



HOW SWEET TO BE AN IDIOT

A Celebration of Neil Innes Through Music, Laughter. & Legacy

Live concert * Interviews * Archive Footage * Backstage

MICHAEL PALIN & TERRY GILLIAM (MONTY PYTHON) • YO LA TENGO (USA) • SANJEEV BHASKAR
EMO PHILLIPS (USA) • STEPHEN FRY (VIDEO) • RICK WAKEMAN (VIDEO) • AIMEE MANN (VIDEO)
JOHN HALSEY (THE RUTLES) • RODNEY SLATER & 'LEGS' LARRY SMITH (THE BONZO DOG BAND)
PHIL JACKSON • PETE AVES • DAVID CAITLIN BIRCH (BOOTLEG BEATLES) • WOODY WOODMANSEY (DAVID
BOWIE & THE SPIDERS FROM MARS) • MADDY PRIOR & JULIAN LITTMAN (STEELEYE SPAN) • ADRIAN
EDMONDSON • JOE STILGOE • HORAGE PANTER (THE SPECIALS) • TERRAFOLK (SLOVENIA) • RUTLIN KEN
THORNTON • CHARLIE DORE • ANDY ROBERTS (SCAFFOLD) • ELLIOTT RANDALL (STEELY DAN) • ROGER
MCGOUGH (GRIMMS) • KEVIN ELDON • TOM MCGUINNESS • MORGAN FISHER (MOTT THE HOOPLE) •
CHARLIE MORGAN (USA) • DOUGIE BOYLE • JAY GOODRICH • MICKY SIMMONDS • MICKO WESTMORLAND •
PAUL CUDDEFORD • TERRY EDWARDS • SONIA JONES • KIM GOODY • ISABELLA COULSTOCK • & NEIL INNES
JOHN ALTMAN (MUSICAL DIRECTOR) • MARTIN LEWIS (MC)

A Feature-Length Music Documentary &
Concert Film with Heart, Humour & History

PRODUCERS

Douglas Hunter / Yvonne Innes

+44 7758 279 341

douglas@shanghaimimi.com

DIRECTOR

Alan D. Boyd

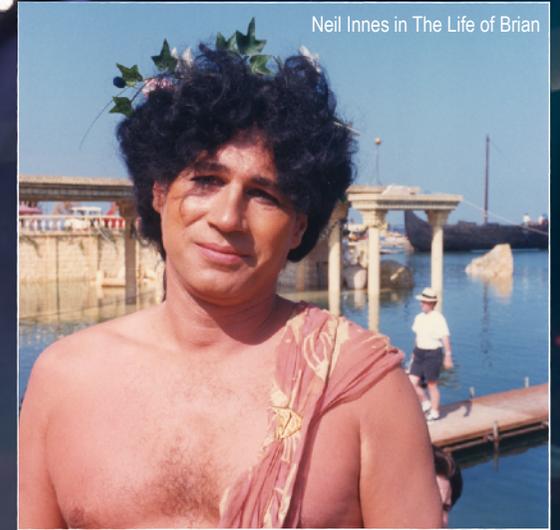
+44 7808 588 689

alanboydmail@gmail.com



The Story

How Sweet to Be an Idiot is more than a concert film it's a time-travelling tribute to the life and legacy of Neil Innes. Through a blend of stunning live performances and documentary-style vignettes, we trace Neil's extraordinary journey through British cultural history: from surreal pop satirist with **The Bonzo Dog Band**, to trusted **Monty Python** collaborator, and the mind behind **The Rutles** and solo TV genius. His music was sharp, silly, poignant and always politically prescient. This film aims to tell his story with the same spirit he brought to everything he did: irreverent, generous, and brilliantly original.



"He was a great writer and he was eccentric and he was clever without being pretentious. And he was the warmest of people to be with, he was a most lovely friend."

Michael Palin, Monty Python



Ade Edmonson



Michael Palin



Yo La Tengo



Joe Stillgo



Kevin Eldon



Emp Phillips

A Celebration of the Life of
NEIL INNES
How Sweet To Be An Idiot
 featuring

MICHAEL PALIN & TERRY GILLIAM (MONTY PYTHON) • YO LA TENGO (USA) • SIAAEEV BRUSKAR
 ENO PHILLIPS (USA) • STEPHEN FRY (VIDEO) • ROB MACKAY (VIDEO) • JIMIE MANN (VIDEO)
 KEVIN GALT (FOR VICE) (VIDEO) • JOHN HALSEY (THE RUTLES)
 RODNEY SLATER & LEG' LARRY SMITH (THE BONZOS) (DAG DOO DAW BAND)
 PAUL JACKSON, PETE INNES, DAVID CATHIN BORDA (HOT LEG BEATLES)
 WHOO WOODMANSBY (DAVID BOWIE & THE SPINNERS FROM MARS)
 MADDY PRIOR & JULIAN LITTMAN (STELLEYS, SPAIN) • JORDAN LINDENSON • PAUL JUPITUS • JOE STILGO
 IMRACE PANTER (THE SPECIALS) • TERRAFOLK (SLOVENIA) • BUTLBY BEN THORNTON • CHARLIE COPE
 ANDY ROBERTS (SCAFFOLD) • ELLIOTT BARBARA L. (STEEVE DAM) • ROGER MCGOUGH (GRIMMS) • KEVIN ELDON
 TOM MCGANNESSE & HUGHIE FLINT • MORGAN FISHER (MATT THE HOOPLE) • CHARLIE MORGAN (USA)
 DOUGIE BOYLE • BRIAN PATTER • MICKY SHIMONOUS • MICHAEL WESTONLAND • PAUL DODDIFORD • TERRY EDWARDS
 SONIA INNES • KIM GOODY • ISABELLA FORSSTOCK • A. NEIL INNES (VIDEO)

MUSICAL DIRECTOR: JOHN ALTMAN

LONDON
 INDIGO AT THE O2
 THU 28 NOV 2024
 8:00PM

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 TICKETS: AXS.CO.UK | AXS.COM
 0871 220 0280

The Concert

At the heart of *How Sweet to Be an Idiot* is the extraordinary live concert held at **The Indigo at The O2 in November 2024** — a joyful, funny, and emotionally charged celebration of Neil Innes' life and work. Featuring a unique lineup of friends, collaborators, and admirers, the show brought together generations of talent to perform Neil's songs, share stories, and revel in his influence. With appearances from **Aimee Mann, Yo La Tengo, Emo Phillips, Michael Palin, Terry Gilliam, Roger McGough, Ade Edmondson, Leg' Larry Smith & Rodney Slater from The Bonzos, John Halsey (Rutles)**, and many others, the night was a rare blend of music, comedy, and heartfelt remembrance. Captured in stunning detail, the concert forms the backbone of the film — a living tribute that radiates with the wit, absurdity, and charm that defined Neil Innes.

Rehearsals

The day before the concert, performers gathered for a full day of rehearsals and we filmed everything. These behind-the-scenes moments offer a rare glimpse into the collaborative spirit that defined Neil's career. Laughter, improvisation, emotional reunions—this material adds an informal intimacy to the film, showing the human connections behind the public performances. It's also where many contributors opened up about Neil, often more candidly than they ever had before.



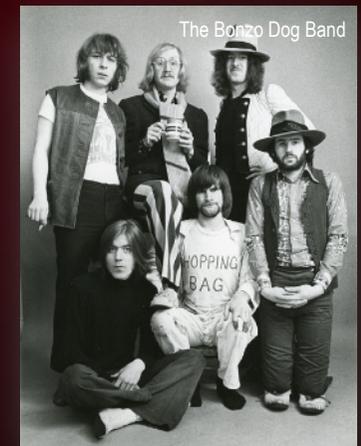
The Bonzo Dog Band

Long before “alternative comedy” had a name, *The Bonzos* were pioneering it — fusing Dadaist absurdity with music hall flair, jazz, psychedelia, and anarchy. Led musically by **Neil Innes** and visually by **Vivian Stanshall**, they created a genre-defying blend of the silly and the subversive, inspiring generations of performers who saw in them permission to be weird, clever, and unclassifiable.

Their influence echoes loudly through British and international comedy and music. **Stephen Fry**, **Ade Edmondson**, **Kevin Eldon**, and **Emo Phillips** all credit The Bonzos with shaping their creative outlook — not just in tone, but in the fearless way they broke form. Kevin Eldon, who performs Bonzo material today with his band **Spammed**, sees them as vital precursors to Britain’s entire alternative scene.

Even **Monty Python**, known for reinventing comedy on screen, found kindred spirits in The Bonzos — working together on *Do Not Adjust Your Set* and beyond. Neil, in particular, became their musical conscience, bridging the worlds of sound and sketch.

To this day, *The Bonzo Dog Band* remains a secret handshake among comedy and music lovers — an underground institution whose spirit lives on in every artist who refuses to choose between the ridiculous and the profound.



The Bonzo Dog Band

Ade Edmondson



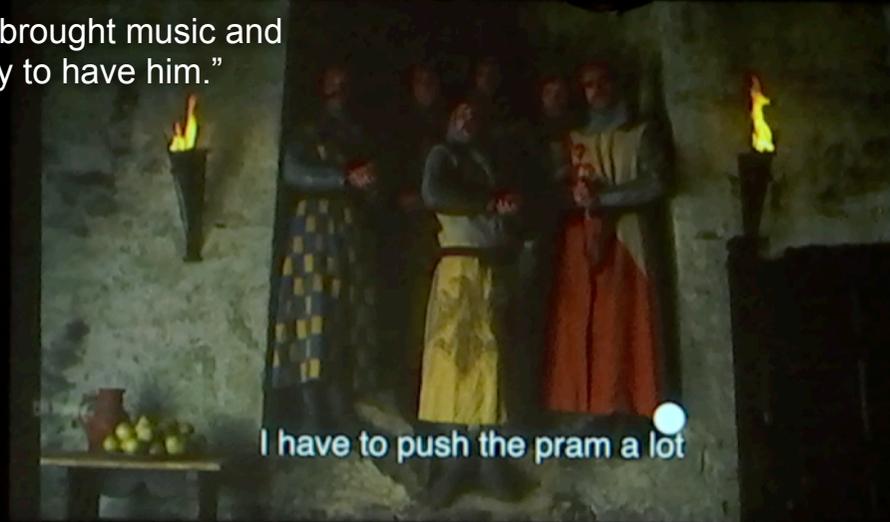
Bonzo's 'Legs' Larry Smith



Kevin Eldon with Spammed



“Neil was the unsung seventh Python. He brought music and madness in equal measure. We were lucky to have him.”
Terry Gilliam, *Personal tribute, 2020*



Neil on Set of 'Monty Python and The Holy Grail'



Neil Innes & Monty Python

Neil Innes's journey with *Monty Python* began before *Flying Circus* even hit the air. In the late 1960s, Innes was already making a name for himself as a founding member of *The Bonzo Dog Band*. Their appearance on the ITV children's show *Do Not Adjust Your Set* — alongside future Pythons Michael Palin, Terry Jones, and Eric Idle — was an early indicator of the creative chemistry that would soon bloom.

By the time *Monty Python's Flying Circus* took off in 1969, Neil was part of the wider comedy revolution orbiting the group. He officially joined the Python team during their post-TV phase, contributing original songs and appearing on-screen in their later work. His involvement deepened during the making of *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975), where

he not only composed several musical pieces but also appeared in small acting roles — most memorably as the obnoxious minstrel who sings the fate of Sir Robin.

Innes's role expanded further in *Monty Python's Life of Brian* (1979), where he co-wrote and performed music as well as playing his hilarious role as a gladiator. His ability to write clever, genre-spanning songs on demand made him an essential creative ally — a sort of “seventh Python” in all but name.

The Pythons themselves held him in high regard. Michael Palin called him “the warmest of people” and “a great writer, eccentric and clever without being pretentious.” Terry Jones

once referred to him as “the musical soul of Python.” His knack for blending satire with sincere musicality mirrored the group's own blend of intellectualism and absurdity.

Neil's collaboration with Eric Idle on *The Rutles* — the legendary Beatles parody — grew directly from his time with Python, and further proved his unmatched ability to write pastiche that rivalled (and in some cases, matched) the music it parodied.

But Neil Innes was never just a sideman. He was a creative equal; a vital part of the extended Python universe whose contributions, both musical and comedic, are fundamental to its lasting success.

"The Rutles was one of the most brilliant things I'd ever seen... and Neil Innes's songs were so good, they were dangerous."

Matt Groening (*The Simpsons* creator)
Interview in *Mojo Magazine*, 2005



John Halsey/Barry Wom



The Rutles

"All You Need Is Cash" — and Neil Innes' genius.

What started as a one-off spoof became a foundational work of musical parody. *The Rutles*, Neil's loving send-up of The Beatles, co-created with Eric Idle, delivered original songs so accurate, so tuneful, and so witty, that even **George Harrison** became a fan and contributor. Neil wrote and performed the entire Rutles songbook — 20 near-perfect Beatles pastiches that stand not just as parody, but as *great music in their own right*.

The Rutles' DNA runs deep in generations of musical satirists and intelligent absurdists. **"We wouldn't have Flight of the Conchords without The Rutles,"** said one critic — and the same could be said of acts like **Weird Al Yankovic**, **Tenacious D**, and **Spinal Tap** who credited The Rutles as not only their biggest influence, but also their greatest competitors. High praise indeed.

Artists in this film — including **Yo La Tengo**, **Aimee Mann**, **Ade Edmondson**, and **Kevin Eldon** — credit Neil and The Rutles with showing that satire and melody can live together without compromise. And as **Emo Phillips** notes, *"Neil's gift was that he could write a song that made you laugh and cry in the same verse."*

The Rutles is more than parody — it's a landmark in postmodern music, created by an artist who understood The Beatles as well as they understood themselves.

A photograph of George Harrison and Neil Innes in a garden setting. George Harrison is seated in a dark blue wicker chair on the left, wearing a light-colored button-down shirt and dark trousers, looking towards the camera with a slight smile. Neil Innes stands on the right, wearing a dark suit, a dark beret, and glasses, looking off to the side. The background features a pond, trees, and a large building in the distance.

George Harrison & Neil Innes

Television Work: Innes Book of Records & Beyond

Neil Innes was more than a musician — he was a world-builder. His television work, especially the groundbreaking *Innes Book of Records* (BBC, 1979–81), gave him a rare solo platform to explore the space between sketch, song, satire and surrealism. Each episode felt like a visual album — self-contained, uncategorisable, and full of eccentric characters and haunting melodies.

Neil's TV output is now recognised as quietly revolutionary. He made *music television* into an art form — influencing not just sketch comedy, but the DNA of music video itself.

Comedians and artists including **Stephen Fry**, **Ade Edmondson**, **Michael Palin**, and **Matt Groening** all cite Neil's TV work as formative. It opened up a strange, cerebral space on British screens — one where humour didn't need a punchline, and songs could smuggle satire into your head on the back of a perfect tune.

In a world of formulaic content, Neil's television output still feels radical: handmade, poetic, and defiantly hard to pin down. With rare archive material and new commentary, *How Sweet to Be an Idiot* will help bring this overlooked work to a new generation.

Family

For all his wild creative energy, razor wit, and enormous public profile, Neil Innes lived a life grounded in quieter commitments, especially to his family. He was, by all accounts, a deeply devoted husband and father. While his artistic life took him on tours, film sets, and global stages, Neil worked hard to protect his private world from the demands of fame.

His marriage to writer and artist Yvonne Innes was a cornerstone of his life. Together they raised a family largely away from the public eye — a conscious choice in an industry that rarely makes space for privacy. Neil was a man pulled between two masters: his art, which demanded everything, and his family, which meant everything.

As is often the case with great artists, this balance was not always easy — the life of a touring musician and satirist doesn't lend itself to routine — but Neil found ways to stay grounded. He rarely spoke publicly about his home life, but it was evident to those close to him that it mattered more than anything.

In *Dip My Brain in Joy*, Yvonne Innes's moving memoir of their life together, she shares rare insights into Neil's personal world — not only as a beloved cultural figure, but as a husband, a father, and a deeply thoughtful man. Drawing from her words, our film will offer a sensitive and honest window into the side of Neil Innes that fans rarely saw, but that shaped the soul behind the songs.



Why Now?

Neil Innes was a rare talent — a songwriter, satirist, and performer whose work shaped the course of British comedy and pop music from the 1960s onward. From the anarchic brilliance of *The Bonzo Dog Do-Dah Band*, to his pivotal role in *Monty Python*, to the Beatles parody *The Rutles*, Neil's career charted a uniquely subversive and joyful path through music, television, and film.

And yet, despite his immense influence, Neil was never fully recognised by the mainstream. His work existed at the intersection of high musicality and surreal humour; too clever for novelty status, too funny for serious rock, and too modest to self-promote. Since his death in 2019, fans new and old have been calling for a proper celebration of his legacy.

This concert film, *How Sweet to Be an Idiot*, is that long-overdue celebration. With exclusive performances, rare footage, and appearances from those who loved and worked with him, it offers a heartfelt, funny, and deeply musical tribute to a man who deserves to be remembered.

The time is right and the audience is waiting.

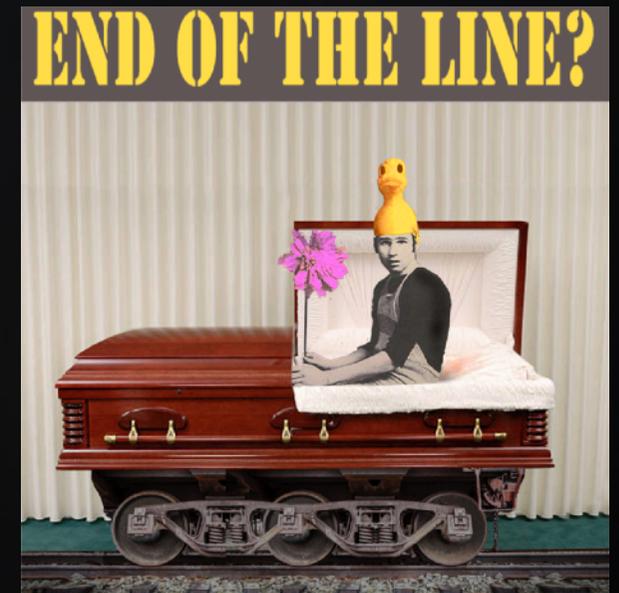


Illustration Created by Terry Gilliam

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How Sweet To Be An Idiot

Contact Information:

Douglas Hunter
+44 (0) 7 758 279 341
douglas@shanghaimimi.com

Alan D Boyd
+44 (0) 7 808 588 689
littlepartaproductions@gmail.com

