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NIGHTSHIFT

Oxford's Music Magazine

Free every
month.
Issue 121
August
2005

Fell City Girl

*On the fast track to
rock and roll glory*



Photo: Julian Small

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NEWS

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This month's issue is dedicated to Albini the Nightshift cat

SUPERGRASS play an intimate show at the Oxford Playhouse this month (Saturday 13th August) as part of a short national tour. The tour is aimed at promoting new album, 'The Road To Rouen', which marks a change of musical direction for the band.

Talking about the tour, singer Gaz Coombes said, "It's gonna be interesting using these little theatres and clubs to show people another musical side of the band. It's not something we've really done before in this way, so we're excited about it. We'll have an old friend playing percussion alongside Danny and his homemade drum kit, new songs and a few old ones that we've not tried before, and a little stage set to give it a real close, mellow, theatrical vibe."

Tickets for the show are on sale now from the Playhouse box office, on 01865 305305. 'Road to Rouen' is released on 15th August.

CHARLOTTE CHURCH, Lucie Silvas, The Noise Next Door, Chesney Hawkes, Freefaller, Tyler James and KT Tunstall are the latest acts to be added to the bill for Fox FM's Party In The park, which takes place in South Park on Sunday 28th August. They join headliners Texas, announced last month. Tickets for Party In The park are available online through Fox FM's website (foxfm.com), priced £10, with £1 from each ticket going to Help A Local Child.

THE DOWNLOAD has been granted an extra month's run on BBC Radio Oxford. The local music show will now run until the end of August, with BBC programmers pleased with the show's coverage of the local music scene and its strong listening figures. The Download is broadcast every Saturday evening from 6-7pm on 95.2fm. The show is presented by Tim Bearder and as well as playing an assortment of local releases, features interviews with local and touring bands, a gig and club listing and a demo vote. Keep listening and help keep Oxford music on the radio.

THE EXETER HALL in Cowley is hosting a four-day free live music festival over the August Bank Holiday Weekend. The festival will feature some 30 acts, most of whom have played at the Ex in the past year. Things kick off on the evening of Friday 26th, with sets from The

Ian Parker Band, Michael Myers, The Invisible and Blue Wax. Music starts at 7pm. On the Saturday, Sunday and Monday, proceedings kick off at 2pm, with a broad selection of rock, folk, jazz, blues and acoustic acts, including Leburn, Kohoutek, Anton Barbeau, Uniting the Elements, Sarah Wilson, Laima Bite, The Cheese graters, Tounsi and The Powders. A cheap and extremely cheerful alternative to Reading Festival. Call 01865 776431 for more details.

GOOD AND BAD NEWS for folks music fans in Oxford this month. The bad news is that both Nettlebed Folk Club and Oxford Folk Club are closed throughout August, with both clubs set to resume live music early in September. The good news is that both Cropredy Festival and Towersey Village Festival take place this month, with strong folk line-ups. Fairport Convention's Cropredy Festival takes place from Thursday 11th – Saturday 13th August, with Richard Thompson, Country Joe McDonald, Beth Nielsen Chapman and Jah Wobble amongst the acts joining the English folk legends on stage. For ticket information, go to www.fairportconvention.com. This year's Towersey Festival, meanwhile, runs from Thursday 25th to Monday 29th August. Show Of Hands, John McHerry's At First Light and Karine Polwart head an extensive bill of folk, blues and world music. Tickets for the five-day festival are available from the box office on 01629 827016.

ELIZA CARTHY AND THE RATCATCHERS, The Oyster Band and John Spiers and Jon Boden are among the acts confirmed for this year's Wallingford Bunkfest. The festival, now in its fourth year, runs across the weekend of the 2nd to the 4th September at various venues around Wallingford. As well as live music there will be the usual array of ceilidhs, workshops and a beer festival. More details at www.bunkfest.co.uk.

DUE TO STRICT PRINT DEADLINES, Nightshift went to press before Truck Festival. Our review of the festival will appear in the September issue. The 'Truck 8' compilation CD, featuring tracks from the likes of Black Nielson, Captive State, Cranes, Fell City Girl, Neil Halstead, The Black Madonnas and Biffy Clyro, is on sale now.



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Thursday 18th **LIVE BANDS NIGHT** 8-12am

Saturday 20th **ROADRUNNER** (Mod, Northern Soul, Funky Hammond and more) 9-2am

Saturday 27th **REGGAE AND R'n'B NIGHT** 9-2am

A Quiet Word With

Fell City Girl

AND THIS YEAR'S OXFORD

representatives at Reading and Leeds festivals will be... Fell City Girl.

That's right, Fell City Girl, the band formed barely two years ago by a group of mates studying at Brookes University, still unsigned, and last seen in Oxford supporting Dive Dive at the Zodiac. Fell City Girl, a band who have come a long, long way in a very short space of time and look set to go even further in the very near future.

SINCE THEY HIT THE LOCAL

gig scene just under two years ago, Fell City Girl have deservedly earned themselves a reputation as one of the most promising young bands around, playing to increasingly packed local venues like the Wheatsheaf and the Cellar, while their show at this year's Oxford Punt in May saw the venue sold out within minutes of doors opening and a queue of disappointed fans out into the street below. This month Fell City Girl release their second single, 'Weaker Light', on Nomadic Records, the follow-up to last year's split CD with Swindon-based rockers Latitude Blue.

The new single, a limited edition 7", displays so much of what is great about Fell City Girl: a short, sharp hit of emotionally-intense melodic rock that's alternately sweet, tender and slightly fraught, or sky-scrapingly epic. Comparisons to early Radiohead aren't far off the mark, but freshness and vitality pours from the song, while live Fell City Girl have a presence, confidence and epic sense of musical scale that stretches from Jeff Buckley, through Muse and The Cure to the more esoteric likes of Godspeed You! Black Emperor. No



wonder Nightshift was excited enough to hail them as the best new band to emerge from Oxford in 2004.

FELL CITY GIRL'S FORMATION

was nothing special: a bunch of mates rehearsing together in a room at a Brookes University halls of residence, getting threatened with eviction of they didn't keep the noise down, eventually ditching the 'Freebird'-obsessed guitarist, before settling on the current line-up (*Phil McMinn: vocals and guitar; Joe Gibbons: guitars; Adam Drake: bass; James 'Shrek' Pamphlion: drums*) and taking their formative sound out into the Oxford scene. Rave reviews quickly followed – not just from Nightshift but also the likes of Drowned In Sound, and soon the record, publishing and management companies started buzzing around.

With the various members either graduating or deferring their degrees to concentrate on the band, things have really picked up speed lately,

culminating in that invitation to play on the Carling Stage at Reading and Leeds Festivals – the launch pad for so many bands in recent times. Nightshift spoke to

the band ahead of their appearance at Truck Festival and a short tour to promote the release of 'Weaker Light'.

FELL CITY GIRL ARE A BAND

who formed at university but they don't see themselves as a university band, having early on suffered from the musical snobbery that can exist in academic circles.

Phil: "The first rehearsal we had was at Brookes music department. We'd borrowed their drum kit, but it'd been double booked. So in walks the head of the jazz quartet or whatever the fuck they were, and said "I'm sorry, you're not *real* music students so we take priority", so we had to give them the kit and pack our gear up after five minutes. Having said that, the music societies are run by really good people so it's not all bad. I'm just bitter at not being a real music student, I guess..."

Joe: "I joined the band a few months after the others had started playing together and although I was just about to start a course at Brookes I joined the band completely independent of the university. I actually met them through an advert on the Nightshift messageboard, so you guys are partly to blame for all this racket! I don't want to put Brookes down at all because I've met some cool people there, it's just that for me college and band life are pretty much unrelated."

There is still some prejudice from both sides of the supposed town/gown divide in the local music scene. How well integrated do you think students are into the local scene? Are

there any particular barriers you've come across as a student band?

Phil: "No not really. It's an ongoing debate but the attendance at gigs by students is shitty, compared to the 1,200 people that pack into Brookes' venue every Wednesday for their club nights. But what can you do? It's not really anyone's fault, more a collective mindset that cheaper drinks are more important than live music now."

Shrek: "It's a shame that there is such a high quality of live music being played in Oxford every night of the week by so many talented bands and solo artists, yet so many students and people in Oxford are disregarding it for club anthems and drinks promos. A buzzing music scene like the one that is occurring in Oxford at the moment is such a rare and beautiful thing that everyone in Oxford should appreciate it more."

Are you all planning to stick around Oxford when your courses are finished?

Phil: "Yes, it's a great place to be. Especially in Summer. There's nowhere like it – every lady is beautiful. If I was a singer in a band I'd be unstoppable..."

Shrek: "As a band we have been really welcomed into Oxford and its music scene and we've made so many friends as a result...and there are so many more debauched nights to be had, it would be just plain rude to leave now."

Joe: "I'm here for life I reckon; I love the place. Now, if I could only stop the wheels on my bike getting kicked in every other week..."

Phil, you said before that the likes of Truck were partly instrumental in you choosing to come and study in Oxford. What is your impression of Oxford now and how much has it changed in the time you've lived here?

Phil: "It's a really divided place – there's the horror of Cowley Centre right through to the centre of town which is pretty beautiful. In terms of being in a band, it's a great place to develop because you can get recognised just by playing a handful of gigs. There may only be a handful of really great bands locally, but there is so much going on – the guys at OxfordBands run a great night, as does Ady at Vacuous Pop. You can go to The Wheatsheaf three times a



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week and see a good band most of the time. I've only been in Oxford a few years so it hasn't really changed that much, apart from those fucking roadworks on the Cowley Road. Honestly, someone's going to get hurt by me if they don't stop soon."

FELL CITY GIRL FORMED A couple of years ago but became local favourites very quickly. How and why do they think that happened? Phil: "I think we're not really in a position to know why this happened the way it did. But my guess is that we do something a bit more accessible than a lot of the Oxford bands at the moment. There is nothing exclusive about the music we make, yet I think it still has an edge to it that separates us from the Tesco's buying public. Also we're all incredibly handsome, which helps." Tell us about the new single and the record label.

Phil: "Last summer we were kind of torn between who to go with for management and the guys we had to say no to have since set up a little label called Nomadic Music, and so we figured we wanted to work with them on it because they gave a shit about us. It's coming out on 7", limited to 1000 hand-numbered copies and the first 100 will each have a unique little item in them that we've been collecting over the last year, so no copy will be the same. It's a cliché but it's a little thank you to people in Oxford."

You're playing at the Reading and Leeds Festivals. How did that come about and how do you feel about it?

Phil: "I got a phone call from our management telling us about it on the day I'd graduated from university. I'd been drinking for nine hours straight and when I woke up the next day I had to ring him to check if it was actually true. We're feeling pretty good about it right now to be honest, it still seems like a long way off but to be given such a platform is an incredible opportunity for us to take the next step. Hopefully we'll be camping next to the Foo Fighters' tent - maybe we can borrow Dave Grohl's tin opener. A lot of excellent Dave Grohl impressions are knocking around our house at the moment."

Joe: "Reading was my first festival experience as a kid so I'm personally a little awe-struck to be playing there now, with all these 'proper' bands. I was there last year and spent quite a lot of time at the new bands tent; if you'd have told me then that we'd be playing there this year I'd have fallen headlong into the mud and kebab trays. And to cap it all, we're playing Leeds on my birthday. The best present ever!"

'EPIC' AND 'STADIUM-SIZED' are descriptions commonly used in reviews of Fell City Girl; live in

particular their sound seems too big for the size of venues they're currently playing. Is there a conscious desire to create big music?

Phil: "It's funny, when we started it was never meant to be like that, but when people start reviewing you and saying things like that, you do start changing the way you write. And you start trying to see if you can *actually* 'do' epic. When we played The Scala in January, friends of mine in the audience heard a couple of people take the piss out of us when we walked on - we have tiny amps and a tiny singer, and within 30 seconds I'm told they were bouncing up and down on the spot going "OH MY FUCKING GOD!" So I made up for my disability. All those years of abuse finally paid off, he he!"

Joe: "The truth is that we're all egomaniacs and are just trying to 'out-loud' each other! No, I think individually we all try to maximise the impact each of our instruments can have sonically, but at the same time always placing most importance on how the song works as a whole; I don't think any of us are great fans of self-indulgent wig outs. Almost despite ourselves the songs just always seem to get bigger and bigger the more we play them; over-excitedness at what everyone else is coming up with just takes over sometimes!"

Having come so far so quickly, and with their continued rise seemingly guaranteed in the immediate future, where do Fell City Girl realistically see themselves a year from now?

Phil: "Anywhere but the office I work in. It's so hard to know what's going to happen, or whether this all goes away tomorrow. There have been so many 'could have been' bands in Oxford and that makes me very wary of getting ahead of ourselves. Hype is a wonderful thing isn't it? We're going to carry on with what we're doing and get really good live. And of course if they ask us to open the Olympic Ceremony in 2012, we'll hopefully be available..."

Such sentiments sound slightly familiar. When we first interviewed a young local band called On A Friday some 14 years ago that same ambition and determination shone through. Something tells us we've only just started to see the real potential of Fell City Girl. This year first on the Carling Stage; next year, festival headliners? Don't bet against it.

'Weaker Light' is released on August 8th on Nomadic Records. Fell City Girl play at the Wheatsheaf on Saturday 20th August, plus the Carling Stage at Reading Festival (Fri 26th) and Leeds Festival (Sat 27th). Check out www.fellcitygirl.co.uk for more news and gig dates.

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SUPERGRASS

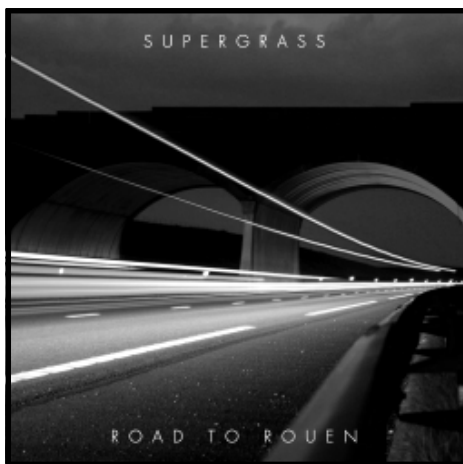
'Road To Rouen'

(Parlophone)

There comes a time in every band's life when they have to grow up, musically at least (The Ramones being the exception that proves the rule). And so that time comes with Supergrass and this, their fifth studio album.

Of course even back in the days of 'I Should Coco' Gaz, Danny and Mickey (before Bob joined) weren't averse to the odd moment of sober contemplation, but 'Road To Rouen' goes the whole hog, dispensing almost entirely with the chipper glam-stomping punk-pop of the past twelve years. It's not an acoustic album, but it is resolutely mellow. The band have incorporated such exotic instruments as ukulele and zither, as well as brass and string parts; there are brief detours into polka and psychedelic folk but the basic format remains confidently laid-back guitar and piano-led pop.

There are traces of Supergrass' affection for mid-70s Bowie still kicking about, notably on the album's title track, while The Faces and Led Zeppelin make fleeting visits. Album opener 'Tales Of Endurance' moves from an idle jam into a breezy Stone Roses lullaby, while 'Sad Girl' steals wholesale from 'I Am the Walrus', and there is a warm, fuzzy lysergic fug hanging over the whole album. Super-strength skunk has long been the band's recreational drug of choice, but now the smoke clouds are even thicker, the



head-rushes fewer and further between. The comfortably numb feeling is amplified by the stretched-out, almost rambling feel of the album which defies its compact 35 minute running time. At its best 'Road To Rouen' sounds like the soundtrack to a cult road movie, set in a mythical 1970s Mid-West. At others, it sounds like a band at a crossroads, unsure quite where their new-found maturity should lead them.

So, a minor indulgence, a stop-gap or a mid-life crisis? 'Road To Rouen' is probably a bit of all of these and none of them completely. Whether it represents the permanent new face of Supergrass or not, only time will tell. Either way, it's a grower, so pull up an armchair and roll yourself a fat one.

Sue Foreman

NERVOUS_TESTPILOT

'Determinance'

(Freedom Road)

Paul Taylor, aka Nervous_testpilot, has been one of the most consistently compelling live dance acts in Oxford over the last couple of



years, notably his near-legendary sets at Truck Festival. His full-on electro assault, coupled with a mischievous smash'n'grab approach to sampling makes for an irresistible spectacle even in the middle of the afternoon.

This debut release is a forty-minute EP featuring five tracks from the sci-fi swordplay video game 'Determinance'. Such soundtracking suits Nervous_testpilot perfectly: his busy, uncluttered brand of techno – not far off Eat Static or Banco De Gaia's uplifting brand of trance – compliments the adrenaline rush of slice-em-up action, but works equally well as dancefloor filler.

There's a cool metallic sheen to the synthetics and a relentlessly bubbling rhythmic pulse; Goan trance by any other name, a winner whatever you call it.

Terry Molloy

REDOX

'Bullaburra'

(Own Label)

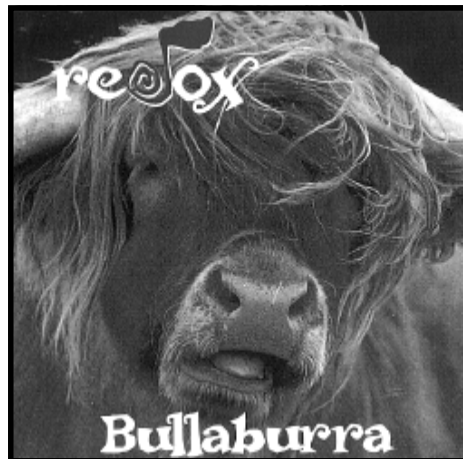
Redox's debut album lands on the doormat the same day Glastonbury is almost washed into the sea by torrential storms. Appropriate really, since they're exactly the sort of band you might expect to stumble across while a little worse for wear at 3 in the morning, in some forgotten corner of the Green Field.

Formed by Phil Freizinger and Sue Smith, the couple behind Klub Kakofanney and veterans, we suspect, of a great many festivals and magic mushroom trips over the years, Redox pack in all the ingredients of a lost-in-space-and-time hippy band: from Phil's playful flute excursions on 'Love Is There', to Sue's unearthly Mother Gong-like whooping and shrieking on the album's title track; from the cod-reggae grooves of 'Free' to the world funk rhythms that underpin much of the album, and a good few wistful guitar solos besides.

As such the album can be either gently uplifting in an uncaringly summery way, or nail-bitingly spiritual in a pagan earth mother manner. Certainly the lyrical content of songs like 'Blood' and 'Free' tend toward the latter, and only the most stoned of 70s throwbacks could endure the loose jam session that is 'Feeling's Right', but Redox can then hit you with a cracker like 'Bullaburra' itself: part barn dance hoedown, part ska skank, part space rock ritual with a nagging chorus that's utterly infectious. A crazy little pop song; here's where the party should really begin.

Redox's most endearing feature is their unselfconscious retro vibe and shameless pillaging of every style and period of music to suit their holistic view – from Canned Heat to Ozric Tentacles via a Jamaican beach party. Just remember to pack a little mind-altering something for moral support.

Sue Foreman



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CHINESE FINGERTRAP 'Grim Fandango'

(Own Label)

"Chinese Fingertrap do not fit in", exclaims the accompanying press release to this six-song debut CD from a metal band who've been a regular part of the supporting cast at The Club That Cannot Be Named over the past few years. Such a statement is noble in its excitability from a young band, but perhaps betrays a little self-delusion from Chinese Fingertrap regarding their musical ambition.

On the face of it they fit in perfectly with so many other bands filling the spaces between venue doors opening and the main attraction. They've got energy to spare: each song speeds by in a flurry of frantic, rolling powerchords that blur the lines between early-80s metal, thrash and emo, while the vocals switch neatly between melodic and screaming. There are exactly 27,926 bands in the UK alone who are doing exactly the same thing at this precise moment. Probably in a garage down your road.

That's not to damn Chinese Fingertrap outright. The songs might be rather formulaic and barely distinguishable from one another but the energy expended is admirable, songs are brief and explosive and a strong, full-blooded production breathes extra life into the track, giving them an almost live feel. Perhaps Chinese Fingertrap's best hope for future success is playing on the fact that they fit in so completely.

Ian Chesterton

VARIOUS ARTISTS 'Fresh Faces For The Modern Age'

(Rivet Gun)

Ah me, another month, another local bands compilation. A combination of a flourishing local live music scene and ever-cheaper CD recording means these things are becoming almost gratuitous. The recent '4 x EPs' on Hanging Out With The Cool Kids Records set a new benchmark of quality for such things, displaying the sonic firepower of Sextodecimo, Holiday Stabbings, Gunnbunny and Deguello. 'Fresh Faces For The Modern Age' aims for a similar target, showcasing five new Oxford noise bands: The Process, Phyal, Harry Angel, Verbal Kink and Junkie Brush, the band who have compiled the album.

It's Junkie Brush themselves who come over best with a vigorous shaking of the punk tree, notably on the frantic, scouring 'Problem - Reaction - Solution', which carries all the zeal and anger you'd hope to find in young men full of testosterone and faced with an unfair world. By contrast, Verbal Kink sound like they're just having a good moan about not earning enough money on 'Tramazapan Alcohol Suntan', and coming on like a lightweight Queens Of The Stone-Age.

The Process are the most straightforward metal band on show, backing alternately hectoring and bellowing vocals with solid waves of thrash riffage on tracks like 'Proud To Be Me'. Harry Angel sound like the only band here who'd prefer to pick up a book than pick a fight,



although their form of heaviosity benefits from a slightly more cultured approach, especially on 'Death Valley Of the Dolls', wherein in a nascent Sonic Youth get a bit of a gothabilly working over, although 'Striptease' is too in thrall to Radiohead to hold its own in such company. Phyal, meanwhile, continue to tread the line between 80s power metal and third-generation punk with a ballsy self confidence, though as such they do sound like a band from another generation completely.

As with most of these compilations 'Fresh Faces...' succeeds in its face value purpose of giving local music fans a budget opportunity to hear new stuff they might not otherwise have gone out of their way to see, while the bands involved get exposure to fans of similarly-minded acts. Beyond that, the bar is set so high now for such things that it needs something spectacular to really shine.

Dale Kattack

the port mahon

Live Music in August

- 1st - Girl - solo rock & pop**
- 2nd - Music Quiz with Dave Fannon**
- 3rd - Oxford Improvisers**
- 4th - The Dharma**
- 6th - The Black Madonnas - new Truck Records signings**
- 9th - Music Quiz with Dave Fannon**
- 20th - John Otway**
- 27th - Sneaky**

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GIG GUIDE

MONDAY 1st

DIANA BRAITHWAITE: *The Bullingdon* – Dynamic Delta blues and spiritual blues and soul from Toronto singer Braithwaite, who has sung with the likes of John Lee Hooker, Albert Collins and Jeff Healey

YETI: *The Zodiac* – Former-Libertines bassist John Hassall returns with his new early-Beatles-style rock and roll inspired band.

GIRL: *The Port Mahon* – Local soul and folk-influenced singer makes her live return.

CLUB HAVANA: *Po Na Na* – Weekly dose of Salsa, Latin dance, bossanova and Brazilian jazz.

TUESDAY 2nd

JAZZ CLUB with THE TOM GREY QUINTET: *The Bullingdon*

OXFORD IMPROVISORS: *The Port Mahon*
OPEN MIC SESSION: *The Exeter Hall, Cowley*

Thursday 11th – Saturday 13th

CROPREDY FESTIVAL

After worries that last year's Cropredy Festival might be the last one, due to the marital split between chief organisers Chris and Dave Pegg, it's business as usual for Fairport Convention's annual get-together in north Oxfordshire. After 30 plus years, there are few surprises left at Cropredy but it's still one of the most pleasant, laid-back and (relatively) clean festivals on the national circuit. As ever Fairport themselves headline the Saturday, joined by the usual array of former members and guests and finishing the event off with the traditional rendition of 'Meet On The Ledge'. Over the three days there'll be assorted folk, blues and rock acts performing, the most notable of which should be Jah Wobble's set on Thursday. Country Joe McDonald headlines the Thursday night, while the evergreen Richard Thompson tops Friday's bill. Other acts worth catching include The Dylan Project, The Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain, Chris While and Julie Matthews and Beth Nielsen. Cropredy always feels a bit like a festival lost in time, but it's that which makes it such a pleasure to attend. The bar and the food is better than you'll find at any major rock festival and there's little chance of any scally scum robbing your tent.



AUGUST

CHIARINA: *Café Rouge* – Weekly acoustic pop, folk and jazz residency.

WEDNESDAY 3rd

IRISH FOLK SESSION: *The Exeter Hall, Cowley*

GIGSWAP UK NIGHT: *The Wheatsheaf*
DELICIOUS MUSIC OPEN MIC SESSION: *Far from The Madding Crowd*

THURSDAY 4th

THE DHARMA: *The Port Mahon* – Hazy hippy folk-funksters.

DELICIOUS MUSIC JAZZ, FOLK AND BLUES BANDS NIGHT: *Far From The Madding Crowd* – With local Hendrix-inspired guitarist Ella Reid.

CAJITA + RICHARD WALTERS + LAIMA BITE + DREW ATKINS: *The Cellar* – A Night of mellow pop pleasures, with possibly the two best singers in Oxford on the same bill – Richard Walters and Laima Bite. Go see them.

OVERLOAD: *Atlantic Bar* – Celebrating five years of Swan E's Maximum Boost label, tonight's features sets from Swan E himself, Dope Ammo and Gomez plus top-drawer MCing from Fearless and Exsman.

SKYLARKIN: *The Brickworks* – Weekly dose of ska, reggae, Latin dance, Afrobeat and more with DJ Aidan Larkin and guests.

SABOTAGE: *The Zodiac* – Weekly club night playing the latest metal, hardcore and indie sounds with TCTCBN DJs.

OPEN MIC SESSION: *The Half Moon*
ZOO NA NA: *Po Na Na* – Weekly indie and electro mash up.

TOMOHAWK ACOUSTIC SPOTLIGHT: *Turf Tavern*

FRIDAY 5th

SUNNYVALE NOISE SUB-ELEMENT + THE HALF RABBITS: *The Zodiac* – Make Poverty History fundraiser with local electro-rock terrorists Sunnyvale going up against New Wave revivalists The Half Rabbits.

STRAFE: *The Exeter Hall, Cowley*
ACOUSTIC NIGHT: *The Victoria, Jericho*
BACKROOM BOOGIE: *The Bullingdon*
SLIDE: *The Zodiac* – Quality house club night.

FUSED: *The Red Lion, Witney*
KUJO SOUNDS: *Po Na Na* – Weekly funk, house, hip hop and r'n'b club night.

SATURDAY 6th

EVERYTIME IDIE + TWELVE TRIBES + A LIFE ONCE LOST: *The Zodiac* – Explosive triple bill of US hardcore, with Roadrunner signings Every Time I Die retraining to the Club That Cannot be Named to promote new album 'Gutter Phenomenon'. Philidelphia's fast-rising new stars A Life Once Lost open the show.

THE BLACK MADONNAS: *The Port Mahon* – Bolshy garage rocking racket from the latest signings to Truck Records.

HARRY ANGEL + THE CORVIDS + REBECCA MOSLEY + ALLY CRAIG: *The Exeter Hall, Cowley* – Good mixed bill of local talent tonight at the Ex with Radiohead-meets-Misfits rockers Harry Angel headlining. Spindly hardcore and krautrock from The Corvids and promising acoustic pop from Rebecca Mosley.
SIMPLE: *The Bullingdon* – Funky house.
AFTER HOURS: *The Red Lion, Witney*
ROLLERCOASTER Vs CHICKS WITH DECKS: *The Cellar* – New Wave, electro, 80s trash and more.

SUNDAY 7th

ELECTRIC JAM: *The Exeter Hall, Cowley* – Jam along with the in-house rhythm section. All musicians welcome.

DELICIOUS MUSIC OPEN MIC SESSION: *The Old School House*
LIFE AND SOUL: *The Black Horse, Kidlington*

MONDAY 8th

SHARRI WILLIAMS & THE WISE GUYS: *The Bullingdon* – Live blues.
CLUB HAVANA: *Po Na Na*

TUESDAY 9th

JAZZ CLUB with THE TOM GREY QUINTET: *The Bullingdon*
OPEN MIC SESSION: *The Exeter Hall, Cowley*
CHIARINA: *Café Rouge*
INTRUSION: *The Cellar* – Goth and industrial club night.

WEDNESDAY 10th

IRISH FOLK SESSION: *The Exeter Hall, Cowley*
DELICIOUS MUSIC OPEN MIC SESSION: *Harcourt Arms, Nuneham Courtenay*

THURSDAY 11th

CROPREDY FESTIVAL – First night of Fairport Convention's annual folk and blues shindig, with headline set from Country Joe McDonald, plus Jah Wobble, Hilary James and more – *see main preview.*

HIP HOP CLUB NIGHT: *The Bullingdon*





Saturday 13th

SUPERGRASS: Oxford Playhouse

Supergrass have been no strangers to Oxford in recent times, having played their home town four times now in the last couple of years, but this latest return should be a bit different, billed as it is as “an intimate evening” with the band. Which means that, while it won’t be a full acoustic jobby, it’ll be a far mellower affair than we’re used to. Part of a short stripped-down tour, ostensibly to show off their new musical direction, tonight’s show is an expansion of Supergrass’ cosy acoustic interludes (sofas and all) that they started on their ‘Supergrass Is Ten’ tour. With the new album, ‘Road To Rouen’, taking a sharp detour from the wide-eyed bump and grind of its predecessors, we might be witnessing a whole new era in the band’s career. Still, we have enough faith in their often magical way with a cracking pop song to predict that they’re unlikely to be turning into Paul Weller any time soon.

DELICIOUS MUSIC JAZZ, FOLK AND BLUES BANDS NIGHT: Far From The Madding Crowd – Featuring local singer Girl. **WILSON + TINDERBOX + THE NEW MOON: The Cellar** – Veteran local rockers Wilson make a rare comeback appearance with support from jazz-inflected acousticpop types The New Moon. **SKYLARKIN: The Brickworks** **SABOTAGE: The Zodiac** **OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon** **ZOO NA NA: Po Na Na** **TOMOHAWK ACOUSTIC SPOTLIGHT: Turf Tavern**

FRIDAY 12th

BLUEWAX + ROPETRICK + ACCIDENTALLY INNOCENT: The Zodiac – Local bands showcase **SOURCE: The Zodiac** – Monthly drum&bass club night with sets from Caution, Azonica, Stumasta, Access and Samas. **ELECTRIC BOOGIEMEN: The Exeter Hall, Cowley** **CROPREDY FESTIVAL** – First full day of folk action at Fairport’s annual festival. Richard

Thompson is today’s headliner with support from The Dylan Project, The Ukele Orchestra of Great Briatin, Bob Fox, Chris While and Julie Matthews and more – *see main preview*

DELICIOUS MUSIC BANDS NIGHT with THE TURBULENCE + FORMLESS ABSORPTIONS + ELLA REID: Harcourt Arms, Nuneham Courtenay **BEAVER: The Red Lion, Witney** **ACOUSTIC NIGHT: The Victoria, Jericho** **BACKROOM BOOGIE: The Bullingdon** **BOSSAPHONIK: The Cellar** – With African dance band Root4MZ. **KUJO SOUNDS: Po Na Na**

SATURDAY 13th

SUPERGRASS: Oxford Playhouse – Intimate gig with the local legends plugging new album, ‘Road To Ruin’ – *see main preview*. **CROPREDY FESTIVAL** – Concluding day of the folk extravaganza, including Fairport Convention’s traditional three-hour headline set, plus Richard Digance, The Hamsters and many more – *see main preview* **NATION: The New Theatre** – The local pop hopefuls play their biggest headline gig to date – *see main preview*

MY AWESOME COMPILATION: The Zodiac – Leicester’s acrobatic Get Up Kids-influenced emo rockers return after recent tours with Hopesfall and Tsunami Bomb, set to release debut album proper ‘Actions’ this month. **ARCTIK WOLF: The Exeter Hall, Cowley** – Funky rock.

NU-SOUL with TONY NANTON: The Bullingdon **ENDLESS GROOVE: The Cellar** – Fortnightly club night from Sir Bald Diddle, playing a wide selection of classic ska, funk, r’n’b, rock’n’roll, Latin and jazz tunes.

THE HOGGZ: The Red Lion, Witney

SUNDAY 14th

DELICIOUS MUSIC OPEN MIC SESSION: The Old School House **FUSED: The Black Horse, Kidlington**

MONDAY 15th

DAVID RAPHAEL BLUES BAND: The Bullingdon – Farnborough-based singer, harpist and keyboard player playing laidback blues and r’n’b.

CLUB HAVANA: Po Na Na

TUESDAY 16th

JAZZ CLUB with THE TOM GREY QUINTET: The Bullingdon **OPEN MIC SESSION: The Exeter Hall, Cowley** **CHIARINA: Café Rouge**

WEDNESDAY 17th

CHARLOTTE HATHERLEY: The Zodiac – Ash’s perfectly put together bassist Charlotte continues to make a classy pop career for herself in her own right, with debut outing, ‘Kim Wilde’, becoming one of the fastest downloaded singles ever. Catchy, summery pop-punk and bubblegum pop is the order of the day and greater success seems hers for the taking.

THE CLIFFHANGERS + THE SCHLA LA LA’S: The Wheatsheaf – Darkly glamorous gothic pop from The Cliffhangers, plus 60s bubblegum garage pop from Piney Gir’s Schla La La’s.

IRISH FOLK SESSION: The Exeter Hall, Cowley **DELICIOUS MUSIC OPEN MIC SESSION: Far from The Madding Crowd**

THURSDAY 18th

ARCTIC MONKEYS: The Zodiac – Sheffield’s hot young pop pups – *see main preview* **LOCAL BANDS NIGHT: The Bullingdon** – Bands to be announced. **DELICIOUS MUSIC JAZZ, FOLK AND BLUES BANDS NIGHT: Far From The Madding Crowd** – Featuring Los Hombres. **KARN8 + MEET HER SISTER: The Cellar** – Local bands night. **SKYLARKIN: The Brickworks** **SABOTAGE: The Zodiac** **OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon** **ZOO NA NA: Po Na Na** **TOMOHAWK ACOUSTIC: Turf Tavern**

FRIDAY 19th

KING FURNACE + DIATRIBE + LIZARDS: The Zodiac – Chili Peppers-influenced rocking from King Furnace, plus local supports. **FUNKY HOUSE: The Zodiac** – With DJ Danny Rose. **THE BIG BOYS BLUES BAND: The Exeter Hall, Cowley** – Long-time local blues favourites. **ACOUSTIC NIGHT: The Victoria, Jericho**

Saturday 13th

NATION: The New Theatre

There’s something fantastically audacious about Nation’s gig at the 1,700-capacity New Theatre. The last local band to headline the venue were Supergrass, and they’ve got four platinum albums under their belts and a global reputation. But then Nation have been working hard to reap such rewards. As well as an endless succession of gigs around the county, away from the usual local band venue circuit. On top of this the band have regularly flown out to places like Bosnia to play to British troops. Last year they released their debut album, ‘Today Is The First Day’, a collection of stadium-friendly classic guitar-pop anthems and epic piano ballads in the vein of The Who, The Beatles and Robbie Williams. Tonight’s gig is a launch for their second full-length CD, ‘Walk’ and follows a tour of local schools. There’s almost an overdose of self-belief and confidence about Nation, but then, hey, if you don’t believe in yourself, who the hell else is going to? Tonight’s extravaganza probably won’t make or break the band, but if it goes well, it could be a pivotal moment in their career trajectory. The very best of British luck to them.





Thursday 18th

ARCTIC MONKEYS: The Zodiac

"The New Libertines!" squeal the headlines, but don't let that put you off. Sheffield teenage quartet Arctic Monkeys have released just one limited edition 7" single thus far ('Five Minutes With The Arctic Monkeys', currently attracting silly money bids on Ebay), but they've already been the subject of a predictably rabid record company bidding war, had Radio 1's Zane Lowe in a right old lather and played numerous oversubscribed gigs around the country, building up an intense cult following with terrifying ease. Musically their lineage is similar to The Libertines, Kaiser Chiefs et al, part way between Squeeze's clever power-pop and The Clash's melodic punk rush, but it's the lyrics that really grab you, frontman Alex Turner laying into everything from wannabe-American bands to over-zealous bouncers with acidic northern wit. Simple, addictive riffs and overdriven guitars aplenty; Arctic Monkeys will probably be on the scrap heap this time next year, but they look like they're going to burn brightly in the meantime

BACKROOM BOOGIE: The Bullingdon
RUBBER MONKEYS: The Red Lion, Witney
KUJO SOUNDS: Po Na Na

SATURDAY 20th

YOUR SONG: The Zodiac – Mac's annual birthday bash with added cover version madness returns once again. This time round it's Chinese Finger Trap, The Family Machine, The Walk Off, ATL, Boywithatoy, The Moneyshots, Nine Stone Cowboy and The Red Stripes ripping rock and roll history to shreds in an alcohol-fuelled frenzy of bad taste and disrespect. A night where reputations are made and livers destroyed.
JOHN OTWAY: The Port Mahon – Back at the Port Mahon to wreak more pop havoc in a confined space, clown prince of pop Otway plays the one-hit loser card to perfection.
FELL CITY GIRL + CARETAKER + THE RACE: The Wheatsheaf – This month's Nighthits cover stars launch their new single, 'Weaker Light'. See main interview feature.
ROADRUNNER: The Bullingdon – Mod, northern soul, funky Hammond and 60s freakbeat.

SLIDEWINDER: The Exeter Hall, Cowley
THE WORRIED MEN: The Red Lion, Witney – This month they have mostly been worrying about the prevalence of horseflies in the Kidlington area.
FRESH OUT OF THE BOX: The Cellar – Breakbeats party style.

SUNDAY 21st

SUNDAY STEAMER with SUITABLE CASE FOR TREATMENT + RICHARD WALTERS + SMILEX: A Boat, The Thames – Second of this summer's Thames boat parties, with warped blues-metal heavyweights SC4T taking to the water to launch their new 'Of Motes And Misdirections' album. Should startle the fish. Considerably more mellow pop pleasures from Richard Walters, plus action-packed glam-rocking from Smilex. Will Lee Smilex end up in the river? Does the sun rise in the east?

ELECTRIC JAM: The Exeter Hall, Cowley
DELICIOUS MUSIC OPEN MIC SESSION: The Old School House
THE WORRIED MEN: The Black Horse, Kidlington

MONDAY 22nd

CREAM'D: The Bullingdon – A tribute to Cream, featuring guitarist Ray Minhinnett in Clapton's lead role.
CLUB HAVANA: Po Na Na

TUESDAY 23rd

JAZZ CLUB with ALVIN ROY: The Bullingdon
OPEN MIC SESSION: The Exeter Hall, Cowley
HEADCOUNT + PHYAL: The Cellar – Killer punk rocking noise from the mighty Headcount, plus punk-metal from Phyal.

CHIARINA: Café Rouge

WEDNESDAY

24th

THE COOPER TEMPLE CLAUSE: The Zodiac – Carling Weekend warm-up for the Reading tech-rock heroes – see main preview

ZAFRICA BRAZILIA + BIG SPEAKERS: The Bullingdon – Party-hard Brazilian hop hop crew make their Oxford debut with live-wire support from Oxford's premier rap gang.
IRISH FOLK SESSION: The Exeter Hall, Cowley
DELICIOUS MUSIC OPEN MIC SESSION: Harcourt Arms, Nuneham Courtenay

THURSDAY 25th

DJ DEREK: The Zodiac – Ska, soul, reggae and more from the legendary Bristolian DJ.
TOWERSEY FESTIVAL: Towersey Village – Opening night of the folk festival, with a headline set from Rolf Harris.

DELICIOUS MUSIC JAZZ, FOLK AND BLUES BANDS NIGHT: Far From The Madding Crowd – With guitarist Ella Reid.
HARRY ANGEL + JUNKIE BRUSH: The Cellar – Gothic rockabilly and post-hardcore noise from Harry Angel, plus ferocious but melodic punk from Junkie Brush.
SKYLARKIN: The Brickworks
SABOTAGE: The Zodiac
OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon
ZOO NA NA: Po Na Na
TOMOHAWK ACOUSTIC SPOTLIGHT: Turf Tavern

FRIDAY 26th

AUGUST BANK HOLIDAY FREE MUSIC FESTIVAL: The Exeter Hall, Cowley (7pm) – Opening night of the Ex's first free four-day live music festival. Tonight's bill includes The Ian Parker Band, Michael Myers, The Invisible and Blue Wax.
GAPPY TOOTH INDUSTRIES presents KOHOUTEK + ANTON BARBEAU + LUM COL CON PIX: The Zodiac – Mixed bill as ever from the GTI crew. Melodramatic acoustic rock from Kohoutek, Dylan-inspired pop from Sacramento's Anton Barbeau, plus multi-deck improvisation from Evenings offshoot Lum Col Con Pix.
GRITTY SHAKER: The Zodiac – Electro soundclash with DJs Gordon Kaye and Ed Fisher.
ACOUSTIC NIGHT: The Victoria, Jericho
BACKROOM BOOGIE: The Bullingdon
BOSSAPHONIK: The Cellar – With jazz, soul and breakbeats collective, The Sugar Beats Band.

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Wednesday 24th

THE COOPER TEMPLE CLAUSE: The Zodiac

Reading's Cooper Temple Clause got sucked into the rock mainstream so quickly after their initial arrival that it was easy to forget what a great, often bizarre, band they were. It doesn't seem that long ago they were creating huge swells of mad kraut-punk psychedelic noise down at the Bully in front of a handful of early converts; tonight they're warming up for the Carling Weekend in front of a long-since sold-out house. They've been pretty quiet in this country over the past year, having spent most of it conquering the States, but a follow-up to last year's 'Kick Up The Fire And Watch The Flames Break Loose' is due before Christmas. Ambitious, druggy, bombastic, indulgent, excessive; it's all in the CTC experience, but the way they've mixed and matched influences from some of the more wilful bands of recent years (Radiohead, Spiritualised, Mansun) and classic rock of old (Led Zep, Hawkwind, Floyd) into a heady techno rock makes them one of the most enduringly interesting British rock bands around.

TOWERSEY FESTIVAL: Towersey Village - First full day of the village folk festival, now in its 41st year. Musical highlights today include Last Night's Fun, Jez Lowe and the Bad Pennies and Grand Union.

WHO'S NEXT: The Red Lion, Witney
KUJO SOUNDS: Po Na Na

SATURDAY 27th

AUGUST BANK HOLIDAY FREE MUSIC FESTIVAL: The Exeter Hall, Cowley (2pm) - Full day of free live music at the Ex with The Cheeseegraters, Tounsi, The Powders, The Franklins and The Epstein.

SNEAKY: The Port Mahon
REGGAE AND R'n'B NIGHT: The Bullingdon

TOWERSEY FESTIVAL: Towersey Village - Today's highlights include Show of Hands, Karine Polwart and Whapweasel.
ENDLESS GROOVE: The Cellar
SLEEPWALKER: The Red Lion, Witney

SUNDAY 28th

AUGUST BANK HOLIDAY FREE MUSIC FESTIVAL: The Exeter Hall, Cowley (2pm) - The free live music extravaganza continues with sets from Uniting The Elements, Sarah Wilson, Laima Bite, Rami, Leni Ward, Glenda Huish, Jeremy Hughes and Doug Hodge.

DELICIOUS MUSIC OPEN MIC SESSION: The Old School House
TOWERSEY FESTIVAL: Towersey Village - Kate Rusby is today's star turn on the main stage, with support from John McSherry's First Light, Tre Martelli and Boka Halat.

THE HENDRED EXPERIENCE: The Plough, East Hendred (1pm) - First half of a two-day live music festival with The G's, The Rooster Band, Stem, Twizz Twangle, Electricity Comes From Other Planets, Nick Chamfer and more.

LOADED: The Black Horse, Kidlington

MONDAY 29th

AUGUST BANK HOLIDAY FREE MUSIC FESTIVAL: The Exeter Hall, Cowley (2pm) - Final full day of the Ex's free Bank Holiday live music extravaganza, featuring sets from Kohoutek, Anton Barbeau, James Sergeant, Dave Leece, Dan Austin, Lee Davies, Ben Dugard and Osprey, plus a folk session in the garden.

DUNGEN: The Zodiac - Sweden's soon-to-be latest megastars, formed around classically-trained virtuoso and hip hop freak Gustav Ejstes. Taking the blissed-out sounds of 60s folk, prog rock and psychedelia, with a baggy groove, they've just released debut album, 'Ta Det Lugnt' to much critical acclaim.

TOWERSEY FESTIVAL: Towersey Village - The last day of the village festival with Sultans of Squeeze, Dr Faustus and Martha Tilston.

THE HENDRED EXPERIENCE: The Plough, East Hendred (1pm) - Day two of the mini-festival, with live sets from Raggasaurus, Lagrima, Jeremy Hughes, Rami, Les Clochards, Nick Lewis and more.

CLUB HAVANA: Po Na Na

TUESDAY 30th

JAZZ CLUB with THE TOM GREY QUINTET: The Bullingdon
OPEN MIC SESSION: The Exeter Hall, Cowley

CHIARINA: Café Rouge

WEDNESDAY 31st

IRISH FOLK SESSION: The Exeter Hall, Cowley
GIGSWAP UK NIGHT: The Wheatsheaf
DELICIOUS MUSIC OPEN MIC SESSION: Far from The Madding Crowd

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LIVE

CAMP ACTOR / THE KEYBOARD CHOIR / SCHLA LA LAS

The Zodiac

Imagine if *Withnail and I* had been set against a backdrop of 80s London. Imagine that instead of actors, the paralytic protagonists were musicians instead. Their Jag would have been careering around to the sounds of Erasure while on their way to a gig, and Camp Actor would be driving. Camp Actor are another band to plumb the depths of 80s revivalism and try to somehow intimate that there were some glory days in those bleak years. Far from the opulence of Duran Duran, Camp Actor are dressed in what look like John Motson's cast-offs as they whirl their way through some reasonable songs. The high point comes with 'This Is Not New York', a tune that, like Withnail's closing soliloquy, suggests that brilliance is within their grasp.

Keyboard Choir prove that eight keyboards on one stage does not always mean lengthy Rick Wakeman solos are just around the corner. Instead, they deliver a kind of electronic post-rock that makes the spine tingle. It's not much to look at, but occasionally they hit on moments that are heavenly.

The Schla La Las take to the stage in matching outfits, looking like 1950s American Housewives on the lash. After the grandeur of The Keyboard Choir, the Schla's rickety take on rock and roll is endearingly fragile. If the 5678's had produced more than once decent song, then they would be a fitting comparison. As with anything that Piney Gir is involved with there's a childlike sweetness to it. There's handclaps, fuzzed guitars, harmonized



Photo: Sam Shepherd

vocals, and a real sense of fun in what the Schla's do. Any band that has their own theme tune is OK by us. That it sounds like it should feature somewhere on an episode of *Happy Days* somehow only makes it cooler.

Allin Pratt

GENE LOVES JEZEBEL

The Bullingdon

There's something a little sad watching a favourite old band still kicking it out nearly twenty years after their greatest achievements, especially when, like Gene Loves Jezebel, only part of the band remains. Even sadder to think that singer Mike Aston hasn't spoken to his identical twin brother Jay for five years after a legal battle over the rights to band's name.

Still, he's in jovial mood tonight, despite the meagre turnout, chain-smoking and swigging lager like the down-home Welsh lad he essentially is, only the crushed velvet jacket, leather trousers and shaggy peroxide mane giving his glamour puss past away. The band are now resident in the States, where they enjoyed greater success than over here in the 80s, and have lost their bass player partway through this UK tour so the first half of the set is acoustic with Mike and guitarist Switch knocking out some bare-bones old classics like 'Heartache' and 'Cow', Mike's voice holding up well despite those years of indulgence: a plaintive, reedy howl, partway between Bono, Patti Smith and Neil Young. It's a bit cheesy at times, slightly ham-fisted, but the full electric set shows sparks of that old magic: 'Upstairs' and 'Bruises' from goth classic debut 'Promises' still leave scars, while the gorgeous, desolate 'Stephen' from 'Immigrant' re-ignites a thousand teenage memories. It'd be great, if unlikely, that Mike and Jay would reunite once more; Gene Loves Jezebel feels like half a band with only one of them, and while there's precious little chance they'll ever regain the success they once enjoyed, tonight's trip down memory lane is a poignant reminder that our lives are littered with lost pop treasure. For the dark of heart, investigate this forgotten gem of a band immediately.

Dale Kattack

ILIKETRAINS / THE THUMB QUINTET

The Cellar

The Thumb Quintet are almost anathema to a venue like The Cellar. The place oozes rock and roll from every pillar, while the band seem more suited to a setting like the Holywell Music Rooms or a sunny summer meadow. There are three of them: two acoustic guitarists and an electric cellist, plus a box of electronic tricks and rhythms that rarely imposes itself too forcefully on proceedings. Stepping back in time to the early-60s birth of English folk-pop, they're pastoral and pretty, almost classical with the odd country twang. Occasionally they meander like an idle Cotswold brook, but at their best they're like a stripped-down Penguin Café Orchestra, while the closing number, with its moody strings and prominent synth drones unearths that previously neglected genre mash-up of Fairport Convention and Gary Numan. There's nothing else quite like them in Oxford at the moment.

Leeds' Iliketrains brandish stronger weaponry, though post-rock is their bag of noise. In 2005 it's pretty much impossible to do anything radical and new with this particular form, but the band make a satisfactory fight of it, overcoming both their cumbersome moniker, nervous disposition and rather clichéd cavalry jacket uniformity with a set that manages an easy balance of cool ambience and forceful power. Alternately icy and bombastic, they're all plateaux of guitar distortion and clamouring crescendos, with a keen grasp of texture and atmosphere. A projectionist-cum-trumpeter adds depth and variety to the standard guitars and keyboard sound, and while Iliketrains are unlikely to break out of a crowded genre any time soon, there's a small legion of disaffected Mogwai fans out there who would do far worse than catch a ride here.

Terry Molloy

THE TREAT / RUSTY SHERIFF / SIMON DAVIES

The Zodiac

Tonight's Gappy Tooth night is sparsely attended, which is a great shame as some little-known talents are uncovered. This unearthing of gems is something that is happening with increasing regularity on Gappy Tooth Industries nights, where the emphasis is on creating a mix and match bill that breaks down genre boundaries.

Simon Davies is first up and treats us to some tracks from his new album. It's a set of lovely acoustic songs with a bossa nova beat, ably assisted by Colin on the double bass. It's very reminiscent in delivery of Luke Smith, the wry, funny, self-deprecating humour that both men have very much evident. It's a splendid way to relax and ease yourself into the evening.

Rusty Sheriff from Portsmouth veers the evening off into a turntablist direction. It's a fine display of scratching, and Rusty is someone who cares more about tune than posing. Sometimes you wish the backing tracks emitting from his laptop were a bit more substantial, but it's a minor quibble. The set drags on a bit and reduces the dynamics; concentrating his efforts into a shorter time span might better results.

The night rounds off in a rock style with The Treat. Quite frankly they're average at best and only exist to clear more punters from the room. The singer gives it the stadium rock poses and attitude, quite oblivious to the audience reaction. Things pick up when they rock out more towards the end of the set, but a lot of it is mere pilfering from rock's past, and at one stage they blatantly steal 'Whole Lotta Love's riff wholesale. The Treat provoke no reaction in you at all, except possibly mild, unintentional amusement.

Russell Barker

THE LITTLE EXPLORER / THE JESUS YEARS / THIS TOWN NEEDS GUNS

The Wheatsheaf

We're confused. We'd headed downstairs half an hour previously to escape The Jesus Year's monochrome approximation of an old Mogwai b-side, callously and calmly marking the Derby instrumentalists as post-rock bottom feeders. But we return to discover the band transformed, quite literally, into something bigger and better. You see, The Jesus Years are The Little Explorer, with the addition of a singer, some decent enough tunes and a few redeeming features. Thoughtful, emo melancholy replaces studious noodling and we even consider buying a copy of their lovingly handcrafted 7" single.

Emotionally fraught local rockers This Town Needs Guns have turned themselves around a bit since we last heard them, too. Where once was ramshackle, run-down indie trash, now is something rather more dynamic and cohesive. Never underestimate

the worth of practice and confidence – TTNG are alternately effusive and melancholy. At times there's an effortlessness about the way they control their song structures, although you end up feeling they're switching gears too much, trying to show off what they can do rather than letting their songs breathe naturally. Equally, they get bogged down in meandering attempts at dub jams. The singer pitches himself somewhere between Thom Yorke and Morrissey but if his lyrics are as full of poetic genius as either of his inspirations we'll never know, as the words remain indecipherable throughout.

Still a band finding their feet then, but on tonight's evidence, This Town Needs Guns are at least heading in the right direction. Practice rather than weaponry might be a better order of the day for now, though.

Dale Kattack

THE YOUNG KNIVES / iFORWARD, RUSSIA! The Cellar

Leeds foursome Forward, Russia!'s singles are selling out on the underground scene sooner than they can burn them off, and why? Militant Disco? agit prog? the Loony Toons' Tasmanian Devil aping the Crazy Frog? They're all these things and more, showering like sweat on a stomping crowd that claps like a festival toilet door during a salmonella outbreak, while being aurally roasted by a singer who looks like the guy who played Dennis Pennis and is more incomprehensible than At The Drive-In reading *Finnegan's Wake* in a wind tunnel.

Don't look for answers in their song titles either, they label them simply as digits. So '13' hurtles along like a train, part Joy Division, part XTC on Ecstasy, and '15' takes PiL's pills and beats up on The Bloc Party. Katie on drums is the real powerhouse of it all, holding every nail bomb beat down while simultaneously riling each caged song with her sticks. Wonder, oh yes indeed.

Billed as a warm up gig for Truck, you could have cooked pizzas over The Young Knives tonight, they are that hot. New management, new EP and a sound sharper than a samurai sword, this is the best of The Young Knives and The Young Knives at their very best. Tonight, a hundred voices are lost yelling along to staccato double chorus lines like "You were screaming at your mother, I was punching your dad" and "Where's the f***ing rent, where's the f***ing rent", while old and new songs like 'Autobahn' and 'Decision' chart not only how much the Young Knives sound is now supremely them and only them, but how far along the road to greatness this band have finally come.

Paul Carrera

JOSH ROUSE The Zodiac

Josh Rouse is a Nebraska-born singer / songwriter who lived in Nashville for ten years, until recently. This alone could point to a meld of standard country-tinged solo fare: kind of Willie Nelson meets Damien Rice. Happily, tonight Josh has brought his four-strong entourage to the Zodiac to quash any pessimistic expectations.

With Josh, the emphasis is on the song, rather than its constituent parts or sound, yet it's not hard to pin down particular reference points. The influence of The Smiths and The Cure are as easy to detect as that of Neil Young and Bob Dylan; the results ramble between laid-back Bruce Springsteen ('It's The Night Time'), west-coast soft rock ('Streetslights'), British indie ('Winter in the Hamptons') and even soul ('Come Back'). Songs like 'Under Cold Blue Stars' are blissful and mellow - perfect summer afternoon lounging music - yet still work in the dark confines of the Zodiac.

Some of his more musically upbeat tracks have bittersweet lyrics, and vice versa; 'Under Your Charms' sounds particularly sad, but is lyrically rather winsome and charming. He explores both sides of love; his most recent album, 'Nashville', followed his divorce, and 'My Love is Gone' is as much a paean to that love of the past as 'Sad Eyes' is to hopeful new beginnings. Both are delivered as personal narratives with full conviction, yet warmly rather than uncomfortably.

Josh certainly has the audience in his thrall; 'Nashville' is his fifth album, and through sympathetic mediums like Radio 2 he has quietly yet steadily inspired much devotion while remaining relatively unknown. While he may not be everyone's cup of tea, tonight he works hard to convert the waverers; in Joshworld, it could be any time between now and the 1970s, but he certainly makes it a wonderful place to be.

Kirsten Etheridge



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DEMOS

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DEMO OF THE MONTH

PATSY DECLINE

Possibly the best month for demos we've had in an age, but this is still an easy winner. Patsy Decline is a long-time collaborator with local musical loon Twizz Twangle, and this album-length demo finds Twizz providing back-up for Patsy's often mesmeric vocal performances. Recorded on "a budget of nil", with vocals all recorded on first take, lyrics made up on the spot, and with Twizz's often unholy mess of noise going on behind, the whole project feels like it's on the verge of falling apart at any minute, if it were ever together in the first place. But it's absolutely fantastic: from 'Cartel' with its synthetic Burundi beats, phased vocals and abstract guitar noodling, a maddening clamour of perfect pop and traditional Celtic folk, to the fuzzy synth-pop wash of 'Lost In Space'. 'N.A.S.A. Astronauts' is pure lunatic art house brilliance, bludgeoned half to death by cheap effects and mental ward poetry, while 'Sky Theft' is partway between 70s disco simplicity and prog-rock indulgence, Patsy's voice pure and limpid, but a light year away from bland stage school ideals of purity. There's more, but we're running out of words. Yet again the lunatics have taken over the asylum. Crazy people, great, great music.

melody, while 'Don't Hold Me Down', with its electro baggy rhythm could be The Stone Roses on Mogadon. It's unassuming enough but clever with it and obviously the work of two very talented people. Hopefully it won't be a one-off collaboration.

HAMMER Vs THE SNAKE

Blimey, Killers fever is spreading! Bands are falling for New Romantic revivalism left, right and centre. And it is here we find the splendidly-named Hammer Vs The Snake, distorted vocals, metal beats and funky synth-rocking 80s grooves all present and correct. Opener 'Synff Phuck' lays out their stall with some style, the tumbling robot dance rhythms and glistening synth lines lurching close to The Faint at times, although they're quickly off on another tangent with 'Insatiable', a disjointed, fragmented piano-led slice of mischief that could pass for Devo getting self-consciously jazzy or, at its most hysterical, Pere Ubu's mangled punk-funk. By the time the demo ends, with 'The Never Ending Story Of Franks Vs The Nazis', Hammer Vs The Snake have dug further back into their record collections, unearthed The Clash's 'Sandanista' and tried to update it via The Futureheads. There's a nasty, cynical side of us thinks that maybe they're simply trying to latch on to something trendy and cool, but they do it with enough panache to win us over.

NICHOLE STEAL

Nichole Steal's last demo, just over a year ago, was an impressive stab at the doomier side of trip-hop. Back for more, Kidlington's Paul Hamblin (the chap behind Nichole Steal) still seems to be drawing on Massive Attack and Tricky for his downbeat, atmospheric soundscapes. The first track here, 'Heartache', is all tripped-out hip hop beats, edgy synths and tight, bubbling bass runs, with barely discernible vocals wandering in and out of the mix. Decidedly lopsided and slightly haunting at times. A shame he doesn't expand on these ideas on 'Gotta Have It', which is a rather twee folk-pop song with girly vocals and some dodgy lyrics about love and stuff. It's inoffensive enough but not in the same class as other stuff he's produced. It almost sounds like Paul wants to break out of his gothic hip hop box and try something different but doesn't really know where to go from there. Our advice: just keep digging that big, black hole. The darker the better, dear boy.

GRUNT AND GROOVE PRODUCTIONS

Ah, such an ugly name for such a pretty musical project. Grunt & Groove Productions is the work of local singer and Nightshift favourite Mark Crozer, and former If and Strangefruit person Bert Audubert (possibly not his real name). It's quite lo-fi in many ways but with an ambitious edge to its production and three rather lovely songs that hopefully promise even more stuff to come. The psychedelic folk swoon of 'Skyhigh' lives up to its title with Mark's breathless falsetto giving a genuine feeling of floating in the clouds, while the spaced-out production recalls The Beatles' early experiments with psychedelia at times. There's a lazy funk underbelly to the song too which carries on through 'Here I Am', with its gently incessant bass rhythms and Byrds-y

THE TROY ENCLOSURE

Must be doomy, atmospheric electro theme month. The Troy Enclosure – the work of someone called Brandon Toy – is another dark, ambient oddity, again with a strangely lopsided, out of focus feel, like something trying to communicate through a badly-tuned radio. The vibe is pretty languid for the most part, mumbled vocals and sparse acoustic guitar overlaying discreet synth hums on tracks like 'Choir', although Brandon creeps into more song-based territory with 'Dreamless', a mournful, measured snippet of Jeff Buckley-inspired folk-pop. The strength here is the way Brandon uses simple, uncluttered textures, and the spaces between the instruments, to weave fine threads of sound together neatly. The piercing electro noise on final track, 'Footnote' is the only thing to puncture the atmosphere, and while the likes of Royksopp do such things in a more accomplished style, this is a promising start.

TOO FAST TO LIVE

Hey, dig the mad-as-a-crazy-rock-and-roll-pig band name! These guys probably chop up and barbecue Lemmy's guts for breakfast before setting off for a hard day's labour down the boulder crushing factory. More likely, they get high as kites together listening to Primal Scream's 'Swastika Eyes' and The Prodigy's 'Smack My Bitch Up' if this bolshy, breakneck techno-punk is anything to go on. 'NRG' could easily be a sneaky steal of some obscure Prodigy outtake, but hits all the right buttons, and with some force. 'Powder Burn' is goblin-faced electro-goth with a swarm of razor-sharp shards of synth noise swirling around it, while 'Destroyer' finds the merry band of brothers rocking it up in a Nine Inch Nails stylee, down-tuned guitar chug and feel-my-pain ghoulish whisper and all. Derivative maybe, but derivative with attitude, and that's all you need to win in this particular war.

WHERE I'M CALLING FROM

They describe themselves as a country-inspired indie band, they've named themselves after a Raymond Carver short story and they're all 16 or 17 years old. This could be so, so wrong. But instead it's very much right. In parts, quite lovely in fact. Where I'm Calling From, hailing from semi-idyllic Oxford outpost Wolvercote, create gently inspired, lo-fi, wispy, lispy folk-pop whimsy with much of the same serenity and quietly rough-edged charm as Belle and Sebastian's early recordings. There's a touch of Low in the relentlessly

hangdog solemnity of the three songs here and it's got a gravity to it that drags you into its emotional depths. There's not an ounce of tweezeness or self-pity here, despite the mood and subject matter. "There's just cardboard and dead bodies on my television", croons singer Ben Osbourne. You should get yourself a freeview box, my lad; then you could watch live and interactive *Big Brother* all day instead. On second thoughts, the dead bodies might be less depressing. The thought that 16 year olds can make music that sounds like this, however, fills us with much joy.

STRAFE

There are two ways you could look at this demo: silly, indulgent pomposity, or a clever updating of 70s excess in a modern indie rock setting. We're in a good mood so we'll opt for the latter. Mainly because 'The World Is Your Oyster (Swallow It Whole)' is so stilted and hysterical it sounds like it's about to suffer a seizure, but has a strange charm that's somewhere between arty 80s weirdness and the slightly mad proggy indulgence of The Alex Harvey Band. We're not sure whether this completely counteracts the overwrought nature and complete lack of cohesion of 'She Fell Down the Stairs', or the over-earnest emotion of 'Madelina', but even on this last number, there's a winning sweetness to the melody that appeals to your better nature.

THE DEMO DUMPER

STIMULUS

Worst of a good bunch? Yes. Possibly not deserving of the Demo Dumper? Hmm, well... maybe. But then they've brought it upon themselves. Stimulus are a bunch of teenagers from Witney and Carterton, just starting out and perhaps not deserving of such an early sledgehammering of their creative endeavours, but if you do go and get an adenoidal pot-bellied pig to sing for you, you must take the consequences. The first track here, 'Eternal Fuzz' really isn't that bad, with its racing bass rhythms and spangled guitars, a little like an old Sisters of Mercy demo, but the horrible, wretched nasal moaning just won't stop: like the nasty evil Tripods in *War of the Worlds*, even faced with a reasonable barrage of sonic firepower. The band keep up the fight on 'Kinky Fresh', a crash and burn of rudimentary post-grunge rocking, but in the end it just sounds like a one-armed weakling vainly trying to drag himself out of a giant bowl of thick soup in slow motion.

Send demos for review to: Nightshift, PO Box 312, Kidlington, Oxford, OX5 1ZU.

IMPORTANT: no review without a contact address and phone number (no email or mobile-only). No more than four tracks on a demo. If you can't handle criticism, please don't send us your demo. Aw heck, you're not taking the slightest bit of notice of this are you?

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