

All aboard red bus to make music history

Bridget Galton finds another famous recording studio in NW8 that has been honoured with a blue plaque

Just up the road from Abbey Road Studios there's another venue that's played a huge part in London's music industry. Named after the capital's transport icon, Red Bus Studios has seen Culture Club, The Beach Boys, Tina Turner and George Michael darken its doors since it opened in 1978.

Now – with the help of the late Bee Gee Robin Gibb – a Heritage Foundation blue plaque has been unveiled on the site in Salisbury St, Marylebone where the likes of Do You Really Want to Hurt Me?, Gloria Gaynor's disco anthem I Will Survive, Duran Duran's Girls on Film and Spandau Ballet's True were recorded.

"For the first five years we had 24 hour recording sessions, it was non stop and as producer of my own group Imagination, I had to book outside studios to record," says owner Eliot Cohen.

"Culture Club recorded all their albums here. I was locked out of studio 1 for three weeks by their producer Steve Levine because he didn't

want anyone to interfere with the desk. We had so many of their fans outside that I employed a special guy so I could get into my office past all the kids."

In its '80s hey-day, stars such as Bananarama, Alison Moyet,

Status Quo and The Jam were regulars. More recently N'Dubz, Goldfrapp and DJ Sasha have recorded there.

The blue plaque came about when President of the Heritage Foundation Robin Gibb, whose final album was posthumously mastered at Red Bus, put the venue forward for the award.

"When Brian Wilson was here his doctor sat 24 hours a day in the lounge on call," says Cohen.

"Most bands let you listen to one or two tracks – Tony Hadley of Spandau Ballet was always a gent. I love discovering new material and to hear one of our tracks on the radio or see an artist perform is great. Then when someone like Maria Carey records one of our songs (It's Just an Illusion), that's what I call the icing on the cake."

Cohen says with digital technology making it much easier to record in smaller spaces, many of London's famous studios have disappeared.

"A lot have been converted into flats, that leaves us and Abbey Road who have kept going despite everything. Once a year my accountant tells me I am a schmuck, but I still love music and I still love what I do, I will let my daughter make that decision later on."

Cohen started out organising music gigs while a student at LSE in the late 60s.

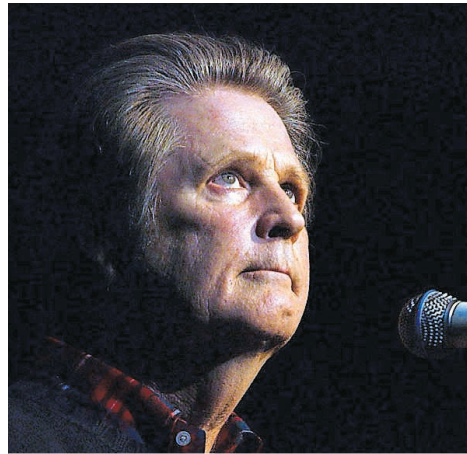
Sitting on the entertainments committee he would book the likes of Black Sabbath and Jimi Hendrix to play the university.

"The atmosphere for the Hendrix gig was unbelievable, but come 10pm the sound was so loud we realised if we didn't get him to lower the volume we were going to be in serious trouble with the police, so I waited for one song to end then said: "Mr Hendrix would you mind lowering the volume?"

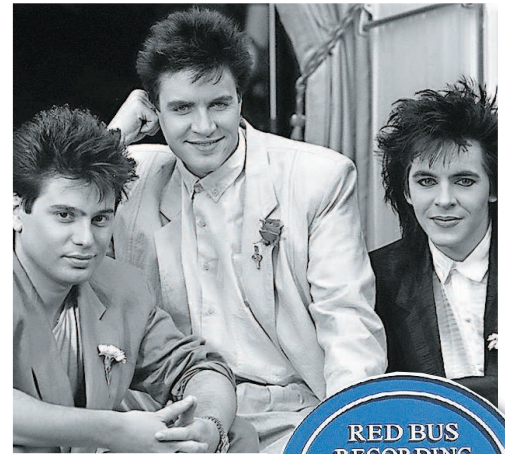
"He said: 'Why don't you fuck



■ Eliot Cohen (fourth left) and Sinitta at plaque unveiling on Sunday. Picture: Dieter Perry



■ Above: Brian Wilson. Above right: Duran Duran. Picture: PA



off?' I was shocked. I was still learning, I was just a kid."

Undeterred by the guitar god's rudeness, Cohen went on to book acts into other universities, then in 1969 formed the Red Bus Agency with Leslie Grade, father of Michael, brother of Lew.

With offices and a demo studio in Wardour St above the famous Whiskey A Go Go bar, they looked after bands including Mungo Jerry and in the early days, Queen.

Then when Cohen was moving into producing artists like Imagination, he found the site in Marylebone was "just perfect".

"We felt we had quite a lot

of success in the industry and thought why not have our own studios?"

Cohen, a former Hampstead resident who now lives with wife Joanne in Marylebone, has had to move with the times, digitising Red Bus's catalogue of 40,000 tracks to cater for digital streaming platforms.

Studio 1 is permanently leased to a firm specialising in film and TV sound effects including The Musketeers and Downton Abbey. "The speed at which the business is evolving is just incredible but I don't think studios will disappear altogether. A few profes-

sionals like the analogue sound to mix with the digital and judging by the people who come here, they feel it's still important to be in an atmosphere where they can create, with people around to bounce off – being in your bedroom you don't get that."

As for Cohen's plans for retirement, he says: "I once asked Lord Lew Grade when are you going to stop making films?"

"He said 'I know nothing else' and I feel just like that."

April De Angelis's new work is a bold but rigid

AFTER ELECTRA
TRICYCLE THEATRE

★★★★☆

The end is nigh in April De Angelis's subversive new work. Free-spirited, octogenarian artist Virgie's (Marty Cruickshank) family and friends find they've been gathered not to celebrate her birthday, but her death. Rather

than suffer the indignities of ageing, Virgie plans to commit suicide by striding into the sea.

It's an audacious premise, played initially – and most successfully – as seething black comedy. Polite incomprehension becomes outrage and recrimination: Virgie's neglected, middle-aged children Haydn (Veronica Roberts) – ironically a bereavement counsellor – and Orin (James Wallace) read it as selfish, her indomitable educationalist sister (Rachel Bell) as hippy attention-seeking. Does Virgie have a right to leave them, and do they have a right to stop her?

De Angelis urgently addresses

the cruel diminishment of ageing, noting that the heaviest burden falls upon the fairer sex – illustrated by the fact that, by centring on older women, her play is a rarity.

Virgie's pioneering feminist individualism and artistic virtuosity are juxtaposed with spikey self-absorption, and Cruickshank does justice to this satisfyingly complex role. She hasn't committed murder, like Clytemnestra, but abandoned motherhood for career – another act viewed as "unnatural" by society – leading to a subtler version of Electra's filial vengeance. Michael Taylor's



■ Picture: Steve Tanner

evocative set, gradually stripped of Virgie's identity, is a powerful manifestation.

Yet the rigidly schematic debate grows wearying, despite a spry Samuel West production, and increased introspection shows up limitations in character development. Two cameos merely hammer home familiar points – time better spent on the main cast.

There's superb work by brisk Bell and handdog Roberts, plus in-joke comic relief from unhappily married novelist Sonia (Kate Fahy) and superlative luvvie Tom (Neil McCaul).

Bold and thought-provoking, but falls short of the contemporary response to Sophocles its title declares.

Marianka Swain