

# A Radical Soul [C1]

Belfast: storia, musica e rinascimento. Un viaggio nel cuore di una città che si è reinventata.

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Belfast, the capital of Northern Ireland has a radical soul, industrial heart and creative spirit. Its [waterfront](#) launched the [HMS](#)Titanic and its modern regeneration symbolises a city of culture with a positive future. To find out more about the city, Speak Up spoke to Arthur Magee, a Belfast native and a musician, historian, author and tour guide. Magee specialises in tours about Belfast's troubled history, a period known as the Troubles. We began by asking him about visitors' expectations of the city. **Arthur Magee (Northern Ireland accent):**In one sense, people are amazed at Belfast, because Belfast is actually a very, very pleasant city. You can see the hills from the city centre, we [overlook](#) Belfast [Lough](#), which is really lovely. So you've got the hills, you've got the countryside, it's wide open for a good time. And then underneath it all, you have the [undercurrent](#) of the Troubles, which everybody thinks has disappeared. They haven't.

## PEACE WALLS

Belfast is home to some impressive architecture. One of the biggest surprises are the 'peace walls', a series of separation barriers built after 1969 to prevent intercommunal violence. We asked Magee to tell us more. **Arthur Magee:** I walk people through peace gates and walls. The walls are 25 feet tall here, more walls have been built, and people genuinely aren't expecting them. They're shocked... "The best way I can explain that to you," I say to Americans, [is,] "So racism stopped when you [got rid](#) of slavery, did it?" It didn't stop. And even to call it a peace process isn't correct; it's a [ceasefire](#). Two mutually incompatible ideas, British and Irish. So it's still here, but a lot of the times, the people in Belfast we [collude](#) with the idea that there's no prejudice here, which is a [nonsense](#).

## MORE THAN A NAME

When Magee was growing up in Belfast during the Troubles, being identified as either Catholic or Protestant could mean the difference between life and death. When Magee took a job with the Royal Mail, a fellow worker, a Catholic postman, was murdered, as he explains. **Arthur Magee:** When I walked into Royal Mail, the only thing that mattered is [was], what side are you from? And because we look the same, language is always eliciting information, innocuous questions. What's your name? Gary O'Hara, Irish Catholic; Wesley Johnson, British Protestant. Everything comes down to that here. And when you're one or the other here, you're a target.

## BUILDING BRIDGES

Music is an important part of Magee's life. During the Troubles he played in a band and produced recordings. He believes that movements such as punk and rock could bridge political and religious divides. **Arthur Magee:** I used to ask people who are the greatest Irish band of all time, but too many people said U2. So I have to club them people to death. The big musical influence on Belfast would've been punk rock music. Right at the heart of the seventies when there were butcher gangsrutting the streets of Belfast, punk rock landed, and it gripped, because what younger people were rebelling against was naked sectarian hatred. The greatest Irish band of all time, bar none, is The Undertones. Any band that ugly had to be brilliant. They're not lookers. People in England don't get what The Undertones are. They're five Catholics from Derry. They're our Beatles.

## JOBS MATTER

One factor in the civil unrest was high unemployment, caused by the loss of traditional industries. Today, new service industries, tourism and the major redevelopment means more jobs and less chance of a return to conflict, says Magee. **Arthur Magee:** One of the main reasons we won't go back is people have work here. And another reason we won't go back is, it's a lived experience: what happens with simplistic answers and solutions? There are

more restaurants and bars in Belfast than I can keep a count of. There's clubs, there's music.

## MORE THAN WALLS

Belfast's complex history is [rooted](#) in the experiences of its people, says Magee. **Arthur Magee:** Belfast is a life lesson for people, because it's full of good people, and absolutely horrendous things happened here. Horrendous things. And who did it? Good people. Decent people did absolutely horrific things here, so. Which [begs the question](#): how come in a city full of good, [kind-hearted](#) people, we had a civil conflict with three thousand five hundred people dead? So my tour is sort of looking at what happened, and we go to where the Troubles were, and then I'll include parts of my own life to illustrate it, because, hopefully, it's a human experience.

## BELFAST HUMOUR

Belfast is an attractive, exciting city. For tourists it offers culture, attractions, great food and drink, and a warm welcome. Peculiarities include the Belfast accent and a tendency [to trade](#) insults in a form of black humour. We asked Magee to tell us more. **Arthur Magee:** To be honest with you, you know what the [motto](#) for Belfast should be?: "Welcome to Belfast. We [don't give a flying fuck](#)." Have you heard a [broad Belfast accent](#)? "It's like out there you wouldn't understand a word." They won't even move their lips. They don't care. But you know what, there's something really real about them. The humour here I love. It's like [banter](#). It's like a [patois](#). If they like you, they'll insult you. That got me into a lot of trouble when I was in England. "Hi you, Julian, you [bollocks](#)." I'm only being friendly. You see when people here start to be polite to me, I start to think what have I done wrong. Do you know what I mean? I'll give you an example: I had weight, you know, and people used to call me fat bastard. "Magee, you fat bastard," okay? And then one day I [noticed](#) people weren't even calling me a fat bastard. They were calling me Big Magee. And then I started to worry. I thought, if these fuckers are being polite, I've actually [gone beyond the pale](#). So I started to lose weight. The humour is very dark, and it's very quick. You know that idea

of craic? It's a [seasoning](#) to life. Salt and pepper. You know, when it's dark here at four o'clock in the winter, and it's raining and stuff. Sorry, I can't give you simple answers. I'm Irish here... [www.experiencebelfast.com](http://www.experiencebelfast.com)

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# Glossary

- **nonsense** = assurdità
- **overlook** = guardare su
- **noticed** = notare
- **begs the question** = suscitare la domanda
- **eliciting** = ottenere
- **divides** = differenze
- **running the streets** = controllare le strade
- **hatred** = odio
- **comes down to** = ridursi a
- **target** = obiettivo
- **kind-hearted** = di buon cuore
- **to trade** = scambiare
- **motto** = slogan
- **banter** = scambio di battute
- **ceasefire** = cessate il fuoco
- **bar none** = nessuno escluso
- **lookers** = persone di bell'aspetto
- **rooted** = radicato
- **patois** = gergo
- **got rid** = eliminare
- **to club them people to death** = picchiare a morte
- **bollocks** = coglioni
- **seasoning** = condimento
- **don't give a flying fuck** = non fregarsene niente
- **gone beyond the pale** = spingersi troppo oltre
- **HMS** = nave di sua maestà (His/Her Majesty's Ship)
- **Lough** = lago
- **collude** = collaborare
- **bridge** = superare
- **unrest** = disordini
- **broad Belfast accent** = accento marcato
- **waterfront** = costa
- **undercurrent** = sottofondo

- **butcher gangs** = bande di assassini
- **gripped** = avvincere