

Mr Chancellor,

I'd like to begin by quoting a lyric from 'Street Life', written by our honorary graduand today, Bryan Ferry. It's from his seminal 1973 album, *Stranded*:

*'Don't ask me why I'm feeling blue
'Cause loving you is all I can do...
Back to nature boys - Vasser girls too
Watch what you say, or think, or do
Continental-style strasse girls might
But you know exactly if it's wrong or right
Education is an important key - yes
But the good life's never won by degrees - no
Pointless passing through Harvard or Yale
Only window shopping - it's strictly no sale'*

Now, on this day, I think we can all agree, Mr Chancellor, it is indeed pointless passing through Harvard or Yale, but not Newcastle University. And today we are honouring one of our most talented and world-famous alumni. Not many people can claim to have helped create the soundtrack of an era, but Bryan Ferry can do so in a moment of quiet satisfaction, if he ever gets the chance between gigs on his current world tour. He composed many of the songs that are his most famous legacy: 'Virginia Plain', 'Avalon', 'Dance Away', 'Slave to Love', 'Don't Stop the Dance'. There are also those legendary tracks that he has made his own – including 'Let's Stick Together' by Wilbert Harrison, and John Lennon's 'Jealous Guy', released as a tribute following the ex-Beatle's death in 1980. Just the other

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day, I was walking through the Central Arcade in Newcastle, near Windows Music Shop – where our honoured guest used to browse for hours as a young man gazing at the record sleeves and instruments – and suddenly his version of ‘Jealous Guy’ was playing over the loudspeaker. His unique voice and compositional talent are instantly recognisable. Judging by the demand for tickets to today’s graduation ceremony, and an unusually large amount of interest, indeed offers of remuneration, from certain ladies of my acquaintance, many people here in King’s Hall have special associations with his music. Today, Bryan Ferry has come home, a local lad who became an international superstar, a virtuoso performer, a consummate artist, composer and musician. What is more – and we do not encounter many of these in academia I am sorry to say – he is famous for being the personification of cool.

Originally from Washington, in Tyne and Wear, Bryan Ferry is enjoying a recording career that so far has spanned more than 40 years. He has credited the four years he spent studying in our Fine Art Department as being crucial in his development as an artist and musician: ‘I was encouraged to go to Newcastle University rather than go to London’, he says, ‘and it was the best thing I ever did... I was very lucky to study under the great English Pop artist Richard Hamilton. There was this connection between the Newcastle Fine Arts department and the American artists, which made it feel special’. The glamour that is synonymous with Bryan Ferry’s art and personal style was present at a young age – a classic American car, a Studebaker, was parked outside his student digs in Eslington Terrace in Jesmond: he recalls ‘it was a beautiful machine... I think I spent more time pushing it than driving it because it was always conking out’. He put together his own student band called The Gas Board, and played R ‘n’ B covers with two musicians, Graham Simpson and John Porter, who with

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Ferry went on to play with Roxy Music, the band that took them to international stardom.

After graduating from Newcastle University in 1968, Bryan Ferry moved to London where he worked as a ceramics teacher ‘for about 30 seconds’, among other jobs, and carefully planned the cultural phenomenon that was to become Roxy Music. He was lead singer of the band, which he formed in 1970. He wrote or co-wrote most of their original songs, and was involved in all of the creative aspects of their work. Roxy Music had three number one albums and 10 top 10 hits in the United Kingdom singles chart, coupled with success across Europe and America. Roxy Music can be seen as one of the great statements of Pop art – a unique montage of diverse musical styles. The revolutionary electronic treatments developed by Brian Eno for the first two albums united with Andy Mackay’s saxophone and woodwind playing to provide what has been dubbed the ‘futuristic, filmic ambience’ of the Roxy Music sound. There was the dazzling virtuosity of Phil Manzanera’s guitar playing and the sheer dexterity and power of Paul Thompson’s drums. The combined effect was a musical energy and eclecticism. Throughout the middle and later years of the 1970s, Bryan Ferry recorded a famous series of cover versions – including two of his best-loved tracks, ‘Shame Shame Shame’ and ‘Let’s Stick Together’. It is remarkable, Mr Chancellor, that whether singing Frank Sinatra or Elvis, Bryan Ferry performs a song in such a way as to make it entirely his own. ‘Tokyo Joe’, released in 1977, was inspired by a Hollywood musical from the 1930s, rendered with a new ‘high energy, subterranean night club feel’.

His successful solo career, which began in 1973 alongside his work with Roxy Music, continues to the present day. His most recent album, *The Jazz Age*, released in November 2012, contains jazz versions of the early Roxy

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Music hits and had a strong critical reception. He continues to make relevant music, working with new generations of artists such as the *Scissor Sisters*. His songs evoke romance, poignancy and heartbreak, and continue to find new global audiences: his song 'More Than This' featured memorably in the 2003 film *Lost in Translation* in a sad karaoke version sung by Bill Murray. Those of us old enough to remember the excitement of buying new albums on vinyl always remember the album covers as essential parts of the glamour and panache associated with Roxy Music and Bryan Ferry as a solo artist, always featuring beautiful and famous women, most recently Kate Moss. It's been a tough life. But I have a sneaking suspicion, Mr Chancellor, that a lot of graft has gone into making it look this stylish and effortless.

The University is delighted that, in 2013, Bryan Ferry agreed to be Lead Patron of the Hatton Future fundraising campaign to revitalise the University's Hatton Gallery. He is also a Patron of BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art in Gateshead. He received a CBE in 2011 from Her Majesty the Queen for his contribution to the British Music Industry, and has been nominated for two Grammy awards (Best Album Package for *Bête Noire* in 1989 and Best Traditional Pop Vocal Album for *As Time Goes By* in 2001). In 2012, he was honoured by the French government who made him an *Officier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres*. He also won the Q Icon award at the Q Music Awards in 2010, so he is officially an icon.

Mr Chancellor, for his distinguished career as an internationally-renown artist, musician and composer, as well as legendary icon, I commend Bryan Ferry CBE to you for the award of a Doctor of Music, *honoris causa*.

Citation by Professor Helen Berry, 11 July 2014