

CityLife

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Meeting my music hero

LEN Brown's emotional collapse into music journalism came shortly after his elder brother killed himself in 1982, apparently inspired by the suicide of Joy Division's Ian Curtis.

Picking through the record box, which carried the soundtrack to 21-year-old Don's tragically short life, Brown was to discover the undulating emotions of other acts, including The Fall, Blondie, Talking Heads and The Buzzcocks.

It also led him to the personal musical discovery of another Manchester band - which would long serve as the pill to ease his pain.

Solace came in the shape of Steven Patrick Morrissey - lyricist and lead singer with The Smiths.

Thirty years on, his relationship with the melancholic singer, initially as a fan, then as a frequent interviewer, is a light which has never gone out.



BROUGHT TO BOOK Brown's book about Morrissey

The intervening years have seen Brown serve his time with the NME, joining Janet Street-Porter's 'Yoof' television programming with the BBC in Manchester and as a 'gun for hire' at Granada, writing and producing music and sports documentaries.

Most recently, he did a stint as a screenwriter with Coronation Street. But his first book on the subject of music is based entirely on his Meetings With Morrissey - a volume he claims is unique in that it eschews the usual 'cut and paste' Smiths pastiche in favour of input from somebody who actually spent

time with its subject matter.

Len, who has lived much of his working life in Manchester, says it seemed ridiculous that no one who had actually met Morrissey had written a book about him.

"None of the previous biographers had had any physical contact with him at all," he says.

Meetings With Morrissey begins with Brown's first NME interview with the singer, in the hotel room where Oscar Wilde was arrested for practising homosexuality.

It sets the scene for two men whose shared passions include the celebrated playwright, Coronation Street, Carry On films and a certain type of music.

The book revisits all of their meetings, including a bizarre encounter with actress Liz Dawn at the Old Grapes in Deansgate, where both believed the other had arranged for 'Vera Duckworth' to make an appearance.

"I think he was quietly impressed rather than speechless," Brown says.

But the book also has cathartic value for Brown - allowing him to focus on his feelings about music and Manchester.

"I still find it difficult to talk about Don," Brown adds. "The Ian Curtis thing had inspired his death and that made coming



MUSICAL ICON Brown says it seemed ridiculous that no one who had actually met Morrissey had written a book about him

to Manchester quite difficult. I'd been there fleetingly to see The Smiths but never spent much time there.

"Moving there and working for the BBC and getting away from the NME made it quite an emotional time for me.

"That's one of the reasons why Morrissey has always been pretty good to me," adds mar-

ried father-of-two Brown, referring not to his personal relationship with the singer but to the music's healing powers.

"In terms of music, particularly about suicide, on songs such as Asleep, The Smiths have been a help.

"And there's always been a sense of community among

Smiths' fans and Morrissey fans and that has helped me too. It's a spiritual thing.

"There's a sensitivity and a humour about him that I like."

Simon Donohue

» **Meetings With Morrissey, by Len Brown is published by Omnibus Press, priced £19.95.**



AUTHOR Len Brown's work eschews the usual 'cut and paste' Smiths pastiche

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