I would review three novels with young protagonists. All three books are inspired by fairy tale and myth, and will hopefully appeal to teenage readers as well as adults.

Last year I had the pleasure of rediscovering my love for Terry Pratchett. I first read his Discworld novels when I was a teenager, but I had not read one in around ten years. However, watching the wonderful TV adaptation of *Good Omens* (from the novel co-written with fellow fantasy writer Neil Gaiman) made me want to revisit his work.



After re-reading both *Good Omens* and *Maskerade* (my personal favourite Discworld book), I decided to read a Pratchett I had not read before. I chose *Wintersmith*, part of a series of novels about trainee witch Tiffany Aching. I've always loved Pratchett's witches: they're practical, gossipy, funny and have a razor-sharp insight into human nature.

Tiffany is nearly fourteen, and is apprentice to Miss Treason, a terrifying yet well-respected witch. One evening, at the start of winter, Tiffany makes the mistake of dancing with the wintersmith. He's an elemental, the Spirit of Winter itself. He falls in love with Tiffany, and soon he's creating snowflakes and icebergs in her image. A part of Tiffany thinks this is all very 'cool' (pun absolutely intended), but she also sees how dangerous it is. The wintersmith wants to cover the world in an eternal winter, with Tiffany as his queen.

As well as being an interesting retelling of the Hades and Persephone myth, this book is also as funny as one would expect from Pratchett. Highlights for me included Horace the sentient cheese, and the scene with the chickens ("They weren't making much noise, just the occasional 'werk' a chicken makes when it's a bit uncertain about things, which is more or less all the time"). I also loved the Nac Mac Feegles, a tribe of tiny men who have vowed to protect Tiffany, and who follow her wherever she goes.

The thing I love most about Terry Pratchett is his way of combining absolute silliness with moments of great poignancy or profundity. This is very much in evidence when, with an act of compassion, Tiffany manages to defeat the Spirit of Winter ("She'd cry, later, for the wintersmith who wanted to be human"). At the risk of sounding like a complete fangirl, which I am, this is beautiful writing.

Read Up!

JENNA WARREN

Having revisited Terry Pratchett, I decided to revisit Neil Gaiman. I had only read a couple of his books and have always intended to read more. I chose *Stardust*, mainly because I enjoyed the film.

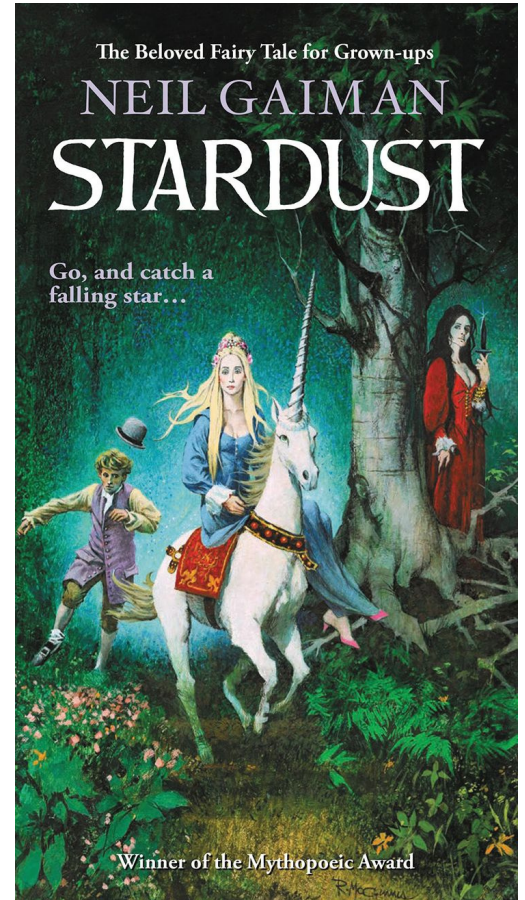
The plot of *Stardust* borrows heavily from traditional fairy tales, so it has a classic feel about it as soon as you start reading. The novel begins in Wall, a village in Victorian England. The village is called Wall because of its proximity to a large stone wall, with a gap which is an entrance to Faerie.

The story follows Tristran Thorn, a young man who believes he is in love with a girl called Victoria. One night, they both see a star fall from the sky. Tristran vows to enter Faerie and retrieve the fallen star in the hope of winning Victoria's love.

Tristran does not know it, but he is half fairy, and his father met his mother when he too visited the other side of the wall. He's also unaware that other people are looking for the star: the King of Stromhold has promised his throne to the son who finds it. And the Lilim – the three witch-queens – know the star will restore their youth.

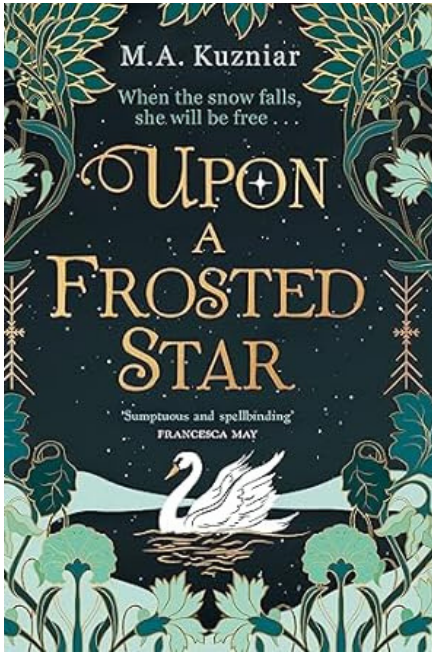
Eventually Tristran finds the star, but it turns out that she's a living being, a beautiful woman called Yvaine. Yvaine initially has no intention of following Tristran just so she can be a prize for his beloved. But with the other characters pursuing them, they embark on a perilous journey together.

This novel is partly about a hero heading out on an adventure, discovering who he is, and growing to adulthood. In this aspect, it has much in common with many traditional tales. However, it is also interesting because Gaiman places great importance on the journey, rather than the eventual triumph of the hero. Spoilers ahead: the witches eventually give up, but in a poignant sort of way which really works. And when Tristran learns that he is, in fact, heir to the throne of Stromhold, he chooses to continue travelling with Yvaine for many years, so they can both explore more of the world. This feels like a playful subversion of the sort of stories where everything is neatly wrapped up in the end (This is in interesting contrast to the film, which is lovely but feels more conventionally plot-driven). And, because it's by Neil Gaiman, it's beautifully written with some nice touches of humour.



Read Up!

JENNA WARREN



Upon a Frosted Star by M A Kuzniar is a fantasy novel inspired by the story of Swan Lake and set in the 1920s. The main character, Forster, is a young artist estranged from his family. One day, he finds a cryptic invitation to a grand party at a country house. These parties seem to happen once a year, whenever the first snow falls. Forster finds himself falling in love with the mysterious host, a ballerina called Detta.

Determined to get closer to her, he witnesses her transformation into a swan, and learns she is under a curse. Detta and Forster fall in love, and Forster vows to free Detta from the spell.

The writing is rich and immersive, befitting a story based on (and partly about) ballet. I particularly loved the descriptions of Rothbart's elaborate theatrical performances. This is a tragic love

story which follows Swan Lake quite closely, while also adding its own interesting, imaginative flourishes. It is another wonderful fairy tale retelling which is perfect for the winter.

Happy reading!

*Jenna Warren is a bookseller and writer from Teesside. She studied Theatre and later Creative Writing at university. She runs Book Corner, an independent bookshop in Saltburn-by-the-Sea. Her debut novel, *The Moon and Stars*, was published in 2022 by Fairlight Books.*



Quiz Answers

1. William Pitt (Pitt The Younger), elected at age 24
2. 5! Budhia Singh – now aged 21 – ran 40 miles in India in just over 7 hours.
3. Henry VI. He succeeded his father, the rather more famous (and in retrospect vastly more successful) Henry V, aged 9 months.
4. Greta Thunberg, aged 16
5. Publish a book. He's described as 'a thinker and innovator'. You don't say!
6. Already a high-flying attorney, he was appointed as a Federal Judge.
7. 13
8. Alexander The Great
9. Joan Of Arc
10. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Word Up!

YOUR POEMS ON THE THEME OF YOUTH

Down Plank

Let's go Dahn Plank!
our flat East Midlands vowels
the same sound in each word.

A narrow twitchel behind the school,
between the hawthorn hedges
of the last houses in the village
winds down to the small wooden bridge
over the Golden Brook
into the fields beyond.

So bold, this venturing
beyond the village boundary,
the eyes of nosey neighbours.
Escape is glorious. We play
hide and seek in the hay meadow,
pick buttercups and lady's smock
until hunger drives us home.

In teenage years
we go Dahn Plank
with our shy,
clumsy boyfriends,
play different games
in the tall grass.

Tonnie Richmond

Fair exchange

There is wisdom in the young.
An eagerness to know
all the lyrics yet unsung,
all the saplings still ungrown.

There is energy to spare,
to run ahead of aged shanks.
A willingness to share
the wonders found in fields and banks.

There is an honest trust to mould
in one who'll grasp the offered hand,
and let its steady warmth unfold
a safety net against uncharted land.

Youth bestows wholehearted love on age
Which lends new life to all who will engage.

Gerda Pickin

Pebble

A child bends down
inspects a stone
squats now on haunches
to get a closer look

her brow furrows
along lines that don't exist
but will one day
when life has done its work

but now the world is there
wrapped up in that single moment
of somber concentration
as that milky lustrous pebble
fills her mind.

Tonnie Richmond

Coming Up!

We don't know about you but, despite all evidence to the contrary, having put together this month's issue we're feeling as buoyant as ever we did in our teens!

So what's coming up next? Well, February is obviously the month of that old romancer, Valentine. However, our focus won't be solely on romance, instead we'll be exploring all sorts of relationships ... those awkward, difficult things which are hard to get precisely right, but are nigh on impossible to live well without!

So come along next month for those things which are at the heart of all our most loved communities - relationships.

Until then, take care of yourselves and each other.

Much love
Bridget & Harry (and Alfie) xx



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