



English town celebrates local hero **ED SHEERAN**

The little-known town of Ipswich in eastern England has historically prided itself on farming and football, but is now celebrating the stellar pop career of its most famous son, Ed Sheeran. The global hit machine's journey to stardom began in the nearby town of Framlingham, where he played his first gig in front of around 30 people. Fourteen years later, the singer is capping off a two-year international tour, on which he played for almost nine million people, with four homecoming shows in Ipswich.

in the school orchestra in Framlingham while a photograph captures him busking in the street, guitar case open to accept donations, aged 13.

Natural showman

Ian Johnson, who spotted Sheeran when he was 16 and helped him break through, told AFP how he was "impressed with... the way he engaged the audience at that age". His career took off with the 2011 release of his first album, "+", followed by a series of hits including "Don't", "Thinking Out Loud" and "Castle On The Hill", which explores his love of growing up in rural Suffolk. The exhibition presents both the superstar who electrifies crowds at concerts in Germany, Australia and the United States—captured by photographer Mark Surridge—and also the four-time Grammy winner's more private side.

A bronze sculpture depicting a young Ed and his brother embracing each other is on show, as well as several drawings, including an Andy Warhol inspired self-portrait in orange and black, his favorite colors. A series of portraits by the painter Colin Davidson, who counts Queen Elizabeth II as one of his previous subjects, reveal "the Ed I think we might see whenever he's seemingly unaware of anyone else being in the room," he told AFP. "I like to think that's the mood that he's in whenever he's on his own, creating his work or writing songs," added the painter.

'Humble' guy

Other highlights of the free exhibition, which runs until spring 2020, are two of his guitars, one of which he named "Cyril", and which starred in more than 300 concerts in 2009. There is also a puppet of the performer used in the video clip for "Sing". In Ipswich, the superstar is a hero. The Swan pub in the town Centre sells postcards and other memorabilia, and even keeps a bottle of Sheeran's favorite ketchup in a Plexiglas box "in case Ed comes".

Singer Barney Holmes, who jammed with Sheeran about ten years ago, told AFP his success could be explained partly because "everyone can relate to an underdog". "You have this really humble, sweet, pale ginger guy... but he was a sweet guy that you just didn't expect to have such a big presence," Holmes said after a gig in the pub. "I think that's the Ed Sheeran effect." — AFP



A cased bottle of Heinz tomato ketchup is pictured on display at inside the re-opened Swan pub in Ipswich.



An award for 6x platinum record sales for British musician Ed Sheeran's single 'Shape of You'.



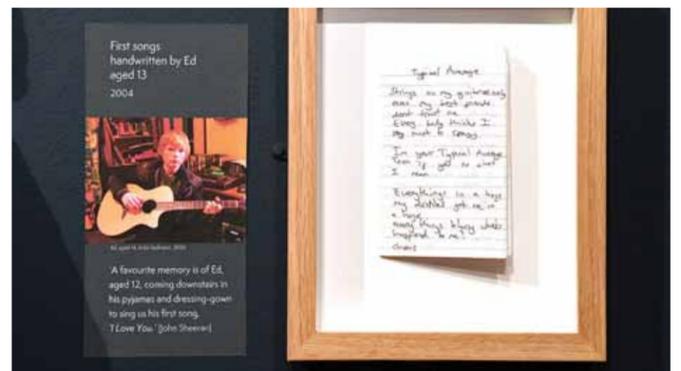
A gold play button, awarded to British musician Ed Sheeran for achieving 'one million subscribers' on YouTube is pictured during a press preview.



A musician performs during the re-opening of The Swan pub in Ipswich, east England.

An exhibition entitled "Made in Suffolk", will mark the event, tracing the career of the singer/songwriter responsible for hit singles such as "Shape of You", which helped him amass a £160 million (\$194 million, 175 million euro) fortune. The show reveals his steely determination to make it in the music business and the unfailing support of his parents, who sold merchandise during his early concerts.

A video montage follows his journey from babyhood to adulthood, with his round face and shock of red hair a constant presence as he tries his hand at the piano, drums and the guitar, always with a smile on his lips. A written account details how as a boy Edward Christopher Sheeran sang in the choir and played cello



A song, written by British musician Ed Sheeran when he was 13-years-old, is pictured during a press preview of the exhibition "Ed Sheeran: Made in Suffolk".



British musician Ed Sheeran's 'Dean' guitar, used by the artist for busking, gigging and studio recording in his early to mid-teens, is pictured during a press preview.



A puppet of British musician Ed Sheeran, used the music videos for the songs "Sing" and "Happier", designed by Steve Troop and BJ Guyer of Puppet Design Studios.



Pedestrians walk past shops in Ipswich, east England.



An award for 2x platinum record sales for British musician Ed Sheeran's album 'X' is pictured during a press preview.