

*Glasgow: A History (Volume I of VI)* by The Tenementals, 2024. [Vinyl] Glasgow: Strength in Numbers Records. £25.00, nine tracks.



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*Glasgow: A History (Vol. I of VI)*, released November 2024, is a nine-track album showcasing Glasgow's radical history through music from The Tenementals, a band of academics, musicians, and artists.

Side one's first track, "The Owl of Minerva" (vocals: David Archibald), launches ekphrastically from Hegel's musings on history to imagine Minerva's little owl setting off over Glasgow, taking in the past, present, and future all at once. It is a fitting album opener introducing broad elements of Glasgow's history. Next comes "A Passion Flower's Lament" (vocals: Jen Cunnion). The song eulogizes the revolutionary Glaswegians who died in the Spanish Civil War from the perspective of the *La Pasionaria* memorial statue of Dolores Ibárruri which stands on the banks of the Clyde. "Pentimento" (vocals: Archibald and Cunnion) appears to offer an allegory of Glasgow's relationship with slavery and the historic denial: "It wisnae us" (Mullen 2009) through references to the family portrait of a Scottish tobacco merchant (Lewis 2018). The subject of "Peter Pike or Pink" (vocals: Sarah Martin) is the 1820 Radical War. The track takes its name from a memorial plaque in Sighthill Cemetery, where one man is tentatively listed as "Thomas Pike or Pink".

Side two begins with "Universal Alienation (We're Not Rats)" (vocals: Archibald and Cunnion). The song is inspired by Jimmy Reid's 1972 University of Glasgow Rectoral Address. "Machines for Living" (vocals: Cunnion), whose title takes inspiration from Le Corbusier, an architect who called the home a machine for living, conjures the disrepair of Glasgow's social housing but leaves room for enigmatic hope. "Post Production" (vocals: Archibald and Cunnion) reflects on deindustrialization in Glasgow and brings to mind Baudrillard's hyperreality. "Fossil Grove" (vocals: Archibald), inspired by the museum of the same name in Glasgow's Victoria Park, takes a different approach to radicalism focusing on geological time. In the final track, the band respond to the city's official slogan, "People Make Glasgow" (vocals: Archibald and Martin), bringing Marx into the equation.

The album and the band constitute a "wild research project", according to Archibald, the band's frontman and a Professor of Political Cinemas at the University of Glasgow (Murphy and Young 2024). Archibald and his collaborators are investigating whether a band can tell Glasgow's history. They ask, what can music bring to history telling and making? At least one element it brings is sound, something textbooks can only evoke, and the album draws appropriately from

rock, folk, and punk traditions, incorporating singing and spoken verse to convey Glasgow's radical political history.

One of the challenges, however, with wild research is balancing genres, and the album does not always get the equilibrium right. Take "People Make Glasgow" (vocals: Archibald and Therese Martin). It starts compellingly enough, but the song soon transforms into a list of "Farmers and planters" to "Global expansionists", and the effect is academic, like a module overview of topics to be covered.

Listeners will benefit from having an initial understanding of Glasgow's radical history to unpick the threads and allusions running through the album. The band intends to reach a diverse audience, including non-academics in Glasgow's music scene. They use YouTube, Spotify, and gig in the city to extend the album's reach and meet audiences where they are. This is part of the project for Archibald, who states they must "run on the logics of a rock band rather than the metricized logics of the neoliberal university" (Gregory 2024). At the same time, the album also presents an alternative entry point for scholars like me researching Glasgow and its history for the first time. I listened to the album while walking along the banks of the Clyde during my first week of ethnographic fieldwork in the city, and it reinforced an early impression of the city as radical.

The album is a novel and apt way to engage with Glasgow's radical history. It also presents a different way of researching and disseminating research to public audiences. Though at times awkwardly academic, the album complements existing ways of historicizing Glasgow and Archibald's "wild research" concept is intriguing and worth following closely.

Gregory, Brett (2024). "The Tenementals: 'Songs of Protest: Scotland, Spain, and Santiago.'" *Culture Matters*, September 16. <https://www.culturematters.org.uk/the-tenementals-songs-of-protest-scotland-spain-and-santiago/>.

Mullen, Stephen (2009). *It Wisnae Us: The Truth about Glasgow and Slavery*. Edinburgh: Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland.

Murphy, Niall and Fay Young (2024). "Series 3 Episode 3: The Tenementals: A History of Glasgow in Song with Prof. David Archibald." If Glasgow's Walls Could Talk, *Glasgow City Heritage Trust*. [Podcast Transcript]. <https://www.glasgowheritage.org.uk/series-3-episode-3-the-tenementals-a-history-of-glasgow-in-song-with-prof-david-archibald/>.