



My kinda town

Chicago-born Rachel Woolley's weekly column about her life in East Lancashire

I have an awkward relationship with the country of my birth. There are times when it feels like there are as many reasons to hate the US as there are to love it. Some weeks are worse than others...let's just say this has been a very bad week.

There are certain things America just doesn't do well. Diplomacy and men's major league soccer to name but two.

And of course, if the world ever needed a perfect blood-soaked example of what limited gun control can do to a nation of mostly rational people, the US would be it.

When I heard about the university shooting in Virginia on the news this week, the first words out of my mouth were "not again."

This isn't the first time a school campus in the States has been transformed into a firing range, and you better believe it won't be the last.

I can remember all too clearly the wake of fear and revulsion that swept across the country after the Columbine shooting in 1999.

Learn lessons from Virginia

I was in high school at the time — hundreds of miles away from the events at Columbine — and the reaction was so intense it might as well have happened across the street.

Parents up and down the country demanded that schools take action, with some temporarily withdrawing their children from classes out of a feeling of pure helplessness.

And the schools did take action. Everything from issuing students with ID cards to installing surveillance cameras and in some cases metal detectors.

At my high school the entrance doors were chained and dead-bolted the second the first bell rang. Two armed police officers were stationed in the building and at one point the security guards wandering the halls appeared to outnumber the teachers.

But none of that paranoia and remorse has paid off. Parents and school boards may have made changes, but lawmakers have done appallingly little. And it shows.

I can already hear them making the same empty noise they did last time, and the time before that. Nothing will come of it.

Britain is fortunate that gun violence hasn't reached the epidemic levels that it has in the US, but it's a slippery slope.

There are lessons to be learned from America's mistakes. I just hope the rest of the world is paying close attention.

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ON SONG: Denis Dundon, responsible for booking acts at the Rhythm Station

They've got Rhythm

FOR jazz lovers across the North West, Tuesday nights have come to mean only one thing — a trip to Rawtenstall.

In this small East Lancashire town a group of enthusiasts have created a weekly jazz night which has attracted some of the top performers from both sides of the Atlantic.

Next week, the Rhythm Station will celebrate its 10th anniversary with a special concert. But it will also be an evening tinged with sadness.

For it will mark the farewell

JOHN ANSON discovers that when it comes to jazz, East Lancashire's got global appeal

performance by Tommy Melville, the man who is widely credited with establishing the Rhythm Station's reputation as one of the finest jazz clubs in the region.

Tommy, who will be 81 later this year, is stepping down as leader of the resident house band due to ill health.

He said: "I shall be hanging up my saxophone on Tuesday, the club's 10th anniversary which seems as good a time as any to retire.

"It seems like only yesterday I walked into the Rhythm Station for the first time with a view to starting a jazz club."

Jazz at the Rhythm Station was the idea of local businessmen Alan Greenhalgh and John Ashworth but it was left to Tommy to develop the Tuesday nights to the level they are at now.

As a tenor sax player, Tommy has worked with some of the most famous jazz musicians during his career and this involvement immediately gave the fledgling jazz nights the credibility they needed and attracted major names to the venue.

Denis Dundon is now the booker for the Tuesday jazz nights and he is in no doubt about the role Tommy, who lives near Saddleworth, has played in their success.

"The Rhythm Station simply

would not have been what it is today without Tommy," said Denis. "He is just so well known in the jazz world that people would do things for Tommy that they would not do for anyone else. The last 10 years have really seen a who's who of the British and US jazz scenes at the Rhythm Station and that is due to Tommy's influence."

Originally jazz at the Rhythm Station was held at weekends before moving to its now familiar Tuesday night slot.

The opening night saw The Animals take to the stage and since then artists such as Stan Tracey, Scott Hamilton and the

would get all the big bands," said Denis. "People would come from all over on a Saturday night."

Now the Rhythm Station is, in its own way, doing the same thing.

"We regularly get people coming from Manchester, Liverpool and even Lancaster on a Tuesday," said Denis. "I think it's because it is a proper jazz club."

"You do get people who say they don't like jazz but I don't think they have ever heard the music played live in the right surroundings."

"It is something you need to experience before you can really make a decision on whether you like it or not."

Fred Shawcross, one of the North West's leading jazz experts, said: "The Rhythm Station is now without question one of the top jazz venues in the UK."

"Tuesday will be an emotional night as Tommy Melville's contribution to the venue's success is immense. First you have to respect him as a musician in his own right and then there is his passion for jazz."

On Tuesday night Tommy will lead his quartet — Dennis Freedman on piano, Jimmy Scaiffe on drums and Steve Berry bass — as they provide support for three internationally renowned soloists, Alan Barnes on saxophone, Roy Williams on trombone and Bruce Adams on trumpet.

● Tickets for Tuesday night's 10th anniversary concert are £10 including supper, available from Denis Dundon on 0161 796 0275.

Jazz is something you need to experience live to fully appreciate

DENIS DUNDON

Northern Jazz Orchestra have delighted audiences.

"The thing about the Rhythm Station is that it is a genuine jazz club full of genuine enthusiasts," said Denis. "People come together on a Tuesday night because they love to listen to jazz and the artists appreciate playing in front of such an appreciative audience."

Rawtenstall has a tradition of attracting leading musicians to play in the town.

"It used to be the Astoria which



BOWING OUT: Tommy Melville has played a key role at the jazz club