



Live At the Brixton Academy: A riotous life in the music business

By JS Rafaeli, Simon Parkes



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In 1982, aged twenty-three, Simon Parkes paid £1 for a virtually derelict building in Brixton. Over the next fifteen years he turned it into Britain's most iconic music venue. And now he's telling his story: full of fond - and wild - reminiscences of the famous musicians who played at the venue, including Robert Plant and Jimmy Page, Lou Reed, The Ramones, New Order, the Beastie Boys and The Smiths.

This is about one man's burning desire for success against the odds, his passion for live music and the excitement of those wilderness years, a far cry from the corporate world that controls the scene today. From rock-star debauchery and mixing it up with Brixton gangsters to putting on the first legal raves in the UK and countless backroom business deals, this is the story of how to succeed in business with no experience and fulfil your teenage fantasies.

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Editorial Review

Review

If Simon Parkes' autobiography - full of raucous tales and geezer speak - is ever made into a film, it will be fun trying to find an actor who can do him justice. * The Independent * The king of gigs * Sunday Times * Brixton was always the one. It was so authentic as a venue, it's when things became 'real'. A proper old Victorian beer hall of a place with a century's sweat and ale steeped into the woodwork and plaster, and the faded glamour of that mighty proscenium arch. The first time I stood on that stage was in the Libertines supporting Morrissey. All my life I'd wanted to be an actor playing to an adoring theatre crowd, and here I was in front of a sea of stony faces with beer cans bouncing off my head. -- Carl Barat Brixton Academy has always been a special venue to me. From the age of 15 I saw countless shows there, from Blur to Foo Fighters. London is a city of countless music venues but in my eyes playing Brixton was the true sign of a successful band. I've been fortunate enough to play there a number of times now, firstly as part of the NME Awards tour but subsequently as the headline act - and the feeling of prestige never gets old -- Russell Lissack, Bloc Party For me, the Brixton Academy has something of a mythical status. As a young teenage boy in south east London I'd always see the listings in the NME or Melody Maker, listings for bands that I desperately wanted to see, but at the time was too young. I remember a school friend claiming that he "knew a back way in" and perhaps we should chance it for the Food Records Christmas Party - playing host to Jesus Jones, and at the time a lesser known Blur. That prospect of this 'back way in' stayed with me until a few years later, when at the height of their powers, the Lemonheads' Evan Dando treated those of us who'd hung around the side alley to an impromptu acoustic set of covers and requests as he straddled the dressing room windowsill. The thing that I always remembered was that it felt like outside inside. If they'd have painted stars on the ceiling I would have believed it was so. Those turrets and balconies... It seemed vast. Playing there with Hot Chip, our front of house engineer pointed out the 'sweet spot' where you could clap your hands and hear a never ending echo as the sound bounced from floor to ceiling to floor and back, proving there was indeed a roof, but to me it sounded like a flock of birds. From the stage, the width of the audience is what first surprised me, twice as wide as it is deep, and on a full house you can still see every face. -- Rob Smoughton, Grosvenor/Hot Chip

About the Author

After leaving The Academy, Simon Parkes went on to run The Coronet in Elephant and Castle, as well as numerous other projects. He also got his life back, got married, had three sons, and did all the things he couldn't do when he was running the Brixton Academy. He and his family still live in Brixton. JS Rafaeli has worked as a copy writer, a brand consultant, researcher and booking agent. He currently plays in a band as well as co-writing this book.

Users Review

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