

A weaver, a musician and a tailor have collaborated to produce a garment that celebrates their individual talents, as well as a historic London address. Teleri Lloyd-Jones pays a visit. Portrait by Trent McMinn

# MUSIC AND MAKING

German tourists don't usually feature at launches of contemporary craft and yet as a weaver, a tailor and a singer ready themselves to unveil their collaboration, a holidaying family insist on joining the proceedings. It wasn't the new fabric that had them knocking on the door, but the venue.

This is the ground-floor flat at 34 Montagu Square, a hallowed address in London's cultural history. Leased by Ringo Starr in the mid-60s, Paul McCartney recorded demos there, Jimi Hendrix wrote *The Wind Cries Mary* there, and it was John Lennon and Yoko Ono's first home. The rock'n'roll history finished in a flurry with the archetypal counter-cultural drugs raid in 1968.

Back at an altogether more civilised gathering, weaver BeatWoven, aka Nadia-Anne Ricketts, tailor David Mason and singer-songwriter Beatie Wolfe explain how they have combined forces to create a garment, woven with the patterns of music and the atmosphere of 34 Montagu Square.

Following chance meetings with Mason and Ricketts, Wolfe spearheaded the project. She jumped at the opportunity to record songs live with her band in the living room at Montagu Square, capturing the resonance of the musical history of the place. Ricketts then used her bespoke software to translate the track into a woven fabric. Mason, the tailor in the group (as well as the all-important tenant of the flat), would then

**From left to right:**  
Nadia-Anne Ricketts  
(BeatWoven), Beatie  
Wolfe, wearing the  
*Take Me Home* jacket,  
and David Mason at  
34 Montagu Square









create a bespoke garment for Wolfe to wear during her performances.

Wolfe is a musician with far-reaching interests and ambitions. Her previous projects stretch from exploring the positive impact of music on dementia patients to creating the world's first 3D interactive album app, which resulted in an invitation from Apple to tour internationally. 'The most creative decision about music can't be whether it's on Spotify or not,' she says.

Her creativity doesn't stop with the music; in fact she sees few boundaries. 'I find it strange that we have the concept of the musician as someone who walks into the studio, sings and then leaves and has little else to do with it,' she explains. 'Why wouldn't you embody the reason you're a musician? It can serve as more than entertainment, it can be the only thing that can get through to those people when they're on the verge of not being with us any more. That's a powerful thing.'

While her approach often involves technological innovation, her music is avowedly low-key and intimate. At its most simple, her aim is storytelling: 'The ceremony of putting on a record and listening to it, not having it on in the background but actually listening to the arc that the album takes you on. That really fuelled my desire to get people excited about the ceremony of music. I like technology, there are things that are brilliant and there are things that are distracting – for me, it's all about, how do you enhance the message...? Music is becoming digitised, streamed and compressed, but it's not about being negative about those aspects: it's about trying to retain and celebrate the storytelling of music. That's what the jacket is, it's a story of music, textiles and tailoring – all those threads are enhancing each other.'

The jacket, with its wide lapels, is made from a fabric with a silk base of gold and flecks of red and

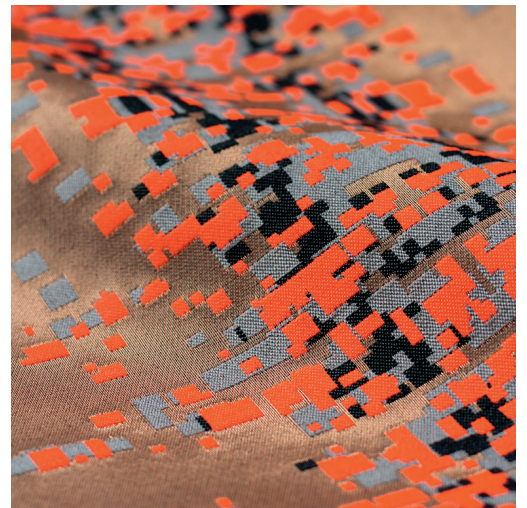
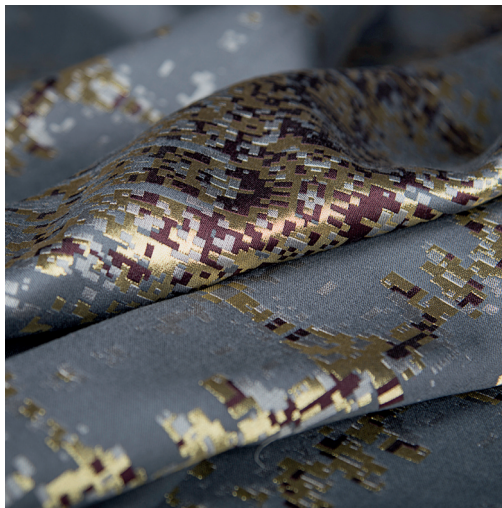


WOLFE PERFORMANCE PHOTO: STU NICHOLLS

Clockwise from above:  
*DiamondDaze Bedroom*  
*Slipper Chair based on*  
*Lucy in the Sky with*  
*Diamonds; My Tribe;*  
*CoolTone, Riff: Tone:*  
*Beat Collection.*  
All by BeatWoven

'I'm always open to collaborations, sharing ideas and energy. It's what I've always wanted to do with other people'

DAVID MASON





white. It screams indulgence and performance. ‘We had a rock star tailor, awesome fabric and a musician – let’s make this as flamboyant as Hendrix, Bowie, all of them combined!’ Wolfe smiles.

The rock star tailor in question is David Mason. His career began as a Saturday job at a shop in Manchester, where he was a studying chemistry. After becoming friends with the shop’s tailor, Mason found himself making trousers with wide turn-ups for the shop’s customers. His talent and client list grew, and on a trip to New York in 1996 he had a chance meeting with Edward Sexton: ‘He was the godfather of Savile Row, and I explained to him what I’d been doing. He said, “If you want to learn how to do it properly then come and work for me”. Which I did, and I moved to London.’

Mason soon became interested in the heritage names of British tailoring. Initially it was Nutters of Savile Row, then Anthony Sinclair (who dressed James Bond) and now Mr Fish. These names were the tailors to the film and music stars of the 50s, 60s and 70s. Mason now has a portfolio of tailoring businesses, with Mr Fish being his most recent. The jacket from the collaboration is the first piece to be made under the relaunched Mr Fish label, at which Mason is now at the helm.

Michael Fish began making James Bond’s shirts at Turnbull & Asser, Mason tells me. In 1966 he opened his own label, and his flamboyant styles were worn by Mick Jagger, Peter Sellers and David Bowie. They had to change the album cover of Bowie’s *The Man Who Sold the World* because the US considered it obscene as the star was sporting a Mr Fish dress. In 1974, one of his last commissions was the gown for Muhammad Ali’s ‘Rumble in the Jungle’ fight in Zaire. ‘How do you do all that in eight years? It’s more than most designers would achieve in a lifetime... Now, designers are like rock stars, more famous than their clients.’

Mason met Wolfe at the Royal Albert Hall, one of the many happy accidents that he says punctuate his life. ‘It just happens. I’m always open to collaborations, sharing ideas and energy. It’s what I’ve always wanted to do with other people. From the first tailor in Manchester to Edward Sexton – people walk into your life and you’ve got the opportunity to work with them.’

Wolfe and Mason had begun hatching plans, but the trio wasn’t complete until BeatWoven was brought into the mix. Wolfe met Nadia-Anne Ricketts of BeatWoven at an exhibition of digital craft. Ricketts was showing a chair she had upholstered with fabric detailing the song *Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds* – a Beatles-related omen if ever it were needed. ‘We barely even got to talk. But I saw that chair, and everything came together,’ Wolfe remembers.

‘That’s the oboe section,’ Ricketts says, as she points at one of her fabrics in her studio at London’s Cockpit Arts. Music, in her hands, becomes an abstracted digitised landscape. Using specialised software, music is translated into weave patterns, silence is the background colour with the various pixels representing the beats and sounds.

Though Ricketts has focused on soft furnishings and wall pieces since launching BeatWoven in 2014, she’s always wanted to see her fabric as clothing – ‘to wear music’, as she evocatively puts it. The trio discussed which of Wolfe’s songs from the new album would fit the project best and the track appropriately called *Take Me Home* was selected. Ricketts was given the choice between working with a clean studio recording or the one made at 34 Montagu Square. The answer was obvious, so using her software Ricketts isolated moments in the track and created a series of repeating patterns.

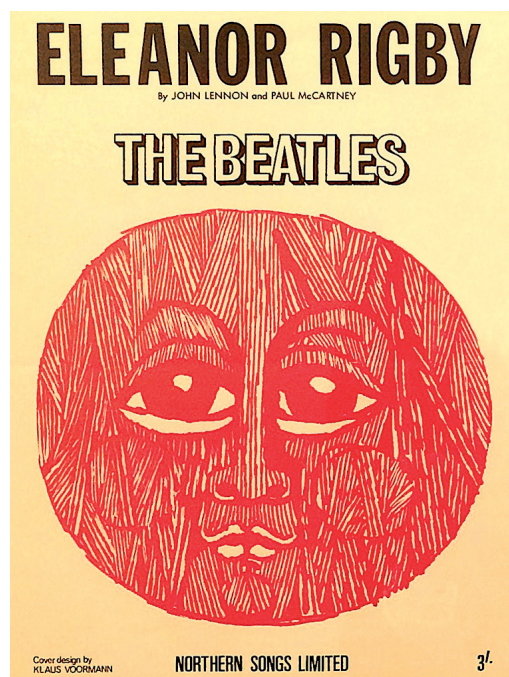
Choosing the live recording meant a little tidy-

ing up of some of the distracting ambient noises. But soon Ricketts was presenting colourways to Mason and Wolfe. ‘I treated it like a commission really,’ Ricketts explains. ‘Beatie’s got to wear it, so she needs to be happy in it.’ The fabric was woven where all of BeatWoven fabrics are made, in Sudbury, Suffolk, at a mill which began life in 18th-century Spitalfields.

Before her career in textiles, Ricketts was a dancer. Music has always been at the centre of her interests, so she and Wolfe had an immediate bond: ‘I think we’re similar in the way we think. We both understand music, the geometry that goes on behind it. The unseen pattern: just because you don’t see it doesn’t mean it’s not there.’

Ricketts is aware that the last 30 years has fundamentally altered our musical experience. ‘When I was 14 I went out raving and had friends who were DJs,’ she says. ‘They’d get up on Saturdays, take a bus into Oxford, go to the record shop and spend half a day sifting through everything. They got the record in their hand and got back on the bus, waiting the whole time to return home to play it. That’s a tactile, social process that takes half a day. Now you can download it on your phone while you’re sitting on the bus. There is a certain side that is being missed out. So how do you bring back those different experiences of music?’

Ricketts asks her clients to see both textiles and music in a new light, just as Wolfe looks at ways to make the tech generation fall in love with albums again. There may be cutting-edge technology at work in this collaboration but, appropriately for 34 Montagu Square, there is also a good dose of nostalgia too for the ghosts of music’s past. *Beatie Wolfe is touring the US this spring. Her album ‘Montagu Square’ is out now. [www.beatiewolf.com](http://www.beatiewolf.com). BeatWoven is showing at ‘Design Days Dubai’, 14-18 March. [www.beatwoven.co.uk](http://www.beatwoven.co.uk)*



Above: *Eleanor Rigby*, The Beatles, 1966 (hung on the wall at 34 Montagu Square). Right: Beatie Wolfe performing in the living room of the flat

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