

IN THIS SECTION:

[A legacy that's built to last](#)

Breaking Ground: Adventures in Life and Architecture
By Brian Morton

[A life story from the dark side of America](#)

Theatre: Penny Arcade: Bad Reputations - Tron Theatre, Glasgow run ended ★★★★★
By Mark Brown

[Adventures in war and poetry](#)

Can't Shoot A Man With A Cold: Lt E Alan Mackintosh MC 1893-1917, Poet of the Highland Division by Colin Campbell and Rosalind Green (Argyll, £12.99)
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By Trevor Royle

[Birthday blues: How did the lottery grow from funding good causes 10 years ago into a £40bn](#)

[stealth tax?](#)
Ian Bell

[Bleak and White](#)

Live Rock: Jim White - Cottiers Theatre, Glasgow ★★★★★
By Colin Waters

[Devon must be missing an angel](#)

Live Soul: Joss Stone - Carling Academy, Glasgow ★★★★★

[Drink a large dram of the finest whisky lore ... and the intoxicating effects will linger long in your mind](#)

MacLean's Miscellany of Whisky by Charles MacLean (Little Books, £10)
By Ron Butlin

[Fragments of a war history forgot](#)

Locals on Raasay in the Hebrides risked their lives to aid suffering German POWs held in their midst. So why is their struggle barely remembered?
By Torcuil Crichton

[Free musketeers](#)

Live Jazz: Free Radicals 2004 - CCA, Glasgow ★★★★★
By David Keenan

[God knows how it happened ... but the](#)

Why I'm stuck on Band Aid



email



print

Midge Ure, one of the driving forces behind the recording phenomenon, explains how it is still part of his life, 20 years on

BAND AID 20 happened because a tabloid news paper came up with the idea that Do They Know It's Christmas? should be remixed and released again to mark Band Aid's 20th anniversary. My phone was ringing off the hook with people asking me about it.

I was denying it, but then Bob Geldof phoned me and said: "I think it's a great idea. Let's re-record it." But then he bugged off to the Congo to make a television programme and I was left trying to put the whole thing together.

Travis and Chris Martin from Coldplay were already on board. Then the rest was easy - a matter of sitting back and waiting for the phone to ring, which it did as soon as word got out that it was happening. It wasn't like we had to explain what Band Aid was to everybody.

I've re-arranged the song slightly. We've got The Darkness now, so I've put some harmony guitars on the end, à la Thin Lizzy. But Nigel Godrich, who produced Radiohead, Coldplay and Travis, is doing the bones of it. I'm the executive producer, which means I can sit on my fat arse and point them in the right direction. And, as Bob said, keep it in the realms of reasonable taste!

Robbie and Dido have already done their bit because they're now out of the country - they've got schedules that were booked up last year, so they can't just drop everything and do it.

Damien Hirst is doing the cover. We got him through my old manager, Chris Morrison, who's also a Band Aid trustee. He manages Gorillaz and Blur and they're mates with Damien, all bad boys together. So he's donating a painting.

Paul McCartney is reputedly going to play bass, but I don't think he's going to turn up on November 14 because he realises it's all about the new kids on the block. He came on as the penultimate act at Live Aid so he's got every right to do it, but the emphasis is on youth. The only person we're talking about having back is Bono because I'm not sure anyone could sing the line he sang the way he sang it - and because he's the biggest rock star in the world and he uses his pop platform very well. He's more than welcome.

There are some people we haven't got. I'd love to have had Thom Yorke [Radiohead] and I'd love to have had Mike Skinner from The Streets. We might still get Thom, I'm not sure yet. We're still waiting to hear from Franz Ferdinand, but we're hoping that's going to happen as well. But we've got a fantastic line-up. It's looking like the Q Awards, a who's who of coolness. It's a real cross-section of credible artists. I just want to see Busted and The Darkness standing side by side, to see who can do scissor kicks the best!

The recording of the new version takes place on November 14 at Air studios in London. I think the new recording is going to be even more fraught than the old one. The thing that scares me is artists turning up who haven't been invited. You can't have what happened 20 years ago when Marilyn just turned up out of the blue. Nobody had asked him, but it didn't really matter. The first time round we didn't have security, but we have now because it's a very different world we live in today.

It doesn't matter if this new version is a Christmas number one or not. It's more a celebration of something that happened 20 years ago. It won't raise the same amount of money as the original simply because of Live Aid and 20 years of being played on the radio. That generates money no matter what. But if it focuses people's attention on what's going on out in Africa, that's a good thing.

Obviously now, people are focusing on Sudan so a chunk of the money will be going to that, but it's for a very different reason. The original famine in Ethiopia was because the rain didn't come and the crops didn't grow; now it's totally different. It's genocide. But people still need help.

I've just done a programme for the BBC about 20 years of Do They Know It's Christmas? I interviewed Bono and Sting and I asked them what they thought of it back then, because when they turned up at the studio 20 years ago they didn't know what they were walking into. It could have been absolute dross. They think it's a little bit cheesy but it does its job. It doesn't matter that it wasn't the best song in the world. What matters is that it does its job incredibly well.

Band Aid changed my life and changed my career. By the time I got out of it and Live Aid, I'd lost my band [Ultravox]. It was detrimental to my career but luckily I was still allowed to carry on being Midge Ure, the musician.

Unfortunately for Bob, the Boomtown Rats had gone and when he came out of the other side of Live Aid he was seen as some kind of saint, a spokesman for youth. He was never allowed to go back to just doing his music.

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◀◀ [back to previous page](#)