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NIGHTSHIFT

Oxford's Music Magazine

Free every
month.
Issue 125
December
2005

Let's hear it for the Girl!

Fell City Girl talk about
their incredible year

Phil McMinn photo by Isla Miskelly

Also inside...

The Best Oxford Songs of the Year

plus

News, reviews and four pages of Oxford gigs

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NEWS

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Hello everyone,

Welcome to another issue of Nightshift – the last one of 2005. It's been a good year for local music, all things considered. Oxford bands have been making their presence felt well beyond the city walls with The Young Knives leading the way. The critical acclaim being afforded Henry, House and Ollie has been phenomenal, while the opportunity to work with producer Andy Gill has enabled them to realise their incredible potential. 2006 looks like being a very exciting time for the band, with their second album due in early summer. Similar fortunes look set to await Fell City Girl, who started 2005 as the Nightshift's local band most likely to, and they haven't disappointed us, releasing what must be one of the most assured debut singles ever to come out of Oxford, earning themselves a place on the bill at Reading and Leeds Festivals and ending the year sharing a stage with Tony Christie and Girls Aloud at the Children In Need concert at Brize Norton.

Other local bands making a name for themselves outside of Oxford have been Dive Dive, whose debut album followed on from a couple of chart-bothering singles, Suitable Case For Treatment who must surely now be one of the most terrifying live bands on the planet, plus long-time favourites Winnebago Deal, who spent most of the last year on tour with Nick Oliveri's Mondo Generator, and Goldrush who, although quiet on the Oxford front, have been making further inroads into the States.

Following hot on the heels of all these bands come a host of new Oxford talents, including the likes of Harry Angel, The Evenings and Deguello. Oxford remains an incredible breeding ground for fresh musical talent of all persuasions and much of the credit for that must go to all the promoters in the city who continue to provide so many great venues for those acts to develop.

Here's to even more of the same in 2006. Happy Christmas and thanks for continuing to support local music.

Ronan Munro (Editor)

SEXY BREAKFAST play a farewell gig at the Zodiac on Friday 9th December. The local favourites announced their split last month and had planned to bow out after their gig supporting The Paddingtons at the Zodiac, but such is their popularity one last headline show

has been arranged. Say your goodbyes and prepare to be rocked spaceward. Tickets are on sale now from wegottickets.com, priced £5. Support comes from Big Speakers.

THE THIEVES release their new album at



ELTON JOHN is scheduled to play at Oxford Utd's Kassam Stadium next year. The pop legend will play to 20,000 fans at the Kassam on Saturday June 24th. Tickets for the gig are on sale already, with prices ranging from £35 up to £75, plus booking fee. Buy online from www.seetickets.com or by phone on 0870 161 21323 or 0871 230 260.

Meanwhile, other gigs booked for next year include the return of **The Go! Team** at Brookes University on Sunday 5th March (tickets, priced £12.50, available from the Brookes box office on 01865 484750),

Julian Cope at the Zodiac on Tuesday 14th February (tickets, priced £16, available from the Zodiac box office on 01865 420042) and 70s pop legends **The Osmonds** at the New Theatre on Tuesday 28th February. Tickets, priced £29.50, are available from the credit card booking line, on 0870 606 3500.

the end of December. 'Tales From The White Line' is released in the UK on December 21st. It has already entered the College Radio charts in the US where the band have been touring extensively all year.

Also out in December is 'Circlesend', the

THE GIRL DONE GOOD

Fell City Girl's frontman, Phil McMinn, has been speaking to Nightshift about the band's incredible year.

Fell City Girl began 2005 as Nightshift cover stars as we tipped them to be the Oxford band to watch this year. They end the year back on the cover following twelve months that has seen them become the hottest young band in town, having been chased by a host of record companies, been the star turn at both the Punt and Truck Festival, played at both the Reading and Leeds Festivals, headed off on a sell-out national tour with Long-view and been handpicked to play alongside Status Quo and Girls Aloud at last month's Children In Need concert at RAF Brize Norton. All this and topping Nightshift's end of year Top 20 with their superb debut single, 'Weaker Light'.

So, what has this year been like for the band? Has the way things have turned out taken them by surprise?

Phil: "We've just come back from our tour with Long-view and to be honest, we're so overwhelmed by the last six days – we played to sold out crowds across the country and we're doing what we set out to do. It's hard for us to



say but judging by the feedback and the CDs we sold, we went down really well each night.

"Reading and Leeds was fairly immense, but this tour was really one big test to see if we were up to the challenge of being a 'proper' band and I think we rose to the challenge. The show we played at The Zodiac with them was pretty much the high point of my life. And last night I was staring out at 900 people in Manchester; that was pretty cool!

Despite all the excitement and positive experiences, Phil says the year hasn't been all plain sailing, however.

"There are a lot of people who are very distrustful of us for whatever reason and in some people's heads we're already written off but that's all part of this. A particular lowlight would be playing a freshers' gig at Cambridge University. Halfway through the first song we had some guy come right to the front of the stage and shout 'fuck off you emo c**ts, who invited you?' for the whole set. All I could think about was me busting my best Funeral For A Friend moves. Emo, us?"

One of the strangest experiences of the year for Fell City Girl was being invited to appear at the Carling Weekend: Reading and Leeds Festivals on a bill headlined by The Pixies, and then being asked to share a stage with Girls Aloud in aid of the BBC's Children In Need night.

debut album from local ambient rockers Under The Igloo, on Freedom Road Records, plus a new EP from Oxford punk act Junkie Brush, entitled 'Hearts and Mines'. All these releases will be reviewed in the January issue of Nightshift.

THE 30th YOUR SONG party takes place at the Zodiac on Friday 16th December. Tickets are on sale now from wegottickets.com, priced £5. Bands already booked to play the legendary covers night include A Silent Film, Suitable Case For Treatment, The Green, The Family Machine, Bombshoe and Harry Angel.

JIM REID's highly-anticipated gig at the Cellar last month was postponed at the last minute after the former-Jesus and Mary Chain singer's father died. Jim is hoping to return to Oxford in the next couple of months. Meanwhile the Mad Professor and Lee 'Scratch' Perry gig, scheduled for December 6th has been cancelled and will not be arranged. A falling out between the two dub legends is cited as the reason for the cancellation.

BIG SPEAKERS launch their own monthly live music club night on Thursday 29th December at the Bullingdon. The Big Speakeasy aims to showcase some of the best hip hop and dance acts on the gigging scene. The opening night features London junglists Subterfuge, Bristol's electro duo Paua as well as Big Speakers themselves and an MC open mic session. The Big Speakeasy will then run every month, usually on a

Wednesday night. Tickets are available in advance from the Bully, priced £4 or £5 on the door.

TURAN AUDIO's reputation continues to grow. The local mastering service has just started work remastering a host of classic Status Quo albums, including, 'Piledriver', 'On The Level' and 'Blue For You'. This follows recent work mastering for Marc Almond, Echo and the Bunnymen, Killing Joke and Showaddywaddy. Tim Turan's next big name job is Slade's back catalogue. Despite all that, he's still keen to master local artists. Give him a call on 01865 716466.

AS EVER, don't forget to tune into The Download every Saturday evening at 6pm on BBC Radio Oxford 95.2fm. The local music show, presented by Tim Bearder and David Gillyeat, has enjoyed an extremely successful year, providing regular prime-time airplay for Oxford bands and artists as well as reporting on a wide range of aspects of the local music scene. Every week the Download team play a selection of new Oxford releases, interview local and touring acts as well as running a local demo vote. You can listen to the show online all week to at bbc.co.uk/oxford.

THE JANUARY issue of Nightshift will be out a little later than normal due to printers' Christmas holidays. The new issue should be out in the shops by the 30th of December. Deadline for all listings, releases and news items is the 20th of December.

"It's Amazing, we got to hang out with Girls Aloud! How often does that happen?! No doubt there will be some detractors but our parents were absolutely beside themselves because they saw Status Quo the first time round and now their little boys are on the same bill as them!" And to top it all of, 'Weaker Light' has been voted Nightshift's Number 1 song of the year.

"I'm stunned. I've spent the last six months saying to the other bands mates, 'how did we ever get here?' - and I still think that song is an okay song, despite playing it a million times. Maybe more worryingly is some girl just emailed us asking for the words and it took me half an hour to remember what they were!"

How does it feel to be bona fide local heroes and how different is it playing to new crowds around the country?

"The show we did with Long-view in Oxford was maybe the first time I'd ever really taken stock of what has happened over the last couple of years. I felt a total sense of pride playing to that crowd - any band in the world will tell you that the best gigs in the world are the ones where the audience are equally important as the band, and that show was one of the few

where I've felt a total connection to them. We left the stage feeling very, very humbled. The rest of the country is different in many ways, but in Glasgow we could have played the songs backwards and they still would have cheered; they were mental. Either way, we still have a lot of work to do to prove ourselves."

What's the plan for next year? Any news on record deals or new releases?

"We're in the process of finalising a deal at the moment. It's with an independent. It's with people we know well. It's terribly frightening. But I hope it will lead us on to the next step. There are a lot of scare stories in the industry about how screwed over bands get, so this is pretty much us getting screwed over as little as possible. We'll be releasing something in February I think - that's if I come out from under the covers and actually write some songs!"

Something tells us 2006 is going to be no less hectic for Fell City Girl. In the meantime help them celebrate an extraordinary year on Saturday 17th when they headline the Zodiac. Support comes from Sunnyvale Noise Sub-Element. Tickets are on sale now, priced £5, from the Zodiac box office on 01865 420042.

DR SHOTOVER: BLIZZARD OF BOOZE

Festive snarls. Haven't heard from me for a couple of months, have you? I popped in to see the doc back in September... wanted some of those pills, you know the ones - mix 'em with a bottle of barley wine and you feel no pain for the next few hours...

Anyway, picture my surprise when I heard the words "NO ALCOHOL FOR THREE MONTHS"

issue from his drool-flecked lips! After I had finished horse-whipping the blighter, I discovered that my liver is the size of a small Zeppelin, and not a Led one either... can you imagine this happening to John Bonham? (Ah, yes, good point...). Anyway, it seems that one more tiny snifter could have caused it to explode like the R-101... so my "festive season" is going to be DRY! (An adjective I had previously only applied to white wine, gin and martini... actually the three of them in the same chipped china mug can make a very refreshing pick-me-up... but I digress). Happy Bloody Christmas! Mine's a brandy butter. Without the brandy.

Next month: More tea, Vicar?



Dr Shotover's liver: Dazed and Confused

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BEST OF THE YEAR

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*2005 was, by any standards, a great year for Oxford music. A shame it had to end to be honest, but at least it gives us a chance to look back on the year and, as is traditional, pick our favourite songs by local acts. Last year **The Young Knives** topped our Top 20; this year it's the turn of epic pop upstarts **Fell City Girl**. But everywhere you looked, there were great things happening, and some fantastic songs being written and played at extreme volume for all the world to sit up and take notice. Hey, why not compile your own Top 20. Ours will still be better. Here it is.....*



1. FELL CITY GIRL: 'Weaker Light'

What a year for the former Brookes University band. As well as regularly selling out local venues, including a crazy, packed gig at the City Tavern as part of this year's Oxford Punt, Fell City Girl also found themselves on stage at the Reading and Leeds Festivals in August and more recently playing the BBC's Children In Need Concert at RAF Brize Norton alongside Girls Aloud and Status Quo. And how did they get to this stage? By writing incandescent stadium pop anthems like this, their debut single for London-based indie label Nomadic. Possessed of both Muse' soaring grandeur and Radiohead's bitter, emotive bite, 'Weaker Light' was, above everything else, a bona fide anthem for a new generation of pop kids. In years to come, this song will be seen as a watershed in Oxford music. Their time has come.

2. HARRY ANGEL: 'Death Valley Of The Dolls'

Harry Angel were everywhere in 2005, either propping up the bill at the Wheatshaf or trying to cast a gothic pall across the blistering sunlight at Charlbury Festival. But every time we encountered them this murderous dirge burrowed its fangs into us deeper and deeper. "The dolls are closing in" growled eight-foot tall frontman Chris Beard in an impressively authentic American drawl as a fizzing torrent of goth-core guitars swamps the accursed valley at that point where Bauhaus meets Sonic Youth. The boys and girls in black are back and they're in a bad mood. Hide the cutlery.

3. THE YOUNG KNIVES: 'Coastguard'

And what a year for The Young Knives. No longer just Oxford's most precious rock commodity, now they're being hailed as the vanguard of quirky post-punk lunacy and trailblazers for sports jacket kitsch. The recently re-released 'The Decision', which is helping them attract so much notice, topped our hit parade last year so we'll plump for this ghoulishly funny slice of life from their 'Junky Music Makes My Heart Beat Faster' EP, sounding like a phased radio broadcast from a strange distant planet where the normal rules of pop don't apply.

4. THE RELATIONSHIPS: 'English Blues'

That most quintessentially English of pop bands The Relationships' gorgeous second album, 'Scene', was so perfectly mannered it could get a job as one of the butlers Richard Ramage sings about on this centrepiece track. This is a picture of unseen suburbia, hiding behind net curtains, trying to keep a stiff upper lip in the face of endless sadness and disappointment and then pouring another large brandy to dull the pain. A thousand miles away from the self-pity and angst of most rock music, it tugs far harder at the heartstrings, replete with all the romance of rainswept cul-de-sacs and restless souls.

5. THE FACTORY: 'Servant's Hand'

Ah... what could have been. For a few brief weeks and a handful of awe-inspiring gigs, The Factory promised to be the greatest new band Oxford had produced in recent years. But then, like their main inspiration, The Velvet Underground, they fell out with each other and promptly split. So all we have now are vivid memories of billowing smoke, vast monoliths of churning, heavily-flanged guitars and Laima Bite's haunted vocals, like Grace Slick fronting a tumultuous hybrid of The Stooges and Spacemen 3. A sad loss.

6. SUPERGRASS: 'St Petersburg'

The Grass's fifth album, 'Road To Rouen' was, despite its typically punning title, a comedown in mood from their previous outings and took a little while to fully appreciate, but it's worth the effort as this languorous, lysergic, piano-led lope demonstrates, proving that however laid-back the band are, classy pop will cling to them like sticky buds. Fresh as spring rain and as relaxed as a post-bong walk in the woods.

7. JUNKIE BRUSH: 'Problem-Reaction-Solution'

What with punk rock being such an abused phrase these days it was a real pleasure to discover this bunch of spindly, spiky noisemakers, spitting on the still-warm corpse of MTV-friendly punk in favour of the real deal – an urgent lurch into Killing Joke territory via

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Pere Ubu's awkward punk-funk. 'Problem – Reaction – Solution' doesn't so much kick your teeth in as nag you to the point where your head bursts under the pressure of it all.

8. DIVE DIVE:

'555 For Film Stars'

Dive Dive's debut album spawned so many puppy dog-keen punk-pop crackers it was hard to know where to start, but this tiny dynamite gem will do just fine, proving yet again what an absolute gem of a band Dive Dive are. As ever Jamie Stuart's delinquent choirboy yelp holds the lead while the spiky melodic hardcore racket they produce fights to keep up, clanking out echoes of Big Black in the onward rush.

9. DEGUELLO:

'Yellow Underwing'

Possibly the Oxford band to keep an eye on in 2006 and certainly one of the finds of this year. Deguello name themselves after a ZZ Top album but owe more to the worlds of hardcore and New Wave. They contributed no less than five tracks to the essential '4 x EPs' compilation, alongside Sextodecimo, Gunnbunny and Holiday Stabbings, and this was, by a small margin, the best. Churning, grungy guitars burrow remorselessly into your head like industrial drilling equipment. Intergalactic warfare breaks out and vast spaceships are consumed by fire. Well, that's what it sounds like to us.

10. BIG SPEAKERS:

'Apocalypse Rising'

With UK hip hop finally overtaking its American cousin, now was as good a time as any for Big Speakers to finally realise their potential. Now an eight-piece crew, replete with five MCs and a full band, theirs is a lively, fluid trade-off of raps and full-blooded beats that mixes up old skool hip hop stylings with a more modern electro feel, as this dissection of divisions in hip hop demonstrates.

11. PATSY DECLINE &

TWIZZ TWANGLE:

'Cartel'

The meeting of Twizz Twangle and Patsy Decline was the catalyst for something strange and inspirational. Prolific but inconsistent in the extreme, here Twizz's mangled melodies, electronic Burundi beats and dissonant guitar play is the perfect foil for Patsy's improvised vocal performance. It could simply have been an odd, disorientating art school experiment were it not for the near-perfect pop song at its heart and the wonderfully crystalline vocal lead. Proof that great things come to those who wait.

12. NERVOUS

TESTPILOT: 'Spacetime'

Renowned for his sample-crazy mash-up live sets that have wowed Truck Festival audiences over the last couple of years, Nervous Testpilot – aka Paul Taylor – provided the soundtrack to sci-fi swordplay computer game Determinance, from where this track was taken, switching style and gears to cruise through some heavy-duty trance, pausing for dramatic effect before hurtling back into the fray.

13. HARLETTE: 'Sometimes She Pisses Me Off'

Since the demise of Beaker, Oxford's female bands have struggled to make an impression, but Abingdon teens Harlette went some way to redressing the male bias on the local scene. Taking fashion lessons from Courtney Love and musical inspiration from grunge, goth and punk, this bitter little pill of angst and bile crunched up X-Ray Spex's spunky zeal with Fuzzbox's exuberant pop simplicity and suddenly it didn't seem such a bad idea to go out for the evening with the word SLUT scrawled large in indelible marker pen on your neck.

14. SEXTODECIMO:

'To The Water'

Sextodecimo (sorry, The Mighty Sextodecimo, as they should henceforth be known) have taken their monstrous form of stoner-metal into such dark waters that they are barely recognisable as a rock band any longer. Instead they sound like all-out warfare, or the gates of hell itself opening and spewing out the vilest of sonic demons. Here is music to make the very air in the room turn to cinder and make time stop still. Still the Oxford band least likely to be appearing on CD:UK any time soon.

15. HOLIDAY

STABBINGS:

'Belly Ache'

Or maybe that honour should go to Holiday Stabbings, whose utterly bleak, punishingly extreme live sets are best exemplified by this sprawling cacophony of terror. Tunes? Who needs *them*? Not when one repeated chord, several thousand effects pedals and a relentless galley slave beat will do just as well. Infected by the morbid spirit of Swans and on a go-slow march to eat rock and roll, Holiday Stabbings are essential listening when any ageing or sensitive relatives come round for Christmas dinner.



Photo: Miles Walkden

16. THE WALK OFF: 'The Taste Of Animals'

The Walk Off, for all their comic stage presence and almost wilful amateurism continue to be one of the most electrifying live bands in town, soundtracking the rapid disintegration of civilisation by way of digital hardcore viciousness. This contribution to Quickfix Records' 'Under 18s' compilation (which also featured Harlette's 'Sometimes...') was a typically nasty, brutish and short attack on the senses, Ministry, Atari Teenage Riot and a dancing bear locked in mortal combat.

17. REDOX: 'Bullaburra'

Lost somewhere between a 1970s hippy festival and an acid-fuelled barn dance, Redox provide one of the year's strangest but most unabashed dance tracks. Part gabba-lite, part hoe-down, part madcap nursery rhyme, it's what might have happened if Gong had jammed with The Wiggles after a pot of mushroom tea, and it turns adults and children alike into gurning loons.

18. ASHER DUST:

'Pissed Up'

Oxford's answer to The Streets? Could be, as veteran local soulman, rapper and techno-bod AJ takes us out for the night along Cowley Road and Park End Street, encountering the best and worst of local clubbing life. Here he's bigging up Depth Charge's drum&bass night while dissing the Park End Club's soulless popularity. The delivery and arrangements might be reminiscent of Mike Skinner's commentaries but it's refreshing to hear someone reflecting the Oxford experience so imaginatively.

19. ELIOT: 'Shine'

Songwriter, multi-instrumentalist and producer Jim Eliot's speciality is creating sweet electro-soul music for the darkest nights. To this end he teamed up with local singer Maria Ilett whose softly resigned vocals add a poppy sheen and warmth to his minimalist soundtracks. This is the high point of debut album 'The Small Hours', a gently bubbling amalgam of Everything But The Girl, Dido and Young Marble Giants. Time to uncork a fine bottle of red wine, we think.

20. THE EVENINGS:

'Paste'

Although they didn't actually release any new material in 2005, The Evenings' recent 'Louder In The Dark' EP did find the band finally recording as a full group for the first time and breathing fresh life into some of their older tracks. Managing to be both sonically challenging and incredibly poppy, 'Paste', with its infectious synth lines, sums up what The Evenings are all about – Neu!-meets-the futurists on the interstellar synth-pop super highway.

Compiled from the votes of Dale Kattack, Sue Foreman, Paul Carrera, Stuart Fowkes, Kirsten Etheridge, Sam Shepherd, Katy Jerome, Art Lagun, Russell Barker, Ian Chesterton, Richard Catherall.

GIG GUIDE

THURSDAY 1st

THE FAMILY MACHINE + NICK BREAKSPEAR + PETER MOORE & RACHEL GRAY: The Port Mahon – Egregious countrified pop from The Family Machine, with support

Friday 2nd – Sunday 3rd

WINTER WARMER:

The Exeter Hall

After last year's excellent pre-Christmas weekend mini-festival, Gappy Tooth Industries and Klub Kakofanney once again team up at the Ex for two full days of live music. And given the eclectic outlook of both clubs the line-up is suitably varied, concentrating on some of Oxford's lesser celebrated stars and eccentrics. Amongst these on the Saturday are headliners Tunsì, providing north African funk'n'bass, along side oddball Gallic folk-punk collective Inflatable Buddha, sparkling indie rocking from Earnest Cox, electrifying punk noise from Junkie Brush (*pictured*), powerful folk-pop from Chantelle Pike and of course Twizz Twangle, without whom any such event would be incomplete.

On the Sunday country-rockers The Epstein top the bill with their Eagles-inspired party tunes. Joining them will be Klub Kak hosts and all-round oddball hippy-punk barn dance trio Redox, plus goth-core rockers Harry Angel, expansive funk ensemble Confidential Collective, 80s indie revivalists Nummernine, Smiths-inspired popstrels Film Noir and youthful dub troupe Raggasaurus. Plus, of course loads more acts on both dates.

For their part Gappy Tooth Industries will be warming up for the weekend at the same venue on the Friday night with an evening of electronic music, including local Truck-signed favourites Trademark, as well as mash-up trance king Nervous_testpilot and London's synth-rockers Eskimo Disco.

As well as a great weekend of music it's perfect place to escape from the Christmas shopping hellfest that will be engulfing the rest of Oxford, and at only £4 entry each day, you can't go wrong.

DECEMBER

from former-Chamfer frontman Nick Breakspear and Script's Peter Moore.

BANANARAMI: The Exeter Hall, Cowley

BROKEN: The Zodiac – House and breakbeats club night with Marty P and Caninesounds.

DELICIOUS MUSIC JAZZ, BLUES AND

FOLK NIGHT: Far From The Madding Crowd – With guests Jazz Emporium playing a set of jazz standards.

THE SPIN JAZZ CLUB with CURIOUS

PARADISE: The Wheatsheaf

HEAVY BLINKERS + THE EPSTEIN +

WESTERN SUBURBS + PETE AVES: The Cellar – Melancholic West Coast-flavoured acid pop and country from Canada's Heavy Blinkers, plus Eagles-influenced country rocking from local boys The Epstein and former High Llamas chap Pete Aves.

BARCODE TRIO: The Hollybush, Osney – Weekly energy-jazz residency.

SKYLARKIN: The Brickworks – Weekly club night playing wide selection of ska, reggae, funk, Latin and Afrobeat with host Aidan Larkin and guests.

SABOTAGE: The Zodiac – Weekly metal, hardcore and indie rock club night from The Club That Cannot Be Named.

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon

CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre

BROKEN: The Zodiac – House and breakbeats club night with DJ Marty P.

ZOONANA: Po Na Na – Electro, indie and mash-up with live bands and DJs.

FRIDAY 2nd

NINE-STONE COWBOY + JOFF WINKS + WHERE I'M CALLING FROM + THE

RAWLINS: The Zodiac – Now officially Oxford's premier supergroup, former-Candyskins guitarist Mark Cope's alcohol-sodden freeform pop and electro-rock band also feature ex-members of Ride (Loz Colbert) and Unbelievable Truth (Jason Moulster), while Copey's eccentric lyrical vision makes for entertaining, occasionally oddball listening. Promising local acoustic singer-songwriter Joff Winks supports along with wonderfully languid country-pop newcomers Where I'm Calling From.

SOURCE: The Zodiac – Drum&bass club night with Marcus Intalex, Jay and Chemical.

ESKIMO DISCO + NERVOUS_TESTPILOT + TRADEMARK + SCRIPT: The Exeter Hall, Cowley – GTI warm-up to their annual Winter Weekender mini-festival in conjunction with Klub Kakofanney with a night of electronic acts – *see main preview*

US4: The Red Lion, Witney – U2 tribute.

OXFORD FOLK CLUB OPEN NIGHT: The Port Mahon

KLUB KAKOFANNEY with THE BIG SPEAKERS + PHYAL + THE MONEYSHOTS: The Wheatsheaf – Another outing for local hip hop crew The Big Speakers at this month's Klub Kak. Support from punk-metallers Phyal and heavyweight pop trio The Moneyshots.

ACOUSTIC NIGHT: The Victoria, Jericho

BACKROOM BOOGIE: The Bullingdon

SATURDAY 3rd

OPETH: Brookes University Union – Monolithic metallers from Stockholm bring the operatic noise – *see main preview*

WINTER WARMER: The Exeter Hall, Cowley (1.30pm) – First full day of the Gappy Tooth Industries / Klub Kakofanney Winter Warmer mini-festival, featuring Tunsì, Inflatable Buddha, Earnest Cox, Junkie Brush, Twizz Twangle, Chantelle Pike, Richard Catalogue and more – *see main preview*

BELARUS + MUMM-RA + THE QUARTER FINALS: The Zodiac – Ambitious stadium-sized pop from Belarus, the band formerly known as Spacehopper, rocking it up gently in the style of Coldplay and Keane. Support from Bexhill's Mumm-ra, oddball synth'n'guitar-based pop inspired by Pulp, Belle & Sebastian and The Teardrop Explodes and recently signed to Sony. Indie-tinged heavy rock from The Quarterfinals. **SIMPLE with ANNIE MAC: The Bullingdon** – Radio 1's Annie is the superstar DJ guest at tonight's Simple special, playing a selection of funky house floor-fillers.

THE SKYNNY NYRDS: The Port Mahon – Lynyrd Skynyrd tribute.

HARRY ANGEL + DESDEMONA: The Wheatsheaf – Excellent gothic-flavoured hardcore fizz-pop from Harry Angel, now firmly established as one of the most promising unsigned bands in Oxford. Reading's 80s-styled indie popsters Desdemona support.

PIPE DREAM: The Red Lion, Witney
CAUCATIONAL BETREET + RIVER + SILKROOM: The City Tavern
JOHN FORSDYKE: The Magic Café, Madalen Road (1pm) – Slide and country blues.

SUNDAY 4th

WINTER WARMER: The Exeter Hall, Cowley (3pm) – Second day of the GTI / KK weekender, today featuring The Epstein, Los Diablos, Harry Angel, Confidential Collective, Raggasaurus, Film Noir and more – *see main preview*

GET CAPE, WEAR CAPE, FLY + SECOND SMILE + CHINESE FINGER TRAP + ITCH: The Bullingdon – Laptop and guitar-based post-rock action from Truck Festival favourite Get Cape. Local hardcore crew Chinese Finger Trap





Saturday 3rd

OPETH: Brookes University Union

Press hype is always to be taken with a generous pinch of salt, but the stuff being written about Stockholm's Opeth across the journalistic board is so unequivocally excitable, it's impossible to ignore. "Probably the best band in the world", frothed Metal Hammer, while Kerrang! went further, proclaiming them "the most unique band on the planet". Even the more considered American press proclaimed that Opeth "continued to expand the definition of what metal can be". And in a genre that seems to throw up a new sub-genre every other week, Opeth have united critics and fans alike with their simultaneously complex, melodic and downright heavy blend of traditional heavy rock, death-metal, prog and goth. The band's most recent opus, 'Ghost Reveries', is a typically expansive trawl through the various levels of metal, by turns gruff hardcore and almost classical or folksy. Hell, there are flutes on it! And grand pianos! And while there might be a bit of the Spinal Tap about Opeth's grand designs, their sheer ambition, vision and range of sound is wholly impressive, while frontman Mikael Åkerfeldt seems constantly driven to take the band ever onwards to different musical plains. A band that boasts Morbid Angel, King Crimson and Leonard Cohen, as well as Nick Drake, Led Zep and Pink Floyd as major influences could be mess of vanity, but Opeth's towering, epic rock stands up to any scrutiny.

are among the supporting cast.

DELICIOUS MUSIC OPEN MIC SESSION:
The Old School House

SUEDE ALIENS: The Black Horse, Kidlington

MONDAY 5th

SKIN: The Zodiac – Former-Skunk Anansie big mouth strikes again– *see main preview*

PAUL BYRD: The Bullingdon – Texas-based blues singer and guitarist playing gritty, authentic southern blues in the style of Albert and BB King as well as covers of Otis Rush, T-Bone Walker and others.

JEREMY WARMSLEY + A SILENT FILM + ROBOT FRIEND + KITTYHAWKDIVE + ZU ZWEIT: The Zodiac – End of term indie rock party with five-band bill.

OPEN MIC NIGHT: The Port Mahon
KAREN TWEED & ROGER WILSON:
Nettlebed Folk Club

TUESDAY 6th

JAZZ CLUB with THE TOM GREY QUINTET:
The Bullingdon – Popular weekly residency at the free jazz club night, also featuring DJs til late.

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Exeter Hall
DELICIOUS MUSIC OPEN MIC JAM
NIGHT: The City Tavern

WEDNESDAY 7th

THE OXFORD IMPROVISORS

ORCHESTRA: The Port Mahon – Free jazz, contemporary classical and alt.rock improv from the local collective.

GLASSFACTORY + SNISH + FINE MIND:
The Wheatsheaf – Mixed bag of local and out of town bands from Gigswap UK.

DELICIOUS MUSIC OPEN MIC NIGHT: Far From The Madding Crowd

ROOTS LOUNGE: East Oxford Community Centre

THURSDAY 8th

MURRAY TORKILDSEN + HOOCHIE: The Port Mahon – The former Sweeney frontman plays an intimate gig, caustic social observation and wit in an Essex boy style.

KATHERINE WILLIAMS + JOHN EGDELL:
The Zodiac – Acclaimed English folkstress and Mercury Prize nominee shows Dido and Nora Jones how it really should be done.

LADY DAZE: The Exeter Hall, Cowley – A tribute to Ella Fitzgerald with Sophie Polhill and Antonia King.

DELICIOUS MUSIC JAZZ, BLUES AND FOLK NIGHT: Far From The Madding Crowd – With guests folk duo The Bewley Brothers.

THE SPIN JAZZ CLUB with THE SCOTTISH GUITAR QUARTET: The Wheatsheaf

BARCODE TRIO: The Hollybush, Osney

SKYLARKIN: The Brickworks

SABOTAGE: The Zodiac

CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre

FRIDAY 9th

ARMOR FOR SLEEP + IDIOT PILOT: The Zodiac – US emo crew return to the Zodiac, a venue they sold out last time round, kicking out more powerchord-heavy rock for disaffected, disenfranchised kids, plugging new album, 'Things To Do When You're Dead', following support tours with Fall Out Boy and Taking Back Sunday.

SEXY BREAKFAST + BIG SPEAKERS + BABY GRAVY: The Zodiac – And finally, it's good night from them. Bid a fond farewell to one of Oxford's most ambitious bands, Sexy Breakfast, as they bow out in heroically space-rock style.

SLIDE: The Zodiac – House club night.

DOUG HODGE BAND + DREW ATKINS: The Exeter Hall, Cowley – Local songwriters night.

SMILEX + ALL YOU MISS + ROBOCHRIST + 20/20 VISION: The Wheatsheaf – Glam-rocking madballs Smilex kick up the dirt once again, promoting their new remix album with support from grunge-pop lasses AYM, cyberpunk performance artist Robochrist and heavy rockers 20/20 Vision.

OXFORD FOLK CLUB with JESSICA & AL MARSHALL: The Port Mahon

EVOLUTION: The Red Lion, Witney

ACOUSTIC NIGHT: The Victoria, Jericho

BACKROOM BOOGIE: The Bullingdon

SATURDAY 10th

SOUKOUS KUMBELE: The Zodiac (upstairs) – Congolese drummer, now resident in Bristol, showing off his skills on congas and djembe.

NO COMPLY + FAILSAFE + EXP: The Zodiac (downstairs) – Devon's relentlessly-touring metallic punk rockers No Comply crank up the noise once again at the end of successful year that's seen them play at the Reading Festival Lock Up stage along the way.

THE ZIMMERMEN: The Bullingdon – Tribute to Bob Dylan from the local favourites.

HOT SILK POCKETS + BETTY & THE WEREWOLVES: The Port Mahon – Local bands night.

MESAPLEX + BLUE KITE: The Wheatsheaf – Ambient electronic experimentation from Mesaplex, plus exotic 60s-flavoured psychedelic folk pop from Blue Kite.

CITIZEN CANED + FOXES + STEAMER: The City Tavern – Local bands night.

SLYDE 400: The Red Lion, Witney
ROCK'N'ROLL X MUST EXTRAVAGANZA:

The Exeter Hall, Cowley – Festive rocking action with local acts Bananarami, Assassins of Silence, Yule Tide Log, Kohoutek and more.

BARAKA: The Coven – A night of psy-trance with DJs Bag Man Dan, Agent24, Toad and Fungi-psy'd

MAEVE BAYTON: The Magic Café, Madalen Road (1pm) – Local jazz-tinged songstress.

SUNDAY 11th

BLUE KITE: The Bullingdon – Another chance to catch the quite lovely Blue Kite before they head back to recording studio exile.

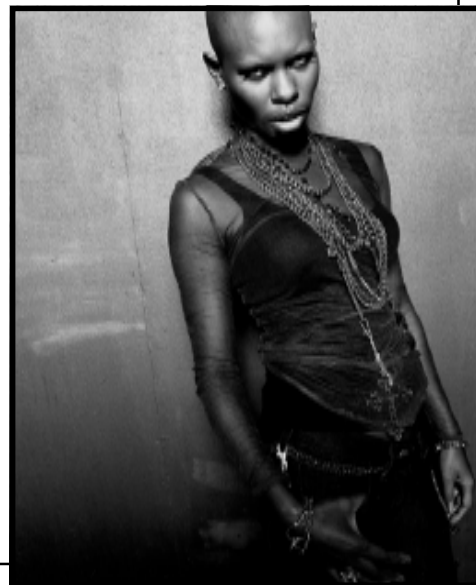
BEARD MUSEUM with ROGER TARRY + RICHARD WALTERS + CHRIS BEARD: The Purple Turtle – Gentle pop goings on at Beard

Monday 5th

SKIN: The Zodiac

Whatever you thought about Skunk Anansie's music, frontwoman Skin (the woman formerly known as Deborah Dyer) was one of the most striking figures in late-90s rock. And her band didn't too badly for themselves neither, shifting over four million albums in their short lifetime. The demise of that outfit seemed to hit Skin hard, as she returned a few years later with 2003's solo debut, 'Fleshwounds', her previously political bite replaced with a more personal bile and intense introspection. Paradoxically, even as she has mined the depths of her soul and exhumed all those emotional hurts, she's mellowed musically. Like a more rock and roll Annie Lennox, Skin can belt out some serious vocal noise, with a piercing soprano, but more and more she's moving into pure soul territory, as new download single, 'Alone In My Room', demonstrates.

Tonight's gig is the final date of a comeback UK tour of smaller venues ahead of the release of forthcoming album 'Fake Chemical State' (featuring co-writing credits for Mansun's Paul Draper amongst others), and recent live outings suggest there'll be a fair few old Skunk Anansie favourites amongst the new songs.





Monday 12th

SKINDRED / DEVIL SOLD HIS SOUL: The Zodiac

Skindred might still be a cult act in their native UK, but over in the States they're on the cusp of huge success. Most recent album, 'Babylon', has already topped the US reggae charts and sold in excess of 300,000 copies, while they've been out on tour with Korn, Papa Roach and Sevendust. Not bad for a bunch of guys from South Wales. Fronted by Jamaican-born, Welsh-raised singer Benji Webb, Skindred are one of that rare breed - a fusion band that actually works. Similar in spirit if not sound to The Clash and System Of A Down, they mix up dancehall, ragga, punk, metal and drum&bass and make party music for metalheads. Webb alternately rants, raps and toasts over guitarist Mike Fry's chunky grunge and hardcore riffage. Fry will be familiar to some local gig-goers since he used to play with Oxfrd metallers Stoo*fa a few years back. Skindred's hard work - they've been out on the road pretty much continually over the past five years - and genre-crossing sound have found them out on their own and finally reaping their reward. Support comes from Gloucestershire's Devil Sold His Soul, current champions of the UK's metal underground, rising from the ashes of Mahumodo and inspired by the likes of Tool and Will Haven.

Museum, including local starlet Richard Walters and the appropriately-named Chris Beard, him out of Harry Angel.

LATVIAN RADIO CHAMBER SINGERS WITH GAVIN BRYARS: St Barnabus Church, Jericho - The British composer teams up with Latvia's premier choir.

ELECTRIC JAM SESSION: The Exeter Hall, Cowley

DELICIOUS MUSIC OPEN MIC SESSION: The Old School House

MONDAY 12th

SKINDRED + DEVIL SOLD HIS SOUL: The Zodiac - Reggae-metal warriors, making it big Stateside- *see main preview*

GILES HEDLEY & THE AVIATORS: The Bullingdon - Funky Delta and Chicago-style blues from the UK bluesman, renowned for his lap steel, bottleneck and slide guitar playing as well as an accomplished harpist, kicking it out in the style of Son House and Robert Johnson.

WHIP + STAFRAENN HAKON: The Port Mahon - Former-Timesbold chap Jason Merritt makes a rare visit to town, promoting new album, 'Atheist Love Songs To God', creating stark, moody country folk songs in a similar style to

Will Oldham, Smog and The Handsome Family. Iceland's Stafrænn Hakon - aka Olafur Josephsson - adds to the moody atmosphere with his loops and drones soundscaping in the vein of LaBradford and Aerial M.

ST. AGNES FOUNTAIN: Nettlebed Folk Club

TUESDAY 13th

JAZZ CLUB with THE TOM GREY QUINTET: The Bullingdon

DREW ATKINS: The Port Mahon - Local 60s-influenced acoustic singer-songwriter.

JUNKIE BRUSH + REELY FOOL + SUBMERSE: The Wheatsheaf - Local new wave and punk hopefuls headline tonight's

Gigswap UK showcase.

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Exeter Hall, Cowley

DELICIOUS MUSIC OPEN MIC JAM

NIGHT: The City Tavern

WEDNESDAY 14th

DELICIOUS MUSIC OPEN MIC NIGHT: Far From The Madding Crowd

ALL YOU MISS + NAGATHA KRUSTI + LAST PROPOSAL + IVY + DEVIL'S ADVOCATE:

The Vibe, Didcot - Under-18s gig. Local grunge-popsters AYM headline.

ARAWAK: East Oxford Community Centre - Reggae sound system.

THURSDAY 15th

WILD CHILD CLUB TOUR: The Zodiac - Trance and hard house touring club package with Wildchild regulars JFK, Reece Elliot, Little Gem. **GWYN ASHTON + ALLY CRAIG: The Exeter Hall, Cowley** - Acoustic blues and folk from the local singer-songwriters.

SNAKE EYES: The Port Mahon - Proper 'eavy metal of the old skool from Snake Eyes, making out like AC/DC.

DELICIOUS MUSIC JAZZ, BLUES AND FOLK NIGHT: Far From The Madding Crowd - Featuring piano and guitar duo Duo Ventes Didos.

THE SPIN JAZZ CLUB with BUTCH

THOMAS: The Wheatsheaf

BARCODE TRIO: The Hollybush, Osney

SKYLARKIN: The Brickworks

SABOTAGE: The Zodiac

CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre

FRIDAY 16th

YOUR SONG XXX: The Zodiac - Suitable Case, A Silent Film, the Family Machine, Bombshoe, Harry Angel and The Green are amongst the stars of the 30th Your Song. You won't hear cover versions and all-round musical sacrilege like this anywhere else.

PEEPSHOW with THE EGG + THE

SPIRALIST: The Zodiac - Local trance-rock heroes return to Oxford - *see main preview*

ALIAS + CHRIST: The Wheatsheaf - One-time Anticon fella Alias brings his experimental hip hop noise to Vacuous Pop's club night, mixing up hip hop beats with the more pastoral side of My Bloody Valentine, and Aphex Twin, while Christ mixes up melody, beats and atmospheric soundscapes.

MARY'S GARDEN + PHYAL: The Exeter Hall, Cowley - Laima Bite returns with her new band after the break-up of The Factory earlier this year.

DIRTY EARTH: The Red Lion, Witney
OXFORD FOLK CLUB OPEN NIGHT: The Port Mahon

CHINESE FINGER TRAP + 20/20 VISION + INCANA + PARADOX METHOD: The Net, Abingdon - Under-18s gig with headline set from local hardcore urchins CFT.

ACOUSTIC NIGHT: The Victoria, Jericho

BACKROOM BOOGIE: The Bullingdon

ROOTS LOUNGE: East Oxford Community Centre

SATURDAY 17th

ROADRUNNER with NEVILLE STAPLES + NINE TON PEANUT SMUGGLERS: The Bullingdon - Former-Specials frontman Staples headlines tonight's Roadrunner club night- *see main preview*

FELL CITY GIRL + SUNNYVALE NOISE SUB-ELEMENT + RICHARD WALTERS: The Zodiac - Rounding off a pretty special year with this headline show, Fell City Girl prepare to outgrow every venue in Oxford. Support from ace post-rock sound manipulators Sunnyvale, plus Jeff Buckley-inspired singer Rich Walters.

OSPREY & FRIENDS: The Port Mahon - Acoustic pop and folk from the local songwriter. **SHAKER HEIGHTS + AXE VALLEY + SKULL THRASH + DREW ATKINS: The City Tavern** - Tom Petty and Lou Reed-influenced melodic indie rock from Shaker Heights, headlining tonight's local bands showcase.

KING ADA: The Exeter Hall, Cowley

FUSED: The Red Lion, Witney

ALL YOU MISS + PHYAL + HARLETTE: The Mill, Banbury - Grunge and punk with a triple bill of local noisemakers.

ELISE: The Magic Café, Madalen Road (1pm)

SUNDAY 18th

THE GREEN: The Port Mahon - Melodic gothic pop with a hint of Suede from the local rockers.

SLIDEWINDER: The Exeter Hall, Cowley - Live blues.

BEARD MUSEUM with LOS DIABLOS + SIMON DAVIES + THE FAMILY MACHINE: The Purple Turtle

DELICIOUS MUSIC OPEN MIC SESSION: The Old School House

SCOOBY DON'T: The Black Horse, Kidlington

MONDAY 19th

NEVER THE BRIDE: The Bullingdon - The Monday Night Blues hosts its Christmas party with UK blues-rock favourites Never The Bride, featuring asbestos-lunged front-woman Nikki Lambourn, likened to Tina Turner and Janis Joplin and rated as Britain's best female blues singer by Roger Daltrey; power-rock backing from the band in the style of Heart.

THE EVENINGS + QUACK QUACK + VIGINATRON: The Wheatsheaf - Possibly a night of paying homage to the mighty Neu! with local acolytes The Evenings bursting forth with esoteric but insanely synth-rocking anthems, plus support from Audioscope stars Quack Quack.

OPEN MIC NIGHT: The Port Mahon

TUESDAY 20th

JAZZ CLUB with THE TOM GREY QUINTET: The Bullingdon

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Exeter Hall

DELICIOUS MUSIC OPEN MIC JAM

NIGHT: The City Tavern

WEDNESDAY 21st

ADAM BOMB ACOUSTIC: The Exeter Hall, Cowley - The LA stadium-rocker unplugs and shows us his softer side. No flame-throwing guitars tonight, then.

ELECTRIC SOFT PARADE + TRADEMARK + THE DUSTY SOUND SYSTEM + THE WALK OFF + BLACK MADONNAS: The Zodiac - Truck Records' Christmas party with chums ESP teaming up with label stars Trademark and Robin Bennett's lo-fi country project, Dusty Soundsystem.

ARCTIC FOX: The City Tavern - Local funkies.

DELICIOUS MUSIC OPEN MIC NIGHT: Far From The Madding Crowd

DIVINE COILS: The Port Mahon - Dissonant noise-making from members of Holiday Stabbings and assorted chums.

ANARCHY IN THE BACKROOM: The

Bullington – Punk rock club night.
ROOTS LOUNGE: East Oxford Community Centre

THURSDAY 22nd

HARRY ANGEL + THE INVISIBLE + THE CORVIDS: The Zodiac – Local goth-rock heroes round off a hell of a year with support from 70s-influenced rockers The Invisible and hardcore merchants Corvids.
THE BLACK WATCH + THE JAZZ BUTCHER + THE NEW MOON: The Port Mahon – Lovely, star-gazing alt.country from The Black Watch – aka John Andrew Frederick, back in the UK promoting new album, 'The Hypnotising Sea'. 80s indie legend The Jazz Butcher continues to make himself familiar with the locals, while acoustic popsters The New Moon open.
SNAKE EYES: The Exeter Hall, Cowley – Old school metal action.
DELICIOUS MUSIC JAZZ, BLUES AND FOLK NIGHT: Far From The Madding Crowd – Latin-jazz classical guitar duo Los Hombres are tonight's guests.
SKYLARKIN: The Brickworks

Friday 16th

PEEPSHOW with THE EGG/THE SPIRALIST: The Zodiac

With Peepshow now firmly established as Oxford's most inventive and eclectic dance club night, featuring everything from live bands to elaborate VJ sets, this Christmas special is a particular treat. Foremost it sees the return to town of prodigal trance-funk sons The Egg, a band who spent much of the 90s as the biggest live draw on the Oxford circuit as well as an internationally successful band. Their first two albums, 'Albumen' (its title inspired by an early Nightshift review) and 'Travelator', mixed up funky grooves and techno with a psychedelic rock edge. The original band split a few years ago, with bassist Dave Gaydon going on to work for the Po Na Na chain and guitarist Mark Revell working on various solo projects, but twins Ned and Maff Scott reconvened in London and have revitalised the band and their old local fanbase is sure to be out in force. A new generation of local live dance is represented by The Spiralist, formed by former Animalhouse people Jason King and Hari Teah, and featuring one-time Egg man Mark Revell. Mixing up trip hop, soul and old fashioned jazz they exude a stylish cool and are the natural local successors to The Egg's inspirational legacy. As well as the live sets there's visuals from Mach V as well as resident and guest DJ sets.



SABOTAGE: The Zodiac
CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre

FRIDAY 23rd

ONE TOY SOLDIER + THE DHARMA + MARK SOLACE + TWIZZ TWANGLE + LAIMA BITE + FORK: The Exeter Hall, Cowley – Fundraising gig for Wittstock Festival with assorted indie, funk and folk turns.
REPUBLICA: The Zodiac – Hard house and trance club night with DJ sets from Kutski and Adam from Lab 4.
OXFORD FOLK CLUB CHRISTMAS PARTY: The Port Mahon
ACOUSTIC NIGHT: The Victoria, Jericho
BACKROOM BOOGIE: The Bullington
SATURDAY 24th

DELICIOUS MUSIC & UP'N'COMING'S CHRISTMAS BASH: The City Tavern
BACKROOM BOOGIE CHRISTMAS SPECIAL: The Bullington
OPEN MIC SESSION: The Exeter Hall, Cowley
CONERSTONE MUZIK: East Oxford Community Centre - Reggae and dancehall club night.

SUNDAY 25th

Ah, Christmas is it? Gonna catch bird flu off the turkey are you? Family arguments? Nothing on the telly? Nothing a large glass of red wine and nice blast of Anaal Nathrakh can't solve.

MONDAY 26th

At least there's football on today. Unless it's all frozen off. Wouldn't surprise in the slightest. But c'mon, are we seriously expected to travel all the way down to Torquay on Boxing Day? Guess we'll have to make do with *The Great Escape* after all.

TUESDAY 27th

JAZZ CLUB with THE TOM GREY QUINTET: The Bullington
OPEN MIC SESSION: The Exeter Hall, Cowley
DELICIOUS MUSIC OPEN MIC JAM NIGHT: The City Tavern

WEDNESDAY 28th

DELICIOUS MUSIC OPEN MIC NIGHT: Far From The Madding Crowd

THURSDAY 29th

THE BIG SPEAKEASY with SUBTERFUGE + PAUA + BIG SPEAKERS + MC OPEN MIC SESSION: The Bullington – New monthly hip hop night from the Big Speakers boys. Junglist beats from London's Subterfuge at tonight's launch night, plus electronica from Bristol's Paua, as well as a set from the Speakers themselves and an open mic MC session.

RED BUBBLE CLUB + PHIL BENTLEY + DANNY MCGURN + SOPHIE POLHILL + DANI WILDE: The Exeter Hall, Cowley – Local singer-songwriters night.
DELICIOUS MUSIC JAZZ, BLUES AND FOLK NIGHT: Far From The Madding Crowd – Featuring blues duo Chico and the Man.
SKYLARKIN: The Brickworks
SABOTAGE: The Zodiac

FRIDAY 30th

THE JJ SOUL EXPERIENCE + DAN AUSTIN + DREW ATKINS: The Exeter Hall, Cowley
ACOUSTIC NIGHT: The Victoria, Jericho
BACKROOM BOOGIE: The Bullington



Saturday 17th

ROADRUNNER with NEVILLE STAPLES: The Bullington

The Bully's monthly celebration of all things Mod, ska and 60s beat celebrates the festive season with a star turn from former-Specials and Fun Boy Three hero Neville Staples, one of the most significant figures in the history of UK ska. Alongside Terry Hall he fronted The Specials until 1981, including classic hits like 'Too Much Too Young' and 'Ghost Town', before he, Hall and Lynval Golding split to form the equally successful Fun Boy Three. Staples also toured the States with Rankin Roger as Special Beat and has continued to tour in his own right ever since, mostly abroad. With the 25th anniversary of Two Tone Records and the increasing influence of The Specials unique take on ska on new British bands (The Libertines, The Streets, Dead 60s and Hard-Fi all owe a massive debt), the time is ripe for Neville to resurface with a new album, 'The Rude Boy Returns', where he is joined by Mick Jones and Rat Scabies amongst others. Tonight's set will feature plenty of Specials material as well as ska classics and material from the new album. As well as Staples' live set there's support from Nine-Ton Peanut Smugglers – the old-school ska band formed by Sir Bald Diddle and former Milkshake Bruce Brand, plus a DJ set from Trojan Records' Dave Edwards.

SATURDAY 31st

KLUB KAKOFANNEY NEW YEAR'S EVE PARTY with THE PETE FRYER BAND + REDOX + KOHOUTEK + OPAQUE: The Exeter Hall, Cowley – Klub Kak Krew welcome in the New Year in typically maverick style.
HOGGZ: The Red Lion, Witney – Rocking into the New Year with Oxfordshire's premier heavy rock covers band.
NEW YEAR'S EVE PARTY: The Bullington – With DJ Tony Nanton.
DELICIOUS MUSIC & UP'N'COMING NEW YEAR'S EVE PARTY: The City Tavern
EOCC ALLSTARS: East Oxford Community Centre

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LIVE

AUDIOSCOPE 06

The Zodiac

For the first time in its five-year history, Audioscope runs to two days, which means a double dose of experimental pop, post-rock, hardcore and downright disorientating electronica. It's also a bit daunting – can the human mind really withstand a whole weekend of leftfield noise and serious-looking men with beards? The biggest, and best, surprise on Saturday is just how accessible most of the music is.

That's not such a shock when you consider the festival's openers are **FELL CITY GIRL**, Oxford's prime purveyors of guilded stadium-sized pop anthems. Such is their stature now that they could have sold out today's gig by themselves. But then it's Audioscope business as expected from **BULLET UNION**, a raw rush of blood to the head in a melodic punk style. They break their guitar strings and slam out each short, sharp skewed song with scant regard for logic or the venue's foundations. Similarly bullish and muscular are late stand-ins **IVORY SPRINGER** whose initially by-wrote DC hardcore wins you over in much the same way as a steamroller might subdue an indignant strip of tarmac. They're a blur of false endings and pin-tight 90 degree turns, their last song sounds like a lost Big Black classic and – despite the beards – there's enough humour on show to warm the hardest cynic's heart.

New York's **ILL EASE** – aka one-woman band Elizabeth Sharp – is an intriguing collision of art-punk confrontation and rootsy melody and simplicity. She sets up distorted guitar loops before retreating behind her rudimentary drumkit to thrash out urgent folk vignettes that are, almost impossibly, halfway between Lydia Lunch and kd lang.

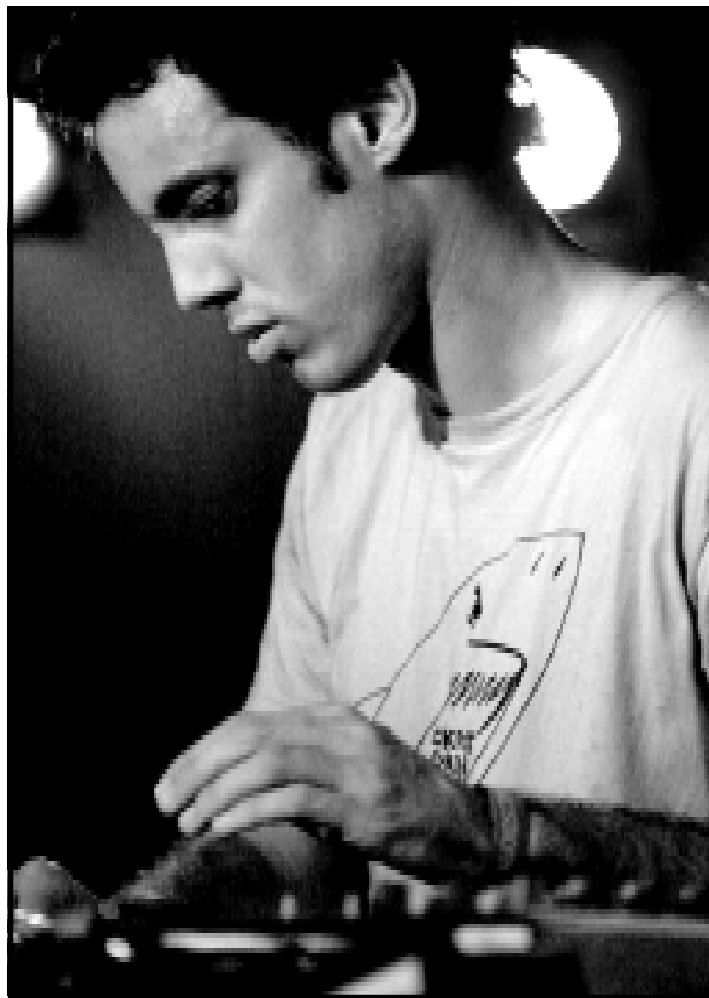
So, it's looking good and can only get better with the arrival of Jon Chapple's new band, **SHOOTING AT UNARMED MEN**. A truly great misanthrope in the tradition of Mark E Smith and Steve Albini, Chapple was always the real star of his former group McLusky and here simply continues his reckless, fists-out rampage into punk rock. Each song sounds like Chapple is trying to condense the entire history of punk into two minutes while dissecting all of society's nastier problems with a wit as sharp as a butcher's cleaver.

And so to what is possibly the highlight of a weekend of highlights. **DATA PANIK** are the band that used

to be Bis. Often written off as a squeaky, screechy novelty annoyance, they always packed a punk rock punch that too few folks ever appreciated and today they're still a joyous bundle of kiddy energy, giddy synth noises and urgent, shouty punk. Manda Rin still sports the same haircut she had ten years ago while Sci Fi Steve has lost most of his. They're Devo dismembering Tina Marie; Gang Of Four messing with The Silicon Teens. An utterly infectious barrel of fun. Unlike Texas' **EXPLOSIONS IN THE SKY** whose ecstatic welcome only serves to make us wonder what we're missing all the more. Maybe if your idea of genius is repeating the opening bars to an old Ride song for half an hour you could understand the chin-stroking rapture, but for "oceanic" simply read "tedious".

All that is quickly forgotten – blown away to be specific. Because here's Saturday night's headliners **FOUR TET**, the man a suddenly packed room has been waiting for. Keiran Hebden is a scary-looking bloke – Hammer Horror make-up, a maniacal stare and the look of a stoned cadaver. If he approached you at a bus stop you'd worry he was either packing a machete or was about to bore you to death with a monologue about binary code, but reports suggest he's an all-round geezer and tonight's laptop set is as joyous and celebratory as it is unpredictable and abstract. Songs are fed through the digital ringer, spasticated robot rhythms twisted out of shape as the set builds to a monolithic climax and yet always remains irresistibly danceable – well, as long as you're a wobble-headed alien high on crystal meth. Hebden has taken Coldcut's cut-up blueprint and run with it. As unlikely a dance hero as you can imagine, tonight he is every inch the superstar DJ.

Typically for the Audioscope organisers, they don't break us into the second day of the festival gently. In fact there they are on stage themselves in their musical guise, **SUNNYVALE NOISE SUB-ELEMENT**, as uncompromising a noise as Oxford has produced since Nought, and a band who can only be properly appreciated in a loud and live setting. While there's a crushing virulence to their guitars-and-electronics soundtracks, familiarity with much of the set lends them a



Four Tet photo by Miles Walkden

strangely melodic edge and Nightshift's old despection of them as Kraftwerk remixed by Shellac still rings as true as any.

And speaking of **NOUGHT**, today's set is as astonishing as any we've experienced from them in ten years. James Sedwards is a genuine virtuoso: like Steve Albini tutored in the dark arts by John Coltrane, he blurs the divide between jazz and hardcore with an unnerving nonchalance – while the bassist cuts heroic shapes and drummer Johnny hammers himself into a froth behind the kit, James looks like he's barely trying and yet the noise that comes from his guitar is incredible. Nought bring new meaning to the idea of industrial music – this really is the sound of foundaries and smelting plants, as oppressive as the heat of molten steel and the intense pressure of hammer into anvil.

We almost break for food a few minutes into Leeds' **QUACK QUACK**'s obtuse instrumental set but something holds us back. Here are more intense, skinny men with beards and no tunes, led by a chap with an apparently out of tune keyboard, but slowly they engulf you, like Neu! lost in Toytown, Young Marble Giants with an added dose of craziness or, as the sound engineer suggests, Jean Michel Jarre Ja Binks. In the end it's like the soundtrack to one of those drug den scenes in a '60s cop show and you don't want it to end.

But end it must, to make way for **LORDS'** frenetic math-rock, which is all very clever but lacks the sheer lunatic invention of Quack Quack. At least they're better than **SUPER NUMERI**, who might as well be the house band on The Fast Show's Jazz Club. Chin-stroking, bearded indulgence that's far too self satisfied. Which is something you'd be hard pressed to accuse American songstress **SCOUT NIBLETT** of. She's coy to the point of being twee, but while her almost nursery-rhyme simple songs initially seem to lack depth, they're fiery little nuggets of pop and with Shellac's Todd Trainer on drums it's quite a spectacle.

This being Sunday and tomorrow being a school day and all, it's unfortunate but unsurprising that the crowd has diminished spectacularly by the time headliner **LUKE VIBERT** gets stuck into his DJ set, mixing up his own material that's seen him move from Warp to Nnja Tunes to Mo'Wax in a diverse career, to classic tracks from Future Sound of London and Squarepusher. In a way it's sad, low-key way to end what is a great weekend of some of the most inventive bands to grace the Zodiac stage all year. Another three grand raised for Shelter, a good few minds broadened to the possibilities of music, and, hey, give us another Audioscope like this next year and we might even lose our prejudice against beards.

Dale Kattack

MEW

The Zodiac

Denmark's contribution to great pop has rarely amounted to much, but with Mew they might just have given the world the greatest live rock experience of the year.

Looking like a gang of Eton dandies gone to pot, they're certainly more stylish than the current crop of British indie urchins, but the band are mere human conduits for a musical and visual storm that literally takes your breath away. The relatively restrained 'Circuitry Of The Wolf' tumbles in on a dense barrage of hardcore guitars and tumbling beats before frontman Jonas Bjerre's gentle vocal reverie allows the song to bloom with an incandescence that matches the showers of sparks and strobes that provides the backdrop to the opening salvos. From there the only way is up. Up beyond the stratosphere to drift in the firmament, lost in the glacial splendour of songs that are alternately airy or portentous, rising from gentle reveries into vast almost space-rock anthems. This isn't going overboard; Mew's new album, 'And The Glass Handed Kites', contains at least half a dozen of the most incredible pop songs you will hear this year or next. From the daydreaming, teasing 'Special', whereby Killing Joke's 'Love Like Blood' gets a Flaming Lips makeover, to tonight's riotous encore of 'Apocalypso' that takes My Bloody Valentine's sky-soaring theft of rock's soul and gives it a pure pop heart, Mew conjure magic and melody from something disjointed and malevolent.

And then there are the visuals: grotesque animations and a billion fairy lights moving across a screen that fill the entire back wall – disfigured nightmare dolls, and bizarre man-animals, perfect if unnerving accompaniment to the ebullient, escapist noise Mew conjure up. This is music from stranger and more beautiful world than we can possibly imagine.

Dale Kattack

THE WEDDING PRESENT

Brookes University

How strange that the Wedding Present released their first single twenty years ago. Two whole decades! So many lesser bands have become trite and lost their spark in far less time than this, and it's great that the Weddoses maintain the things which people love about them.

Tonight they play some old songs, some new songs, some Cinerama songs; but they're all bound together by that terrific guitar hyperstrum, a God-given, innate sense of melodic correctness and the effortless charm of David Gedge. Not forgetting Gedge's voice, of course... one of the best 'non-singing-voice' singing voices of all time.

The beauty of this band is that they know *exactly* how simple things can be kept. In a world overrun with bands trying their hardest to prove how complex they can get, it's extraordinarily refreshing to experience a band who seem to do nothing more than getting up on stage and playing songs. They don't run about, they don't leap into the crowd. These songs show a confidence, maybe learnt through the twenty-year life experience of the band, in their simplicity and finesse. There's nothing missing here, and nothing to be added. The secret of the Wedding Present is that they know how to put together a good tune, and they can do it again and again. Even when they're not playing their own songs (tonight, for example, they play out Julee Cruise's 'Falling') Gedge's distinctive tones make them sound like Wedding Present originals. Is this effusive praise pure nostalgia? I think not – even though I've loved this band for a large part of their twenty years, they play like they're playing for the first time, and like they're overjoyed just to be playing. It's hard not to be won over.

Simon Minter

KIMYA DAWSON / JASON ANDERSON

Freud's

The Sidewalk Café this ain't. A million miles away from the spiritual home of New York Antifolk, Freud's seems like an odd choice for a show such as tonight's.

Unfazed by the vastness of the venue, Jason Anderson embraces its God-fearing past and strides into the middle of the tables, guitar brandished like a crucifix, eyes burning with religious zeal. Soon half the audience are on their feet, joining him up at the altar as an impromptu gospel choir, singing choruses and giving him every "heck yeah" he demands. It could seem cheap but his delivery is so sharp, his timing so perfect and his attitude so honest that everyone happily joins him in his state of quasi-religious fervour, glad to be out of their seats, grinning at his scissor kicks until their faces ache.

Kimya Dawson takes the stage next with the crowd coming forward to sit around her feet. Sporting a new mohawk, the one-time Moldy Peach starts by playing through the first three songs of her as yet untitled forthcoming album. It takes a special kind of artist to open with a song about their hospitalised mother but from the moment her trademark stream of heartfelt, tightly-rhymed lyrics begins, Kimya has the crowd rapt. It's not just the quality of the songwriting that makes the show so special, it's the overwhelming friendliness and sense of intimacy that Kimya inspires. Half of her set, for example, is made up of requests, darkly funny songs punctuated with sadder ones, covering everything from tsunamis to the fall of Michael Jackson. Moldy Peach humour still pervades, thank God: "You can sing along to this next one. Or if you're shy and you don't want to sing, just come and sit on my face or something". Maybe Freud's wasn't such a bad choice after all.

Catherine Clark



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LACUNA COIL

The Zodiac

Just days before Hallowe'en, Milan's Lacuna Coil prise open their coffins to join the recently-risen dead for a sold-out Zodiac gig. Ten years old, this black-clad goth-metal sextet has built up a formidable reputation, and the crowd reveres them with fingers splayed in the traditional gesture of devil-worship.

However, there's not much devilry taking place on stage. As Oxford's tots trick-or-treat for chocolate spiders and liquorice bats, Lacuna Coil boil up the auditory equivalent of such confections: cutely kitsch nuggets of gothery. Cristina Scabbia's vocals – all soaring, girly sweetness – are undercut by Andrea Ferro's James-Hetfield-joins-Linkin-Park gutturals. Meanwhile, aggressive guitars and drums jerk and judder like dancers from the 'Thriller' video amidst unearthly synth sequences. They are a cartoon band, their creepiness as stylised as that of a Tim Burton animation.

The stage show, too, is pure pantomime. The carefully-choreographed head-banging routines in which the long-locked

blokes frequently engage are enjoyably silly, creating an amusing juxtaposition between the clichés of death metal and manufactured pop as they do. Less amusing – aside from a worrying absence of irony – is the way in which this pop-metal cocktail seeps into the music itself. A sheep got up in wolf's clothing, if you will. Dull the drums and guitars of songs such as the demi-ballad 'Entwined', whip aside its scary costumery, and a perfectly harmless Kelly Clarkson track is revealed beneath. Proficient, note-perfect, but sanitized of the dirty grit it needs. Elsewhere, especially on 'Humane', there is a truly uncanny similarity to copycats. Evanescence, right down to the corporate goth-next-door aesthetic. Plastic fangs puncture the music and suck out all the sex, subversion and spontaneity, until little more than a slick, shiny skin is left.

But maybe to criticize them for this is to miss the point: like Hallowe'en, Lacuna Coil offer silly, spooky fun in a package that is unashamedly commercial.

Emily Gray

MOTÖRHEAD

The New Theatre

Lemmy Kilminster strides onstage at Oxford's premier non-smoking theatre, spits his fag butt into the monitors and announces that, "We are Motörhead and we play rock and fucking roll". And so they do.

But Motörhead, celebrating 30 years on the road and fronted by the iconic Lemmy – 60 years old on Christmas Eve – don't just play any old rock and fucking roll. They play the loudest, fastest, heaviest, most brain-crunching rock and fucking roll in the world; full throttle, no remorse. From classic oldie 'Love Me Like A Reptile' through to 'Killers' from Motörhead's latest album, 'Inferno', the pace rarely drops beneath breakneck, Lemmy crunching out heavy-duty chords on his bass while guitarist Philip Campbell creates a soundtrack to nuclear conflagration all on his own.

For an old man who barely moves on stage, Lemmy has astonishing charisma, tall, lean and with a face that could end wars. His humour is bone-dry and self-mocking but he's never become the kind of cartoon figure that Ozzy has. You wouldn't

mess with Lemmy. But anyway, here are more songs about drugs (or lack of), remorse (or lack of) and warfare. 'No Class' is 12-bar boogie taken to the Nth degree, 'Metropolis' a deceptively complex thunderous cacophony, while 'Sacrifice' ups the speed-metal ante even by Motörhead's incredible standards. And when the band finally do slow it down, on the acoustic 'Whorehouse Blues', Lemmy demonstrates that beyond all the excess, he's got a great, lived-in blues voice, akin to Muddy Waters.

'Iron Fist' climaxes the main set; the encores bring 'Ace Of Spades', the apex of heavy metal songwriting, and an extended, synapse-fusing finale of 'Overkill' and then it's just time for a quick, "We were Motörhead and we played rock and fucking roll". And when Lemmy Kilminster finally, inevitably, collapses and dies on stage, like the great warrior on his beloved battlefield, he'll have that carved on his gravestone. Quite simply, no-one plays it better than him, and probably never will.

Dale Kattack

THE HELLSET ORCHESTRA / BIG JOAN

The Cellar

A four piece band, two of whom are drummers? Call me unsubtle, but I like those percussive odds, and when one of them is playing an old metal bin we know we're in for some clattery goodness. Opening instrumental aside, Big Joan trade in the sort of brutal yet insidious simplicity McLusky used to deliver, with the vocals smeared greasily over the top in the beguiling style of a pitch-perfect Kim Gordon. A superb racket, by any other name. It would have been slightly better if they'd made more of the quieter sections, and much better if an angry little monster had popped out of the bin shouting "Hey, lady! Tryin to get some sleep over here!" but you can't have everything.

Ever noticed the similarity between an old Hammond and a child's coffin? Or between a black clad cellist and a melodramatic mourner? Watching The Hellset Orchestra's catalogue of camp horror tropes starts bringing these odd images to mind, as they crank

out their organ-led tales of malevolent science, mayhem and, erm, ornithology. Like a Hammer Horror film performed by metalheads on a Victorian pier end, the effect is patently ridiculous, but like our very own Suitable Case For Treatment they take farcical elements and weld them into imposing and somehow logical forms.

There's a certain intelligent economy in the way the grotesque ingredients are melded that stops the show falling into the flabby novelty camp – 'Temporary Stronghold of The Weather Thieves' has got to be *the* best song title of the year, surely – and if the string section were ever in tune we'd be nearing pop music territory. Well, alright, you'd have to excise the vocal growls and the free jazz sax too, but who'd want to? Anyone noticed the similarity between The Hellset Orchestra and a bloody great band? A Cellarful, roughly.

David Murphy

the port mahon

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KNIFEHANDCHOP / NERVOUS **TESTPILOT / THE NAILBOMB** **CULTS**

The Wheatsheaf

Tonight's Vacuous Pop night would be a good case study for a scholar of the current state of laptop electronica. Knifehandchop and The Nailbomb Cults are at opposing ends of the spectrum, with Nervous_testpilot slotting somewhere in between.

Birthday boy The Nailbomb Cults is a complete aural onslaught - a disjointed crash of noise, cut-ups, mangled samples, frenetic beats and breaks, and so on. It's not exactly commercial and an immediate comparison with Aphex Twin springs to mind. The apparently random nature of the set becomes more cohesive a few tracks in, but it's still hard to discern any sort of structure. However, the unpolished, harsh, edgy sounds make the overall performance more interesting than it could be if it were dominated by drum&bass breaks and relentless gabba.

By comparison, Knifehandchop is the epitome of smooth dance beats. Starting with dark hip hop rhythms and heavy vocal samples, he

journeys through hard house, rap and drum&bass towards gabba - and back again. It's a lot more coherent than TNC's stuff, but seems to suffer from being more like a DJ set than his recorded output; tonight, the emphasis is on the audience rather than the inventiveness and creation he only shows glimpses of. 'Hooked on Ebonics' stands out amongst the plethora of familiar samples.

Nervous_testpilot is tonight playing more from his recent game soundtrack EP 'Determinance' than his earlier stuff. He's not quite living up to his Venetian Snares- and Autechre-influenced billing; the newer stuff is trancey, but amongst the build-ups and sweeps there are still traces of his trademark breaks, cut-ups, glitches and jazzy melodies. 'Spacetime' and the older 'Raiders of the Lost Arp' demonstrate the development of his style, and in the process encroach into both The Nailbomb Cults and Knifehandchop territory.

Kirsten Etheridge

THE MASS / SUITABLE CASE FOR **TREATMENT / BULLET UNION**

The Wheatsheaf

It all starts out so well. Camden's Bullet Union flail out of the traps at a furious tempo. This is music you fight to; the kind of proto-punk to have on your iPod if you happen to be charging across no-man's land toward an enemy machine gun nest. It's Sonic Youth on fast-forward, the Youth Brigade kicking Idlewild's head in, and all coming out of double-stacked Marshall speakers.

It's these speakers belonging to The Mass which loom like the portals of Hell over the whole evening and eventually prove to be their undoing. This is because Suitable Case For Treatment are let loose with them beforehand, and believe me someone should have warned The Mass about SC4T. Much reviewed already in Nightshift, I'll just say this: normally they are incredible. Tonight they are fucking incredible. Singer Liam should be on the front cover of every rock magazine in the world before he explodes forever into tiny pieces. The utter pant-

filling silence that descended over the audience during his "You do not fear the darkness... but you will!" rant at the end of 'Dead Pigeon Teachers', simply reinforces why what follows with The Mass never has a chance of getting off the ground. Six thousand miles from home, touring what sounds like a pretty far-out grindcore/jazz album, 'Perfect Picture of Wisdom and Boldness', The Mass come over as dated and as clichéd as it's possible to be when simply playing like Neurosis or Carcass.

It doesn't help that the singer, Matt Young, is only a foot taller than a munchkin, with a scare factor of zilch.

His saving grace is a batch of impressive high-speed sax solos, but by this time two prolonged intervals for broken bass strings means the crowd had seen their opportunity to melt away into the night. Doom rock needs proper doom!

Paul Carrera



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CARDIACS

The Zodiac

Formed in London in 1977 when punk was killing off prog-rock, Cardiacs somehow managed to fuse both of these strains of music. They also added pinches of metal, folk, and classical, whilst also managing to retain a keen pop sensibility; and tonight, almost every step of their twisted thirty-year career is represented.

They open with the Wagnerian stomp of 'Home of Fadeless Splendour', and the tone is set for the evening. In terms of grandeur this is a pure master class. From the songwriting of frontman Tim Smith, through to the stage set, everything is geared towards the monolithic. If a few years ago their line up of seven seemed a little extravagant, then the fact that there are now nine of them could appear ludicrous. Instead, the addition of three backing vocalists, and two further percussionists add to the spectacle of the evening. Performance-wise, this is manic theatre at it's best, an almost unlikely pairing of pantomime and Sunday mass. There's the baiting of Jim Smith; the frequently put-upon bass player who has become a cult hero in Cardiacs circles, and the threat of 'sleepy time' from his brother Tim; who plays the childish, schizophrenic frontman role with obvious relish. As a soundtrack to this somewhat unsettling show, you could not ask for a more qualified band. There's the perverse pop punk of older songs like 'Tarred and Feathered' and 'To Go Off and Things', whilst the 'indie' hit 'Is This The Life' makes an appearance mid-set. But it's how Cardiacs close the show that really stuns. In quick succession they play 'Dirty Boy', 'The Everso Closely Guarded Line',



Photo by Sam Shepherd

and 'Stoneage Dinosaurs'. All three are evidence that Tim Smith is one of the most undervalued songwriters around today. Each one is an emotional journey mapped out in pop songs that possess an almost hymnal quality. 'Dirty Boy' in particular is an astonishing eight-minute example of noise and beauty that could make grown men weep. Quite how Cardiacs have remained a cult band for so long is a mystery; on this evidence they are one of the finest live bands you are ever likely to see.

Allin Pratt

LONG-VIEW

The Zodiac

Here's a mystery. Two years ago Long-View's set in the new bands tent at Reading Festival was nothing short of incendiary, such that many proclaimed it the highlight of what was admittedly an under-par weekend. Yet tonight they fail to fizz, never mind ignite. Still to release their second proper album, they continue to flog debut LP 'Mercury' to within an inch of its life, this being their seventh visit to The Zodiac. They benefit from a great two-pronged guitar sound and, unlike support act Fell City Girl, boast a singer with a distinctive,

engaging voice. A charitable description could be Athlete with more depth and slightly rougher edges; after all they do hail from Prestwich, home of The Fall. Yet the suspicion is that they were snapped up early in a major deal for all the wrong reasons. Specifically, they fit in perfectly with the modern trend for bands who create nothing more than a warm glow, like a shot of whisky on a cold night, welcome but entirely predictable. Their main attraction to the industry may be their songs being unlikely to motivate anyone to hop channels and a few, like flagship single 'Further', could fit well into a Hollywood soundtrack. But the incessant touring, along with the recent album of tired

remixes, further smacks of multi-market overkill.

So how did they get it so right at Reading? Well, we couldn't hear the moon-and-June lyrics for a start, and didn't have to put up with singer Rob McVey's endless paeans to 'the educational majesty of Oxford' between songs. Maybe it was that the material was still fresh and they caught a mood that simply belonged to the moment.

Either way they need to start pulling some rabbits out of hats to avoid becoming just another band that could have achieved greatness.

Art Lagun

MATT SAGE

The Zodiac

Until tonight I was a Catweazle Club virgin. At first I thought I had accidentally walked into a prayer meeting. Everyone sitting on the floor mostly crossed-legged with smiling faces gleaming up at the stage. Like one big happy family. And it is. Thanks to Matt Sage.

The hyper and loveable Steve Larkin from Inflatable Buddha is our compère for the night. Any rigidity on my part (ok I'm not used to sitting on the floor at the Zodiac) is soon washed away as he sets the scene for the Matt Sage Trio, with Colin Fletcher on upright bass and Jane Griffiths on violin. I admire Matt for going against the norm. The arrangements with voice, guitar and other instruments are lovely and both simple and complex. They change from sweetness one moment to big movie-scape songs the next. In 'Around the World' he's gets the audience to 'lalalala' (yes it is TOO a verb) throughout its entirety and it certainly wouldn't be out

of place playing through the rolling credits of the next James Bond movie. In 'Be There' he lovingly laments, "When you don't feel so pretty, that's when your beauty shines", with the grace and emotion of Jeff Buckley or Damien Rice. Ah yes, emotion. Matt has lots of emotion. Sometimes... maybe too much. He has an amazing and dynamic voice; his stagecraft and performance persona would have most local acts spitting with envy. But Matt's best when he forgets that actually there's an audience even there. When he plays it up he can fall into a Bob Dylan-esque pretence, over-annunciating his words. But when he forgets the melodrama, like in the heartfelt 'Lilia', he closes his eyes and in his own world he goes for glory. It's his best song tonight and leaves little doubt as to why this big happy family will all be sitting here rapturously next time.

Katy Jerome

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OSWIN CHIN BEHILIA

The Zodiac

Oswin Chin Who? I hear you say. Well that's sort of the point of tonight's show. The Big Village Organisation, tonight's promoters, are a group seeking to increase world music awareness in Oxfordshire by putting on a series of gigs featuring different artists from the world over.

Which brings us to Behilia, a Latin-jazz guitarist from the Dutch Antilles, backed tonight by a five-piece band. Tonight's atmosphere is certainly very different to most gigs you would see at the Zodiac, sparsely populated, enough so for tables and chairs.

Even when Behilia and his band take the stage, the place is decidedly thin on the ground. But regardless of this they spring into a set of mostly upbeat Latin jazz numbers. The sound they produce is fantastic: nylon strings, backed by lush, exotic percussion and soaked in sunshine harmonies. From this writer's admittedly scant knowledge of both Behilia and his hybrid of the Spanish and Portuguese languages, it seems tonight's set mainly

comprises of standards from both the Latin and trad jazz fields, with a few original numbers from Behilia's studio albums.

The vibe is extremely laid-back and Behilia and other band members follow the sheet music for some numbers, while the band at times glance nervously to each other as the song's end approaches; any slight mistakes there are smoothed over by easy-going, shrugged smiles.

This lack of polish gives proceedings the air of jam session, rather than performance, but this, combined with Behilia's between-song broken English, just seems to make things feel both more endearing and more authentic. The vibe is extremely infectious and while the band face a tough job of getting a seated and early doors crowd up to dance, their closing number is a triumph, the what-is-there-to-lose-in-having-fun? aura making the seats superfluous, and for a moment, a little window to the Caribbean is opened at the Zodiac.

Patrick Casey

INSTABILE ORCHESTRA

Wesley Memorial Church

Tonight is an event as much as a concert. The enthusiasm and experimentation of Instabile creates a delicious atmosphere of risk and uncertainty.

The seventeen players from all over Italy have strong individual musical personalities. They mix solo and collective freeform improv, bebop, modern European art music influences like Berio, Mediterranean funeral marching band, sublime ensemble playing, a rock sensibility and just having an exuberant collective thrash, often many styles in the same number.

Sometimes the whole thing threatens to go over the edge but it never does. They echo the absurd humour of 'musica futurista' with shouts of exultation and pain, and their cooing and mewling response to their cello player puncturing their raucous encore with a sweet version of the Beatles' 'Norwegian Wood'. Not your usual jazz big band then, and so unlike the cool sounds of northern European art music and jazz. Many of Instabile's players are also its composers. Their different styles of leading them through their own pieces, from being out front

throughout to pondering at the side, coming on to signal a change and retreating, are immense fun to watch.

For the first half of the show Instabile's collaboration with Leeds' own iconoclast Mathew Bourne on children's toy instruments and ukelele is a sort of novelty addition to the marching band groove of the opener. Bourne conducts his own specially commissioned thirty-minute abstract piece like a demented mechanical toy, jerky arms holding aloft placards emblazoned with "riff" and "solo". Instabile cope magnificently. The second half shows off Instabile's terrific individual and collective musicianship even more. There are delicate lyrical passages to evoke "A raft driven forward by the wind", a strange and exuberant reworking of 'St James Infirmary', and a life affirming blast of a Thomas Mafumo anthem, a homage to the protester killed at the Genoa G8 summit. So, yet again it's a big thank you to Oxford Contemporary Music who bring such magnificent players to town to stretch our musical boundaries.

Colin May

PARALLAX BEAT BROTHERS

Jacqueline Du Pre Music Building

There's nothing more dangerous than a man with an idea, and Scanner (aka Robin Rimbaud, one of tonight's eponymous brothers, along with percussionist Pete Lockett) is nothing if not brimming with ideas. Trouble is, these ideas are often better than their execution. Case in point – the theory of performing 40 simultaneous live sets using a set of impersonators is a great one, but the cold reality is one of 40 balding men playing mediocre techno all at the same time.

Similarly, there's something about tonight's performance – billed as fusing together acoustic and electronic beats – that doesn't quite gel. With both men on opposite sides of the stage hunched over their respective hardware, scarcely glancing at one another, there's little sense of synergy between the two elements for much of the set. Too often, the backbone is provided by a predictable mid-tempo beat pattern from Scanner (of the kind that's characterised his more recent uptempo work), over

which Pete Lockett has enough room to play along, but not the space to expand the groove and take it beyond its constituent parts.

There are some mesmerising highs when things do come together, however, heightening the sense of missed opportunity. When Scanner's electronics are at their most minimal, providing a circular rhythm or a fulgent drone as an anchor, his contributions are more lush :zoviet*france: or Avrocar dreaminess than plodding Ochre Records-style tedium. Without a rhythmic frame to adhere to, the assorted tablas, frame drums and percussive miscellanea are free to explore and add depth to the piece as a whole, rather than simply augmenting the leitmotif provided by the electronic backing. Moments like this offer up both consonance and the thrill of genuine collaboration we've been waiting for: at its core, there was something exciting going on here, but it wasn't half hard work finding it.

Stuart Fowkes

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ZUPOB

The Spin, The Wheatsheaf

Zubop's music is very much like their name. They combine exuberant, highly danceable global rhythms with jazz improvisation. World rhythms are not a superficial gimmick with them; they have paid their dues but perhaps because all bar one number tonight is composed by them, the band's sound is their own. Flute and alto player Ricky Edwards' Brazilian style, 'Life is Magic', with the refrain "Celebrate, celebrate", very much sums up the gig.

The turnout is respectable even though Courtney Pine is in town tonight. Zubop is not the usual Spin Club menu of a strong resident rhythm section plus guest, playing established jazz numbers. There is a some resistance but the audience is won over by the second half and there is even the rare sight of some dancing at the Spin, for which congratulations to both band and dancers. The band's front three is versatile. They go from the pleasing

brassy, clean, punchy sound of two saxes and trumpet or valve trombone on the South African and ska-influenced numbers, to atmospheric playing of clarinet, flute and valve trombone for their samba, cumbia, North African and klezmer-influenced compositions. When the solid rhythm section features, they sometimes add maracas, some particularly fine triangle riffs and the beating of a strange yellow phallic object akin to an anorexic beehive. "Very interesting", as my therapist would say.

Will Embliss on trumpet and valve trombone is the night's star. He is the one player constantly stretching the envelope when he solos, particularly on his valve trombone. Throughout Zubop are fresh and lively even though they have been gigging together over a decade. On this showing long may they continue entertaining with their Zubop music.

Colin May

CREEPSHOW 2 featuring HEXSTATIC

The Zodiac

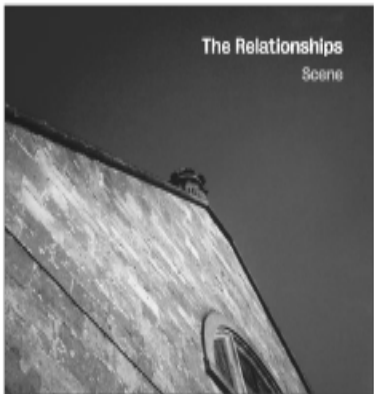
Creepshow 2 marks the long-awaited return of Peepshow to Oxford's clubbing calendar. Now firmly established as the city's most ambitious and innovative club night, organizers Paddy, Alan, Rob and Ron are passionate about showcasing cutting-edge music and visuals, with tonight's headliners the perfect case in point. Of course, in the wrong hands such dalliances into the clubbing counter-culture (we arrive, at midnight on a Friday to a live re-scoring of Stephen King's *The Shining*) could result in a short-lived exercise in low turnouts and stroked goatees. Peepshow has been packing in punters (having outgrown the backroom of The Bullingdon) for two years. It does this because the promoters know how to

throw an incredible party.

So having reminded ourselves that we're in The Zodiac (virtually unrecognisable with live projections being beamed onto umpteen screens and glowing pumpkins galore) and berated ourselves for being almost the only people not in fancy dress, we're presented with Digital's pacey laptop accompaniments to the scary bit, the "Here's Johnny" bit and the "oh feck he's running through the maze and he's going to kill them with a feckin' axe" scenes from Stanley Kubrick's chiller. Genuinely gripping, and all from the hands of a bloke dressed like one of those nutters out of *A Clockwork Orange*. Class.

Between that and some frankly devilish tunes from Alan M there's an overwhelming sense of anticipation as Robin and Stuart Hexstatic enter to the theme from Creepshow 2. It's a testament to Peepshow's glowing national reputation that the Ninja Tune pair have prepared an exclusive Halloween-themed set for this evening, mashing and melding the brash ('Smack My Bitch Up' makes an early appearance) with the frankly gash (Sir Cliff gets cut up till he's chanting "Hexstatic" and his face disintegrates before our very eyes), before Rick James gets jiggy with fellow freaks Missy and Chic over a bonkers audiovisual bootleg-athon. Enormously hi-tech, it's also silly enough to keep us grinning from ear to ear, and achingly brilliant tunes like their two-step reinterpretation of 'These Boots Were Made For Walking' ensure that no-ones boots are going anywhere before 4am.

Aidan Larkin



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DEMOS

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DEMO OF THE MONTH

SLEEPYHOUSE

Bands with names like Sleepyhouse are usually rubbish. But for once the name is appropriate, given the music's hushed, almost ghostly feel. Taking their cue from both 60s acid-folk and contemporary alt.country, Sleepyhouse's sound is pretty traditional, but within their limits they create a gothic atmosphere, the songs dominated by a dark, scraping violin and the singer's fragile, almost jazzy vocals. 'Skank Report' immediately provokes a rush of reference points, from The Coral and Devendra Banhart to Canned Heat and 80s nu-folksters The Horseflies. 'My Name' recreates the twilight ambience, again the violin holding the mood while the guitarist and drummer try to edge the song into traditional rock territory. And maybe that's Sleepyhouse' only real fault, seemingly unwilling to play to their strengths and let the gothic mood infect every facet of each song. It's not exactly groundbreaking stuff, but it's sporadically intriguing stuff that coolly distances itself from any prevailing musical trends.

THE IDEA

The idea is the solo project from a fella called Mitch Salisbury whose accompanying photo montage suggests he's Victor Lewis-Smith simpleton twin brother. Mitch used to be in a band called Tribe of Dan who apparently supported The Alarm and Ned's Atomic Dustbin as well as Cliff Richard, although we don't know how seriously to take that last claim. Mitch's main claim to fame, however, is apparently upsetting Metallica's Lars Ulrich at a party once, although that's a bit like shooting fish in a barrel if 'Some Kind Of Monster' is anything to go by. Anyway, after an opening harpsichord-led jingle we're into plinkety-plonk lo-fi pop territory, Mitch sounding not unlike obscure US eccentric Flour on 'Nice Girls Don't Like Boys Like Me', although it's all a bit too camp for its own good and suggests there may be more biological reasons why he's incompatible with the ladies. 'Time' is more sullen, which goes against the grain of the rest of the demo, while a fourth, untitled, song sounds like an old 1960s folk band covering Peter Gabriel's 'Solsbury Hill' ten years before it was written. Which is perhaps an achievement in itself.

MOUNTED INSANITY CANNON

We know we've reviewed this lot before – it's not the sort of band name you forget easily, but memory fails us on their past record except that one half of Mounted Insanity Cannon used to be in local nu-metal trysers Centre Negative. This demo is described as a min-album and boasts eight tracks but given it clocks in at a mere five minutes, mini is the key word there. Still, MIC manage to stuff plenty of action into that brief timespan, kicking off with a flurry of apocalyptic sci-fi dialogue before a motorbike synth revs up and we head off into digital hardcore territory with accompanying hysterical screaming, a spot of random channel hopping, some scat jazz by way of Tom Waits and then back into metal territory. Along the way there's a track titled 'Autons Attack', which pleases the resident Dr Who fans no end. It's all a bit of a clamour and these mash-up things can be ten-a-penny, but while it lasts it keeps you on your toes.

LINER

The question every band should ask themselves before they even play a note is, "is there really any need for us to exist?". If they were true to themselves, Liner would have packed up and buggered off down the pub immediately, stopping only to flog their instruments to the local second hand shop. They're the encapsulation of the idea of that competence is an adequate substitute for inspiration. Sure they're musically adept and the singer makes a reasonable if unsuccessful attempt at emulating Joe Strummer's vocal spit, but it's so crushingly generic and utterly lacking in any character of its own that the whole thing makes us cry like lost kittens just thinking about it. Here's a bit of Clash-lite; there's a spot of early-80s indie revivalism. At its best it sounds like the least interesting bits of XTC hacked out by a soulless, jobbing pub-rock band. Liner are the musical equivalent of a middle-aged bloke in a grey M&S anorak – you could walk past them a dozen times in a day and never recall seeing them.

SOKYO

Another solo project, this time from a chap called Danny Chigley who isn't sure whether he wants to be in a West Coast psychedelic pop band or an early-90s electro noise outfit. So he opts for both. At the same time. Which should be a

fascinating soundclash but ends up as a pretty incongruous mess. First track 'Outside' is a good start, if overlong, the heavy bass synths trying to flatten the airy Stone Roses-styled flight of fancy, but as the song overstays its welcome you start to think that maybe all that electronic assault and battery was added at the last minute to try and make a rather boring song a bit more interesting. 'Sweet Chilli Sauce' is more consistent, flitting between Eels-style lo-fi whimsy and Donovan's folkier, er, whimsy, but soon the collision between traditional acoustic instrumentation and song structures and the electronics becomes formulaic. It's clever enough at times and suggests better things might emerge in the future, but for now Sokyo needs to unravel the threads he's tangled himself up in.

LE EMU TAVERN

Our hearts beat that little bit faster every time we get a demo from former-Holy Roman Empire frontman Ste Fleming. Because the guy is a genius in turning shit into pop gold. This time round he's joined by one-time Candyskins drummer John Halliday as well as local internet loon Clarence Pistoldinner. 'In The Garden Of Destroyed Universes' is a rock opera in comparison to Holy Roman Empire, what with its Snowy White-style guitar solos and all, and bears a vague resemblance to Pure Reason Revolution in its almost spiritual reach. The scientific theme continues with 'A Cow's Tale', which deals with the very birth of Planet Earth itself and suggests some kind of obsession with cosmology. Best of the lot here though, is 'When Other Kids Stamp On Your Glasses', with its immortal lines, "When other kids stamp on your glasses / It is they who are blind", which is a commentary on geekdom that even Morrissey couldn't equal. As we've come to expect from anything involving young Ste, Le Emu Tavern are very slightly silly. But beyond that, there is a strange kind of genius at work.

THE VALE

This is a bit confusing since we in the Oxford post-rock clique have a tendency to refer to Sunnyvale Noise Sub-Element simply as The Vale in our overly-casual, aren't-we-cool fashion (before laughing and sneering at common people who like proper songs with tunes and stuff). But no, this Vale, from Wantage, have no truck with punishing techno beats and sheet-metal guitar noise. Instead they describe themselves as an indie-folk band and sound like a cross between Bert Jansch and Tracy Chapman, with the odd spot of Spanish swing added in for variety. Not bad, although we spend the entire demo trying to figure out who the singer reminds us of –

he's got a slightly strangulated, quavering, understated shriek of a voice and it's the absolute spit of someone we can't for the life of us put a name to. None of which helps you, the reader, any, and it's driving us completely round the bend. There's a large bar of chocolate for the first person who can put us out of our misery. Answers on a postcard to the usual address.

THE FRUSTRATIONS

The Frustrations are a local ska band, but they're extremely keen to stress they're not a ska-punk band. Which is good news. We've had quite our fill of third-rate Rancid tributes over the years. Instead The Frustrations, who we take to be pretty young although we have absolutely no evidence to support this idea, take their cue straight from The Specials, whose 'Little Bitch' they cover here. The three tracks here have got a bit of lightweight bounce about them; they're a bit clumsy at times, and covering The Specials is always going to be a hard job, but simplistic as they are they're enthusiastic enough to win you over. The vocalist, meanwhile makes a decent enough stab at emulating Terry Hall's deadpan delivery. Best news of all? Neville Staples is coming to the Bullingdon this month. Legend.

THE DEMO DUMPER

SPARE HALF HOUR

This student band have called themselves Spare Half Hour and titled their demo 'Scraping The Barrel'. Perhaps they should simply have sent us a letter asking us to kick their teeth down their throats and spared us the trawl through fifteen minutes of life-wasting bollocks. 'Habitual Junkie', apart from being a tautology, is the sort of rumbling, grumbling, bass-heavy indie thrash that could have graced the preliminary heats of any student band competition of the past 25 years, while the knowingly-titled 'Anodyne' throws everything into the scrap to climb the slippery slope to that plateau signposted 'Anthemic' but inevitably falls back on its sorry arse with all the dignity of a vomit-flecked tramp. Two more tracks left to go, how can Spare Half Hour save themselves? Well, why not try the obligatory funk excursion? Hey, lads, can you hear that clanking noise beneath your execrable dirge? That's the Nightshift Musical Decency Retribution Squad fetching their claw hammers and dental drills out of the shed. We've just realised we've got a spare half hour before tea and we're going to use it to teach you a lesson you'll never forget.

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