

Tim Arnold, cultural activist: “When I left social media, I reached into my pocket as if I had a phantom limb” by Raquel Peláez, El País

The musician and performer, activist against gentrification and the exposure of children to algorithms, performs his show ‘Super Connected’ at the Soho Theatre in Madrid on February 20 with, as part of the OFF Festival.



“My girlfriend says that when I speak in Spanish, a part of my personality comes out that isn't seen when I speak English,” explains the smiling and amused musician and activist Tim Arnold after reminiscing about his childhood in Málaga (including songs by Mecano and Hombres G), where he studied at a Steiner school for 3 years thanks to the determination of his mother, the actress Polly Perkins. Eccentric and hyperactive, Arnold, who had a moment of glory during the Britpop era with a band Jocasta, has been an activist for the preservation of Soho and one of those figures of British bohemia who knows everyone: this led him to collaborate with David Bowie’s mentor, the dancer Lindsay Kemp with whom he established a close friendship with. Now he arrives in Madrid with his show Super Connected, a plea against social media addiction, with which he seeks to raise awareness among families about the need to protect minors from what he considers an adult drug.



Question: You have been a prominent activist against gentrification. What advice would you give to major Spanish cities to avoid it?

Answer: I think it's important to distinguish between gentrification and the destruction of culture, because sometimes gentrification is renewal, and not all changes are bad. What I tried to do in Soho was to show that the new doesn't have to mean tearing down the old. We have to protect theatres, cultural spaces, and artistic communities.

Q: Do you think what you did there has made a difference?

A: Well, in 2015, when I began the Save Soho initiative, I thought it wasn't doing anything. But over the years, I've spoken with people from all over the world and realised that it inspired many people to start their own initiatives. Young people need to know that they have alternatives for connecting with art in the real world and that not everything needs to be experienced through a mobile phone. People of my generation know this, but younger ones don't always know this.

“We aren't biologically designed for an infinite flow of information.” – Tim Arnold

Q. Last week in Spain, there was talk of banning social media for minors under 16. Some people argue that this is an attack on freedom of expression.

A. Freedom of expression is a very complicated issue. I think that when you're a child, it's important for parents to have some kind of control. On one side are the children, on the other the parents. In the middle are the tech companies: Facebook, Meta, X, Amazon. This is very dangerous. I like technology and I use it, but I'm an adult and I can choose. Mobile phones are designed to be addictive, and if your brain hasn't finished developing, that addiction can affect the rest of your life. We aren't biologically designed for an infinite flow of information. Young people are suffering the consequences as if they are.

Q. When did you become aware of this issue?

A. In 2010, I spent a few months working at Apple as a creative. I was 35 at the time, and my colleagues were much younger. I started writing songs about the topic out of pure curiosity. At that point, I had already released many albums, but I began using the available tools and realised they were interrupting my creative flow, making me lose my unique approach to creativity. That's when I started researching. Then a psychologist friend told me the story of a 16-year-old patient who stopped going to school, staying in her room for months with only WhatsApp, Facebook, all social media, communicating solely online. That inspired me to write the album *Super Connected* and later write and direct the film drama.

Q. You don't have children, but you're very concerned about how this affects families. Why that perspective?

A. A few years ago, my family experienced a rupture, and it made me realize how important family was to me. Now I have a family of friends. But I've always felt empathy for other people's problems. For example, in 2017, I started a project called *What Love Would Want*, which revolved around love in all its forms, including same-sex love. I'm not gay, but my mother is. I've had two mothers, and I don't like that some people think there's something wrong with that, so I wanted to support love as a human right. I also had a very happy childhood thanks to creative freedom, and I want all children to have that option. I don't have children of my own, but I've been a co-parent to my partner's children since the pandemic, and I was a child once too!

Q: And what about the creative possibilities that social media and new technologies have opened up? You've complained that in the 90s, when you were in your independent band, Jocasta, your record company wouldn't let you experiment as much as you would have liked.

A. I was a part time songwriting tutor for several years at a college where incredibly talented young people arrive saying they want to be like Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, or David Bowie, seeking human connection, but there they were, glued to their phones because they had developed a dependency at a very young age. Many times I had to stop the class because they were on their phones, and it made me very sad.

Q. Was your own process of disconnecting difficult? Tell me a little about the phases you went through, please.

A. The first time I quit, I put my iPhone in a drawer and used a Nokia without internet access, but after three months I was back at it again. Then I tried again for nine months and wrote down everything I realised I needed from the smartphone whenever I felt like going back to it. Then I learnt how to replace that on my laptop or, without notifications, which interrupt me like a hammer. The internet isn't the drug; it's the algorithms designed to create dopamine rushes. The Super Connected website has a list of alternative methods for getting dopamine without 'apps'.

Q: Did you have withdrawal symptoms during that period?

A: It was more like having a *phantom limb*. For eight months when there was only a non-smart phone in my pocket, but I'd reach into my pocket for no reason, because that's where I got used to having a device that seems to contain all the information in the world. It was very strange.

Q: Many people argue that living without social media is also a class privilege. What do you think?

A: Well, it's true. Many people who come to our show aren't rich; many are single mothers with children who need an iPad to entertain their children while the mother is trying to attend to chores. It's those people we're trying to help with this project. We know that Mark Zuckerberg's children go to a screen-free school. I myself studied at a Waldorf school for a short time. If the people in the top 1% don't believe in a digital upbringing for their children, then neither should anyone else.

Q: And are you optimistic or pessimistic about the future?

A: Always optimistic. You can't change the world in a day, but you have to plant the seeds for those who come after you. Our lives and our actions now do not die when we are gone.

Interview by **Raquel Peláez**. Originally Published in **El País**, 12th February 2026.

<https://elpais.com/cultura/2026-02-12/tim-arnold-activista-cultural-cuando-deje-las-redes-me-echaba-la-mano-al-bolsillo-como-si-tuviese-un-miembro-fantasma.html>

EL PAÍS
EDICIÓN CASTELLANA

PAÍS: España
PÁGINAS: 48
AVE: 9810 €
ÁREA: 216 CM² - 45%

FRECUENCIA: Diario
DIFUSIÓN: 14948
OTS: 61000
SECCIÓN: ÚLTIMA



12 Febrero, 2026



Tim Arnold, el viernes en Madrid. SANTI BURDÍAS

RAQUEL PELÁEZ
Madrid

"Mi novia dice que cuando me comunico con españoles sale una parte de mi personalidad que no se ve cuando hablo en inglés", explica risueño y divertido el músico y performer **Tim Arnold** (Londres, 50 años) tras recordar su infancia en Málaga, donde estudió en una escuela Waldorf gracias al empeño de su madre, la actriz Polly Perkins. Excéntrico e hiperactivo, Arnold, quien tuvo su momento de gloria en los años del *Britpop* con una banda llamada Jocasta, ha sido activista por la preservación del Soho y colaboró con el bailarín Lindsay Kemp. El día 20, gracias al OFF Festival, llegará a Madrid con su espectáculo *Super Connected*, un alegato contra la adicción a las redes sociales, con el que busca concienciar a las familias de la necesidad de proteger a los menores de lo que él considera una droga adulta.

Pregunta. Usted ha sido un activista muy señalado contra la gentrificación. ¿Qué consejo le daría a las grandes ciudades españolas para evitarla?

Respuesta. Es importante establecer una diferencia entre gentrificación y destrucción de la cultura, porque a veces gentrificar es renovar y no todos los cambios son malos. Lo que yo intenté en el Soho fue demostrar que lo nuevo no tiene que signifi-

CONVERSACIONES A LA CONTRA

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Activista cultural

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ficar tirar lo antiguo. Tenemos que proteger los teatros, los espacios culturales y las comunidades artísticas. Los jóvenes tienen que saber que cuentan con alternativas para estar en contacto con el arte en el mundo real y que no todo se puede experimentar mediante el móvil.

P. La semana pasada en España se habló de la posibilidad de prohibir las redes sociales a los menores de 16 años. Hay quien dice que es un ataque a la libertad de expresión.

R. La libertad de expresión es un tema muy complicado. De un lado están los niños, del otro los padres. En medio, las compañías tecnológicas, Facebook, Meta, X, Amazon. Esto es muy peligroso. A mí me gusta la tecnología y la utilizo, pero soy adulto y puedo elegir. No estamos biológicamente preparados para un flujo infinito de información. La juventud está sufriendo las consecuencias de fingir que sí.

P. ¿Cuándo se produjo su despertar con respecto a este asunto?

R. En 2010 estuve unos meses trabajando en Apple como creativo. En ese momento yo ya había lanzado muchos álbumes, pero comencé a usar las herramientas disponibles y me di cuenta de que me quitaban la fluidez, de que me hacían perder mi poder. Ahí empecé a investigar. Después un amigo psicólogo me contó la historia de una paciente de 16 años que dejó de ir al colegio, se quedaba en su habitación durante meses comunicándose solo por internet. Eso me inspiró para el álbum *Super Connected*.

P. ¿Y las posibilidades creativas que han abierto las redes y las nuevas tecnologías?

R. He sido profesor de música durante varios años en una escuela a la que llegan jóvenes increíblemente talentosos, pero ahí estaban pegados al teléfono porque tenían dependencia de él. Muchas veces tenía que parar la clase porque andaban con el móvil y me ponía muy triste.

P. ¿Su proceso de desconexión fue duro?

R. La primera vez que lo dejé metí el iPhone en un cajón y utilizaba un Nokia sin conexión, pero a los tres meses ya estaba otra vez de vuelta. Después lo volví a intentar durante nueve meses y escribía todo lo que pensaba cada vez que me entraban ganas de recuperarlo. En la web de *Super Connected* hay una lista de métodos alternativos para conseguir esa dopamina.

P. ¿Tenía ataques de mono?

R. Era más bien como si tuviese un miembro fantasma. Durante ocho meses me echaba la mano al bolsillo.

P. Mucha gente argumenta que vivir sin redes también es un privilegio. ¿Qué opina?

R. Pues que es verdad. La gente que viene a nuestro *show* no es rica, muchas son madres solteras con hijos que necesitan un iPad para aplacarles y hacer las demás tareas de su vida. Es a esa gente a la que estamos intentando ayudar con este proyecto.