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NIGHTSHIFT

Oxford's Music Magazine

Free every
month.
Issue 133
August
2006



The Half Rabbits

Welcome to the dark side - interview inside

plus

TRUCK FESTIVAL

Four-page review inside

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NEWS

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THIS YEAR'S WITTSTOCK

FESTIVAL takes place over the weekend of 18th – 20th August. The three-day festival is free and features a wide selection of local bands and singers and aims to raise money for Motor Neurone Disease research through donations and sales of programmes and raffle tickets. Headline act on the Friday night are hardcore punk wackos Barry & The Beachcombers; Saturday's main acts include Mary's Garden, Junkie Brush, Phyal, Smilex and Twizz Twangle, while on Sunday Suitable Case For Treatment top the bill, joined by Lagrima, Mark Bosley, The New Moon and more. Full line-up and details are online at www.wittstock.co.uk. You can book camping places by calling Phil on 01865 739369.

THE CITY TAVERN in Market Street has now changed its name to The Market Tavern with the upstairs venue now known as The Music Market. The venue continues to showcase new local and out of town bands. Send demos to Charis at the pub or call her on 01865 248388.

CLINIC have been confirmed as headliners of this year's Audioscope. The annual mini-festival takes place at the Zodiac on Saturday 28th October. Joining Clinic will be Magnetophone, Sonic Boom, I'm Being Good, Kids In Tracksuits and Sunnyvale Noise Sub-Element, plus more acts to be announced. Audioscope raises money for homeless charity Shelter. Tickets for this year's event will go on sale as soon as the rest of the acts are announced.

DIRTY EARTH BAND's gig at the New Theatre has been expanded to include the venue's circle and balcony due to high demand for tickets. The popular local rock covers band play at Oxford's biggest live music venue on Sunday 3rd September along with The Corsairs and Warm Baby. The gig is in aid of local young people's charities Chox and Base 33. Tickets are on sale now, priced £10 (£8 concessions) from www.getlive.co.uk/oxford or on 0870 607 7484.



The Divine Comedy play at Brookes University on Monday 30th October as part of a UK tour to promote new album 'Victory For The Comic Muse'. Neil Hannon will be backed by a seven-piece band. Tickets are on sale now, priced £17.50 from the box office (01865 484750). The Automatic appear at Brookes on Thursday 26th after selling out the Zodiac last month.

THIS TOWN NEEDS GUNS release their debut single, 'Hippy Jam Fest' on Big Scary Monsters Records in September. The 7" single comes with a free CD of the single for them what haven't got record players. An unmastered version of the single is available to hear at www.myspace.com/thistownneedsguns.

THE EXETER HALL in Cowley is now closed for a major refurbishment until the end of September. The popular local venue is due to have an extension built as well as a new stage, bar and better soundproofed windows which will allow it to become an even better home to live music.

YOUR SONG takes place on Saturday 19th August at the Zodiac. The legendary annual party, now in its 16th year features local luminaries playing merry hell with classic and not-so classic covers in aid of promoter Mac's birthday. This year's line-up features Beelzebobo, Witches, Sow, The Delta Frequency, Ally Craig, Borderville, The Hero Story and Baby Gravy, with all the makings of a classic night.

WE CURRENTLY HAVE a three-month backlog of demos for review. If you've sent a demo in in the past couple of months, it's probably in the pile waiting for the butcher's knife. If you are worried about the whereabouts of your demo or any of your relatives call our special freephone helpline. No but really, sorry, there just ain't been the space, innit?

DR SHOTOVER

A Cornball In Cornwall

I say, did you see Shack at the Zodiac the other month? Much West Coast 60s melodicism and top-quality harmony vocals... so inspired was I by their song 'Cornish Town' that I found myself heading to the (South) West Coast for my last golfing holiday... a splendid little place in the Duchy of Cornwall called (I kid you not) Rock. Apparently it's twinned with a small French town called Role... but I digress. I played a hole or two, then, having pushed some Young People over a cliff for wearing offensive wetsuits, I settled in at the club bar and regaled the locals with a few choice stories about my Burma days. What with the gin and the sunstroke we were all soon fast asleep... A timely prod from the steward's favourite Mashie Niblick awakened me, just in time for a round of chotah



The Duchy of (Hugh) Cornwall

pegs from the Club Secretary, a decent fellow called Tregadillick, and the evening began in earnest. I soon discovered that getting sense out of a drunken Cornishman is like attempting to buy a cocktail in Chittagong during Ramadan... it was not long before we were joyriding a golf buggy around Polzeath beach whilst singing 'Peaches' by The Stranglers, pursued by some rather comely life-guardettes. Ah, the joys of the traditional British summer holiday...

Next month: Newquay Brown

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A Quiet Word With

The Half Rabbits

THERE USED TO BE AN OLD adage that if you wanted to know whether a band were goths or not you simply asked them and if they denied it they *were* goths. It had all the logic and justice of a medieval ducking stool but it did highlight the apparent stigma attached to being practitioners of music's darker arts. Here's what Half Rabbits had to say when we put the question to them:

Michael: "To say you're a goth band would mean we start with a musical (and physical) template that you have to conform to. We just play whatever music we like - the only rule we have is that we try to make each song better than the last."

Chris: "If I'm absolutely honest I personally don't think we sound gothic at all: the guitars can be pretty heavy at times and Michael's voice is often compared to Jim Morrison but does that make us gothic? In contrast I think many of our songs are quite uplifting in parts. I wouldn't be necessarily uncomfortable with the label, if I felt it was true."

Sally: "We are not a 'gothic band' in the way that the term is generally applied to the music scene, but there are certainly elements of the gothic in our sound."

Hmm, sounds like denial. Goths!

OKAY SO THE HALF RABBITS

aren't goths. Really, they aren't. But there is a darkness about their music that recalls the early-80s sound of bands like The Chameleons and Bauhaus, coupled with the brooding intensity of 70s Bowie. Live the band are a high-wired, uptight storm of noise that comes from the less celebrated side of new wave and post-punk; not for them speed-addled funk and chopped-up guitar lines. The Half

Rabbits are shrouded in dense layers of guitar and bass but exude an almost psychedelic exuberance of the kind early goth bands never got the credit for.

THE HALF RABBITS WERE

formed in 2002 by school friends Michael Weatherburn (guitar and vocals), Alice Watanabe (bass) and Chris Rant (guitar), with drummer Sally Pelling joining them at the end of that year. The band's name came from Chris hazily remembering finding half a rabbit in a field as a youngster. Having made a bit of a name for themselves on the Oxford music scene over the last couple of years, gigging regularly both locally and around the UK, including support slots to Editors, We Are Scientists and House Of Love. The Half Rabbits release a new EP this month, 'Tiny Knives For Tiny Minds', a three-track CD featuring live favourites 'These Rumours', 'Someone's Coming' and 'Playing With Fireworks'. The band have previously featured on two 'Public Service Broadcast' compilation albums, the regular new talent collections put together by Irish rockers Jetplane Landing. Along the way they've been played on Radio 1 and hailed by Rolling Stone magazine as a band to watch out for.

NIGHTSHIFT TALKED TO

The Half Rabbits as they prepared to launch 'Tiny Knives...' with a typically ferocious gig at The Cellar. The new EP is more clean cut than the band's live sound, Michael's Bowie-meets-Fad Gadget snarl dominating proceedings as guitars cut turbulent shapes beneath. Situated far beyond the dominant rock domains

Half of The Half Rabbits. That'll be a quarter rabbit, then. Possibly the ears and front paws.



of punk-funk and emo, it can sound like a record out of time.

Michael: "I'm really proud of it - it's probably my favourite three songs that we play live at the moment. The main difference between this record and the last one is that a lot more people know the band now and so there was a degree of expectation that's not been there before. We were aware of it during the recording process and we're still aware of it now."

Chris: "I've yet to get hold of a copy but I hear good things! In all seriousness I feel they are three strong songs that stand out and even though I've played them many times I always look forward to belting them out live. The production is different from previous recordings and it's always refreshing to hear a different interpretation of your music."

Sally: "It is more coherent, immediate and forceful than anything we've done before. The straightforward production style has allowed us to convey the character and feel of the music more directly. The band has developed a chemistry that allows us to produce more tension, depth, and intensity than ever before."

A while ago Rollingstone.com said great things should be expected from you; how did you feel about that and how close are you to fulfilling their prediction?

Michael: "It was of course amazing for them to say something like that. I'd like to think that the band is always getting better and better - this way we may become 'great' one day. We're constantly assessing and reassessing our own music to try and achieve this, which I think is very important."

Alice: "We are not a band to take a

rest. We aim to progress with what we are doing and I think that is reflected in the results that we achieve. We are always working on new material. There is very little that we played a year ago that we play now."

Being included on two of the 'Public Service Broadcast' series must have helped the band's profile.

Michael: "Smalltown America (Jetplane Landing's record label) must have heard some good things about us because they got in touch to ask if they could use a song on their new compilation and of course we jumped at the chance. When our next record came out, they got back in touch and asked to use another. The label has a really great 'we keep the bands in charge of their own music' attitude, which you don't get often."

NEW WAVE-INSPIRED MUSIC seems to predominate at the moment. The Half Rabbits seem to be inspired by music from that post-punk period but by completely different bands to those normally name-checked. Where do they draw their main inspiration from and where would they see themselves fitting, or not fitting, in with today's music scene?

Chris: "One of the hardest questions I've ever been asked is 'what kind of music do you play?' All our tastes differ - some more than others - but those different tastes and styles are, I guess, what defines our music. I think we're somewhere between fitting and not fitting in (if that's possible) which is a good place to be. We haven't sold our souls to be famous and yet I don't feel our music alienates anyone either. For instance I've



The other half of The Half Rabbits: whiskers and bobtail.

seen people who I really wouldn't have thought would be into us turn into some of our most hardcore fans."

Alice: "We are not a band who set out to join in with a particular scene or draw very direct influences from a specific handful of bands. Our sound comes from an ethos that coincidentally other bands may share."

Sally: "On a surface level there are similarities in style. However, we are trying to create a more layered and diverse sound, which is reflected in the range of musicians that inspire us."

Michael: "It's weird – personally, I'd never even heard of bands like Bauhaus and the Psychedelic Furs until people started to mention the names to us. Even when I eventually did listen to them I still didn't see it. As for whether we fit in or not, we think about this a lot less than a lot of other bands seem to. If we fit in, that's great, if not, we're still exactly the same band. I reckon that people like to pigeonhole bands as then it saves having to think about it. That's the last thing we want to do!"

In tune with the music, which inclines towards the darker side of things, Michael's lyrics reflect a frustration with life. Michael, describes them as nihilistic. What are life's great frustrations?

Michael: "I normally use my lyrics as a frustration vent if anything's winding me up at the time, which explains why the songs are often pretty dark and intense. That said, there's definitely an element of exaggeration – you could say that even putting lyrics to music involves an element of fantasy. If it wasn't for the fact that I like to play music, I could just write my thoughts on pieces of paper and hand them out to people as they walk past."

THE HALF RABBITS'

growing local fanbase includes a large number of fellow musicians and they always seem to be namechecked by other Oxford bands. This is very often a good indicator of a band's ability and potential. It is also reflective of Oxford's tight-knit music community and The Half Rabbits' standing as a band who like a good party. Indeed their drinking exploits are well known.

Michael: "When we gig in other cities we always like to ask people at the gig about what local scene's like there. Normally the answer is that there's about one gig a fortnight and only three decent bands that don't just play covers. I can (and do) go to about three gigs a week here – and there's always

more I'd like to go to."

Alice: "I really appreciate how many great bands I get to see because there are promoters who will put them on, venues to see them in and other like-minded gig goers in the audience!"

Sally: "Oxford is a fantastic place to play and listen to new music. Competition amongst many musicians creates a standard of quality that means that great music can be had locally any night of the week, and the willingness of local promoters to give new bands a chance means that there is choice and variety in the music scene. The music scene has treated us pretty fairly, and criticism has helped us to improve and develop."

Who is the biggest party animal in The Half Rabbits?

Sally: "Chris can drink the most whisky without falling over."

Michael: "I think we'd all like to say we're the biggest party animal in the band, but we've all got pretty stiff competition. If it were up to me to choose the people to invite to our party, I'd get all the bands we've ever played with, then make them all play our album as one massive band."

Chris: "I used to be the last one to leave a party but I'm a couple of years older now so just get me my pipe and slippers and while your up if you could just stoke the fire a bit for me, ta. Nah, I still enjoy a good drink and as far as the others go, they're always up and about somewhere, gets a bit hard to keep track of them to be honest."

SO, IT'S THE HEIGHT OF

summer. Oxford basks in a heatwave, but The Half Rabbits are here to remind us that Autumn is only around the next corner. The new EP is a good chance to shelter in their musical shadow. But before we do that, it's time for a trite, predictable question. One that is already making them regret their choice of band name and will doubtless haunt them for many seasons to come. Was it the front or back half of a rabbit you were named after?

Michael: "A guy with a strange look in his eyes asked me that when we played in Bristol the other day. I'll tell you the same thing I told him – the important thing is not which half, but who or what would want half a rabbit for something..."

'Tiny Knives For Tiny Minds' is out now on Punk Elvis Records. The Half Rabbits play The Zodiac on Saturday 30th September. Check out www.halfrabbits.co.uk for more news and gig dates.



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THE YOUNG KNIVES

'Voices Of Animals And Men'

(Transgressive)

We've been banging on about the genius of The Young Knives for so long now it seems almost unreal that this album is going to launch them into a whole new sphere of fame and influence. Genius: there, we said it. It's such an overused word, particularly in music journalism, that it hardly registers any longer, but listen to 'The Decision' or 'Here Comes The Rumour Mill' or 'Loughborough Suicide' and the wide-angled pop brilliance with its incredible attention to detail hits you like a highly-sprung fly-swat every time. You could take someone's eye out with some of the stuff on 'Voices Of Animals And Men'.

Drawing on post-punk's wilfulness as much as its sounds, The Young Knives have created a sugar and sandpaper-coated rough diamond of an album. The primary colours are well



documented: Wire, Sparks, Pere Ubu, but there are more unexpected shadows lurking; Henry and House's almost sloganeering shouty harmonies on album opener 'Part Timer' could be Chumbawamba on a bit of a bender, while 'Tailors', with its *Bagpuss*-like spookiness drifts into 60s acid folk territory. And then there are those barely-suppressed jazz tendencies; 'Half Timer' is little more than a

commercial break from the main programme but the Steely Dan-style shuffle can't be overlooked.

But then The Young Knives are so much more than the sum of their myriad influences.

Magnificently over the top and armed with maddeningly obtuse lyrics, they make pure pop songs that are wrenched out of shape by a glancing blow from the passing crazy bus, melodies taking unnatural detours, but the best songs so simple they can withstand any meddling and remain cannon fodder for tartrazine-fuelled children at school discos the land over. Much of 'Voices...' will be familiar to local fans; also included here are demented meet-the-parents pop grenade 'She's Attracted To' as well as 'Weekends and Bleak Days', 'Coastgard' and 'Trembling Of Trails' from last year's EP, but there are enough new songs to stir the loins, while 'Loughborough Suicide' is worth the admission price alone.

So there we go: Oxford's brightest stars belong to the world now. No chance of them not spreading their wings and flying. There's not a cage could contain them.

Dale Kattack

ROBYN BRADY-

HALLIGAN

'The Rite'

(Own Label)

The idea of having to review an album by a local 14-year-old girl would normally fill us with dread. Especially when the lead track was apparently "inspired by the London bombings". But, almost miraculously, Robyn Brady-Halligan's debut offering is nothing like the twee, cliché-ridden product of pushy parents' rampaging egos we might, cynically, have expected.



The fact that Robyn wrote most of these songs when she was only 13 is achievement enough. That she sang and played nearly all the instruments too suggests a real talent on the rise. For starters Robyn has a pretty stunning voice: a soft, high-pitched coo with a very slight warble that's like a very young KT Tunstall crossed with a very, very young Dolly Parton. Lyrically tracks like 'The Bombs' are naïve but no more so than the trite political statements made by pop stars twice her age. But while it's this number that will attract the attention of the likes of Fox FM, it's sweeter songs like 'Middle Class Cliché' that stand out, Robyn's breathy vocals soft as feathers over an innocuous soft-rock backing. The jazzier 'The Rite' sounds like her attempt to "do a Joss Stone". Elsewhere she touches on the lighter side of celtic folk and Nashville country, though it's the supposed joke track, '0800 Bacon Rind' that really stands out.

Musically 'The Rite' plays it pretty safe, though when you think there's about twenty million folks out there would trample on each other's spines to grab the last copy off Woolworth's racks given a decent advertising campaign, why not?

We'd love to hear Robyn team up with a more adventurous songwriter and bring out some of the darkness that makes the best jazz and folk music so great. But for now, this is a genuinely unexpected treat.

Sue Foreman

THE FAMILY

MACHINE

'Flowers By The Roadside'

(Beard Museum)

"Don't leave me flowers by the roadside / It's not the place I loved, it's just the place I died". Well there's a cheery singalong for the summer. And it gets worse: "I could not answer the phone when you rang / I was dead by the roadside".

Top stuff, and all banged out with a cheery country twang, a few whistles and an exuberance that makes Supergrass sound like The Cure on a wet Tuesday night in Grimsby. Family Machine frontman Jamie Hyatt is a master of dry, hangdog songwriting; there's an apparently unselfconscious cheesiness about everything The Family Machine do, whether it's the mindlessly merry and morbid 'Lethal Drugs Cocktail' – also included on this new EP – their equally daft World Cup anthem or the title track's ode to roadside tributes, that it's too easy to dismiss the band as a bit of a novelty outfit, but 'Flowers By The Roadside', a sort of cross between Paul Evans' 'Hello This Is Joanie' and Monty Python's 'Always Look On The Bright Side Of Life' marks them out as the cheeriest country rocking goths in town.

Dale Kattack

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WINNEBAGO DEAL

'Flight Of The Raven'

(Fierce Panda)

The subtitle of 'Flight Of The Raven' is 'When He Flies, Someone Dies'. Pretty neat really when you consider that when Winnebago Deal take flight, stuff gets broken: limbs, heads, musical subtleties, that sort of thing.

And so we reach Winnebago Deal's third album. They neatly side-step the "difficult" bit by simply kicking it out exactly as they have done on their previous two. Here is rock and roll played fast and loud and dealing with fighting, drinking, going mad and poisonous spiders. These guys hang out with Nick Oliveri for chrissakes, what do you expect? Asking Winnebago Deal to do things any other way is like asking a lion to stop ripping antelopes apart. It ain't gonna happen, and nor would we want it to.

Winnebago Deal's deathwish grunge-metal (hey, remember when grunge was a nasty old beast and hadn't started feeling sorry for itself or moping about girls and stuff?) sticks to a simple formula, and with only two band members (Ben Perrier on guitar and vocals and Ben Thomas on drums and – gasp! – piano for one track) there's perhaps less room for variety than more expansive bands would have but sticking to a well-worn path never did The Ramones any harm. Anyway, Winnebago Deal's path is a dust-encrusted road that leads to hell



with plenty of whisky bar stop-offs along the way.

From the Stooges-flecked piledrive of 'Reeper' and the bloody blues-metal of 'Czechoslovakia', through to the stoner thrash of the album's title track, 'Flight Of The Raven' keeps adrenaline levels high, neat bourbon on the menu and navel-gazing only visible through the sights of a rifle. The album's real stand-out track is the more considered 'Venomised', Ben P's lava-gargling growl coupled to the molten guitar sludge in a style reminiscent of the mighty Killdozer.

Is anyone seriously suggesting any of these things need *changing*? Like The Ramones, like Motörhead, like Iggy, Winnebago Deal just keep charging on the only way they know how. Charge your glasses.

Dale Kattack

FULL ON EMPTY

'Pride'

(Trojan Horse)

Master of mirth Umair Chaudhry returns with another bleak excavation of musical darkness with his Full On Empty project. Umair, a regular feature in the Nightshift demo pages under various guises as well as a pivotal member of hardcore monsters Xmas Lights, likes to look on the bleak side of life and this creeping ambient-industrial dirge soundtracks that outlook well. 'Pride' is choc full of primitive electronic beats, spectral choir samples, desolate piano and squelching synths. It's the sort of album – weighing in at a hefty 80 minutes – that you might put on to accompany a couple of bottles of wine of an evening if you really wanted to piss yourself off.

From pounding gothic histrionics to more edgy electro passages, not a million miles away from Human League's earliest explorations, Umair crackles and grinds like a man trying to meet a strict deadline on a Cyberman production line. It is pretty unrelenting though, and occasionally a few rays of light might help. Rather it's like stumbling through a blacked-out tunnel waiting for some nameless evil to devour you but it never arrives; the blackness just goes on forever. It's the soundtrack to purgatory. That was almost certainly the intention. Next month Umair will be writing the score for new West End production, *The Battle Of The Somme - The Musical*. Enjoy!

Ian Chesterton

the port mahon

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OPEN MIC SESSION: Marlborough House

Thursday 10th – Saturday 12th

CROPREDY FESTIVAL

And still it marches on, now into its fourth decade, Fairport Convention's annual gathering of the folk tribes has survived its recent scares (the marital split between Dave and Chris Pegg, Fairport bassist and festival co-ordinator respectively, threatened to end the event a while back) and continues to end the event a while back) and continues to gather up the old and new guard of traditional English folk, blues and rock, as ever headlined by the mighty Fairport (*pictured*) on the Saturday night, with their traditional three-hour set featuring all manner of guest turns. Other highlights over the weekend include 10cc's Friday night headline set and the enduringly great Steeleye Span on Thursday. Amongst the supporting cast are hard-drinking Scottish folk survivor and pioneer John Martyn (that's survivor in the real sense of the word – four shooting attempts and a stabbing in his time), former-Squeeze frontman Glenn Tilbrook and perhaps highlight of the lot, traditional Irish harpist Maire Ni Chathasaigh's set with renowned guitarist Chris Newman. Plenty more besides, including a Status Quo tribute, but the best thing about Cropredy remains its lost-in-time ambience, laid-back atmosphere, decent food, quality beer and (relatively) civilised loos. Tickets on sale from www.fairportconvention.com.



AUGUST

THURSDAY 3rd

GUNNBUNNY + MONDO CADA: The Music Market – Incendiary bluesy grunge from Gunnbunny, plus storming garage rocking from Mondo Cada.

WHERE I'M CALLING FROM + LITTLE FISH: The Cellar – Sweet new wave-inspired pop from the promising local newcomers, taking in Belle & Sebastian, the Only Ones and Fleetwood Mac along the way.

SKYLARKIN: The Brickworks – Weekly reggae, ska, funk, Latin and Afrobeat session with DJ Aidan Larkin and guests.

SABOTAGE: The Zodiac – Weekly rock club night playing new metal, hardcore and alternative releases.

FRIDAY 4th

PLANES MISTAKEN FOR STARS + SECONDSMILE + DEGÜELLO: The Zodiac – Feverishly intense Illinois punkers return to the Zodiac off the back of tours with The Ataris and Dillinger Escape Plan. A new album, the follow-up to 'Up Them In Guts' is due out later this year. Top-notch local support from hardcore mutants Degüello.

BLACK POWDER: The Music Market
BACKROOM BOOGIE: The Bullingdon
JUDY'S FARM: Somerset House, Marston Road – Classic rock and pop covers.

BOSSAPHONIK: The Cellar – Live jazz dance.

SATURDAY 5th

SEAFOOD + THE RACE + THE ROCK OF TRAVOLTA: The Zodiac – Long-time underground indie rock heroes return, now signed to Cooking Vinyl, and with a fresher, stripped-down sound, inspired by the likes of Pavement and Sebadoh rock but with a sweet English psychedelic pop edge. New single 'Signal Sparks' precedes an album, 'Paper Crown King' in September and hopefully a new lease of life for one of the UK's most underrated – and unlucky – young bands. Local post-rock heroes The Rock Of Travolta support.

SAHARA BOAT CLUB + STORNAWAY + FILIP SALEN: The Music Market
SIMPLE: The Bullingdon – Funky house club night.

NEBEREST SANG + BLACK STATIC TRANSMISSION + JONQUIL: The Port Mahon – Leftfield and post-rock.

ABORT, RETRY, FAIL with DISCO DRIVE: The Cellar – Frenetic, funky hardcore noise with a heavy gang Of Four influence from Italy's Disco Drive.

RICHARD BROTHERTON + DIRTY RED + ALAN HAINES: King's Head & Bell, Abingdon – Skittle Alley acoustic night.

SUNDAY 6th

LEATHERAT: The Port Mahon – Energetic folk-rockers.

SUNDAY STEAMER with BORDERVILLE + BRICKWORK LIZARDS + JAMIE HYATT + CAPTAIN PYRATES: Departing From Salters Steamers, Folly Bridge (3pm) – More rock-on-a-boat action from the Sunday Steamer crew, this month taking to the water with glammed-up space rockers Borderville, eclectic global sounds from Brickwork Lizards and sardonic songsmithery from Family Machine's Jamie Hyatt.

DELICIOUS MUSIC JAM SESSION: The Music Market

JINX: The Black Horse, Kidlington

MONDAY 7th

LIGHTNING WILLIE & THE POOR BOYS:

The Bullingdon – Texas-born, Pasadena-resident electric blues-rock guitarist, a big favourite on the UK circuit where he's more popular than back home. Rocking blues, swing and rock'n'roll that mixes up Otis Rush, Stevie Ray Vaughan and Eddie Cochran.

TUESDAY 8th

JAZZ CLUB with THE TOM GREY

QUINTET: The Bullingdon

GJB + NOT ROCKET SCIENCE: The Port Mahon

DELICIOUS MUSIC JAZZ, BLUES &

FOLK NIGHT: Bar Milano, Pizza Express - With Jazz Emporium

INTRUSION: The Cellar – Goth and industrial club night.

WEDNESDAY 9th

MT. + UP C DOWN C LEFT C RIGHT C

ABC AND START + MAI MAYO MAI +

FLIES ARE SPIES FROM HELL: The Port Mahon – A competition night to see who can give their band the most irritating name.

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Marlborough House



THURSDAY 10th

JIMMY BARNES: The Zodiac – Enduringly popular Australian singer-songwriter who's duetted with Tina Turner, INXS and Joe Cocker. Currently promoting new album 'Double Happiness', taking a more considered, acoustic approach to his soulful rock sound.

FOXES: The Music Market - 60s

psychedelic pop.

THE THUMB QUINTET + BRICKWORK

LIZARDS: The Cellar – Instrumental folktronica from The Thumb Quintet, coming in somewhere between Four Tet and Pentangle.
PINEY & THE BLUEGRASS TWO: QI Club – Truck Records favourites Piney Gir takes a break from synth-pop to display her American folk roots side.

TRUE RUMOUR: The Port Mahon

SKYLARKIN: The Brickworks – Weekly reggae, ska, funk, Latin and Afrobeat session with Aidan Larkin and guests.

SABOTAGE: The Zodiac

FRIDAY 11th

KILLA KELA + DJ SKELETRIK + MC TRIP + ROOKWOOD: The Cellar – Short live set from the renowned human beatbox, plus a night of hip hop from DJ Fu.

HANGMAN JOE + THE RUINS + KT & KY: The Port Mahon – Local indie rock bands night.

SOURCE: The Zodiac – Monthly drum&bass club night. Tonight's guests are Mikee Hussla, GDStar, Caution, Jibba and Rogue.

BACKROOM BOOGIE: The Bullingdon – Classic funk, soul and disco every week.

SATURDAY 12th

M-WARD: The Zodiac – Gorgeous modern blues and folk cult songsmith – *see main preview*

BORDERVILLE + BLUE JUNK + SHE CRIES + JOE SATRIANI TRIBUTE: The Music Market – Theatrical funky glam rocking from Borderville, plus funky improv rock from Blue Junk and mellow Led Zep-influenced rock from She Cries.

THE BLACK POWDER: The Port Mahon – You need to watch that soot, it'll ruin the carpet.

LEATHERAT: Brasenose Arms, Cropredy

SUNDAY 13th

BEARD MUSEUM with THE DIRTY ROYALS + BARNABAS + BAREFOOT TIM + LUCKY FACE: The Purple Turtle – Myriad pop thrills at Beard Museum, tonight featuring the new-look, renamed Samurai Seven, The Dirty Royals, plus Berkshire-based songsmith Barefoot Tim, drawing on Evan Dando, Badly Drawn Boy and Weezer for inspiration.
MELODIC OXFORD with THE A+E LINES + YOUNG PLAYTHINGS + IODO + THE GULLIVERS: The Port Mahon – Various melodically-inclined local bands.

DELICIOUS MUSIC JAM SESSION: The Music Market

COPYCATS: The Black Horse, Kidlington

MONDAY 14th

THE RUDY ROTTA BAND: The Bullingdon – Italian blues guitarist who's made his reputation on the European blues festival circuit, mixing up blues roots with rock, soul, r'n'b and funk, as well as reinterpreting Beatles classics in a blues style.

TUESDAY 15th

JAZZ CLUB with THE TOM GREY

QUINTET: The Bullingdon

DELICIOUS MUSIC JAZZ, BLUES &

FOLK NIGHT: Bar Milano, Pizza Express -

With singer Chiarina Darrah

WEDNESDAY 16th

PHILLIP ROEBUCK + ROB HOKUM:

The Port Mahon – One-man band in the old-fashioned sense, armed with banjo and bass drum strapped to his back. Voted Subway Performer of the Year in his native New York in 2002 and adding a punky edge to traditional busking style, having supported the likes of Shellac and American Music Club. Local chap Robb Hokum leaves his Ylid project aside for the night for some downbeat acoustic pop.

SUNNYVALE NOISE SUB-ELEMENT + XMAS LIGHTS + MARY BENDY TOY + THE IDEA + BEAVER FUEL: The

Wheatshaf – The Grinning Spider club presents ace local post-rock electro noise merchants Sunnyvale, doing their Shellac-meets-Kraftwerk stuff to punishing effect, while doomladen industrial hardcore terrors Xmas Lights keep the volume and intensity levels up. Skewed punkoids Mary Bendy Toy bring a degree of insanity to proceedings, while Beaver Fuel go acoustic to warm the evening up slowly.
OPEN MIC SESSION: Marlborough House

THURSDAY 17th

DRUGDEALER CHEERLEADER: The

Bullingdon – Dumb, fun rock and roll noise from London's Drugdealer Cheerleader, mixing up Motley Crue, The New York Dolls, Ramones and The Cult into a frothy brew.

PRIMITIVE TIME MACHINE: The Music Market – Local funk rockers.

KATY BENNETT + LUKE SMITH: QI Club – Acclaimed local folkstress Katy teams up with Truck favourite Luke for a night of quality acoustic folk and pop.

LUKE BARBANNEAU: The Port Mahon
THE DRUG SQUAD + FROM MARS + NAGATHA KRUSTI: The Cellar – Ska-punk stalwarts The Drug Squad return to live action with new singer James, previously of Underbelly and Mindsurfer.

SKYLARKIN: The Brickworks

SABOTAGE: The Zodiac

FRIDAY 18th

COOPER TEMPLE CLAUSE: The Zodiac – V Festival warm-up gig for Reading's psych-rock heavyweights, back in town once again.

WITTSTOCK FESTIVAL: The General Elliot, South Hinksey – First night of the free local music festival in aid of Motor Neurone

Disease research. Headliners are punk loons Barry & The Beachcombers, plus Opaque, EJ Norman, Audio Pollution and Anton Barbeau.

HANGMAN'S JOE + MARY'S GARDEN + PHYAL: The Music

Market – Local bands night including gothic rocking from Mary's Garden and punky metal noise from Phyal.

TWAT DADDIES: The Port Mahon

BACKROOM BOOGIE: The Bullingdon



Saturday 12th

M.WARD: The Zodiac

With 'End Of Amnesia' Portland, Oregon's Matt Ward created a genuine modern folk-rock classic. Last year's 'Transistor Radio', his fourth album, got critics in a similar froth, establishing the charismatic virtuoso as one of the great contemporary purveyors of classic Americana while never threatening to break into mainstream success. Maybe this year will be different, and anyway, Ward's music is so timeless it doesn't really matter if he becomes huge next month or sometime in 2020. The collision of melancholy and childlike wonderment, warmth and gentle disorganisation and his mellow, rasping voice, backed by a sparse arrangement of piano, harmonica, acoustic guitar and percussion draws on everything that's great about blues, folk, country, rock and gospel. He's in the lineage of Woody Guthrie and Bob Dylan, although vocally at least he's closer to Glenn Campbell and Tom Waits, while a host of more successful stars are quick to name-check him – from Vic Chestnutt to My Morning Jacket. Both have contributed to recent recordings, alongside Lambchop and Giant Sand, and his fanbase can only grow as more and more folks get to hear his music.

SATURDAY 19th

WITTSTOCK FESTIVAL: The General

Elliot, South Hinksey – Full day of live music with headliners Mary's Garden joined by Junkie Brush, Phyal, Smilex, Twizz Twangle, Fork, Laima Bite and Foxes!.

YOUR SONG: The Zodiac – The legendary covers night, now in its 15th year and featuring a selection of local rock luminaries debasing themselves with booze and dodgy reinterpretations of classic and not so classic hits, all in aid of promoter Mac's birthday. 29 again, eh? He doesn't look a day older than 34.



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Tuesday 22nd

HAYSEED DIXIE:

The Zodiac

It's easy to see why Nashville's Hayseed Dixie were perceived as a novelty band when they first started getting a bit of airplay over here. Their reinterpretations of classic rock and metal songs – from AC/DC and Motörhead to Queen and Spinal Tap – in an authentic Deep South folk style were a dream for ironically-minded pop fans, but anyone who saw the band the last time they played the Zodiac will testify to their serious musical credentials. Starting from the premise that AC/DC's 'Highway To Hell' is essentially the same strip of tarmac as Hank Williams' 'Lost Highway', they make an easy crossover between the two styles of music. Their exemplary choice of covers is executed with a keen sense of humour as well as a genuine love and feel for the originals, while the traditional Tennessee folk songs they play display the incredible musical dexterity of the band. New album, 'A Hot Piece Of Grass' boasts covers of Outkast and Green Day. A perverse and maybe slightly guilty pleasure they might be, but Hayseed Dixie are also one of the most fun bands you'll see this year, and mandolins and banjos never sounded so rock and roll.

Acts performing are Beelzebozo, Witches, Sow, The Delta Frequency, Ally Craig, Borderville, The Hero Story and Baby Gravy.

THE IDEA + TRUE RUMOUR + CAPTAIN PYRATES + HOLIDAY IN VIETNAM: The Music Market – Local bands showcase night.

JUANA MOLINA: Phoenix Picture House – Widely considered to be one of the best experimental artists outside of the English speaking world, Argentinean Juana Molina was a successful TV comic in her homeland before ditching all that to follow her musical destiny, mixing electronic experimentation, live loops and haunting balladry. Having supported David Byrne on tour she's signed to Domino Records and now finds herself labelmates with Franz Ferdinand and Arctic Monkeys.

REGGAE CLUB NIGHT: The Bullingdon
ADRENALINE: The Port Mahon

TONIC: The Cellar – Live funk, soul, jazz and hip hop.

SUNDAY 20th

WITTSTOCK FESTIVAL: The General Elliot, South Hinksey – Final day of the free music festival with sets from Suitable Case For Treatment, Lagrima, Mark Bosley, Su Jordan, The New Moon, Raggasaurus, Les Clochards, Phil Garvey and more.

FOXES! + SAILPLANES + STORNOWAY: The Port Mahon – 60s-styled psychedelic

pop from local newcomers Foxes! at tonight's first Swiss Concrete gig.

YOU'RE SMILING NOW BUT WE'LL ALL TURN INTO DEMONS + ZELEGA: The Cellar – Sonic Youth-inspired psych-core from the headliners whose name we really can't be bothered to type again, plus post-rock soundscaping from Zelega.

DELICIOUS MUSIC JAM SESSION: The Music Market
STORNOWAY + THE SAIL PLANES + FOXES!: The Port Mahon – Local bands night.
NATION: The Black Horse, Kidlington – Hard-working local glam-popsters continue their never-ending tour of the shires.

MONDAY 21st

TRAFFICKER: The Bullingdon – The band fronted by young British blues guitar sensation Tommy Allen whose tour credits include Big Joe Turner's Memphis Blues Caravan and Sugarbabes. Blues-rock with a heavy 60s influence.

DAVID K FRAMPTON: The Port Mahon – Heavyweight experimental electronica.

TUESDAY 22nd

HAYSEED DIXIE: The Zodiac – It's metal Jim, but not as we know it – *see main preview*

JAZZ CLUB with THE TOM GREY

QUINTET: The Bullingdon

KOHOUTEK: The Port Mahon

DELICIOUS MUSIC JAZZ, BLUES &

FOLK NIGHT: Bar Milano, Pizza Express – With vocal and piano duo Cicily & Lattice.

WEDNESDAY 23rd

MAMMUTH: The Zodiac – Swedish emo rockers.

OPEN MIC SESSION: Marlborough House

THURSDAY 24th

TEMPLE: The Bullingdon

FROWSER + CARAVAN OF WHORES +

GLEND A HUIH + DR SLAGGLEBERRY:

The Hobgoblin, Bicester – Live music returns to the Hobgoblin with tonight's showcase of local rock talents.

BEELZEBOZO + BARRY & THE BEACHCOMBERS + THE FOURTH

CHAMBER: The Cellar – Funereal uber metal from Beelzebozo, plus wonky punk madness from Barry & The Beachcombers.

FRIDAY 25th

GAPPY TOOTH INDUSTRIES presents MY FATHER THE BEAT + FAR FROM THE DANCE + LAGRIMA: The Zodiac – Mixed bag of sounds at tonight's GTI with baggy-cum-electro popstrels My Father The Beat somehow finding a middle ground between The Velvet Underground and Happy Mondays, while Huddersfield's Far From The Dance mix up synth-pop and indie and local trio Lagrima provide some acoustic thrash.

FOALS + THE SWARM: The Wheatsheaf – Local post-rock starlets on the rise, following on from their headlining set in the Trailerpark Tent at Truck Festival.

LICKETY SPLITS: The Music Market
BACKROOM BOOGIE: The Bullingdon
HQ: The Cellar – Drum&bass club night.

SATURDAY 26th

TONIC + NOT MY DAY + THE TURBULENCE: The Music Market – Funky jazz and hip hop from Tonic.

HIP HOP CLUB NIGHT: The Bullingdon
ACOUSTIC GODFATHERS: The Black Horse, Kidlington

ROLLERCOASTER Vs CHICKS WITH DECKS: The Cellar – Indie, new wave, riot grills and 80s mash up.

SUNDAY 27th

PINDROPPER PERFORMANCE with WAIT FOR CONISTON + BUGBRAND: The Port Mahon (5pm) – Local instrumental post-rockers Wait For Coniston headline tonight's Oxfordbands.com night with heavy electronic noise support from Bugbrand.

BEARD MUSEUM with HORSEFIGHTER + CHANTELLE PIKE + PATRICK BRISCOE + MAT GIBSON: The Purple Turtle – Indie rocking from Horsefighter and theatrical folk-pop from Chantelle Pike.

DELICIOUS MUSIC JAM SESSION: The Music Market

FAJITA EATERS: The Black Horse, Kidlington

MONDAY 28th

BROKEN SOCIAL SCENE: The Zodiac – Symphonic indie rock from Toronto collective.

TUESDAY 29th

JAZZ CLUB with THE TOM GREY

QUINTET: The Bullingdon

DELICIOUS MUSIC JAZZ, BLUES &

FOLK NIGHT: Bar Milano, Pizza Express

WEDNESDAY 30th

MELODIC OXFORD with DENNIS DRISCOLL + WOLF TRACKS + SHOES & SOCKS: The Port Mahon

THURSDAY 31st

THE QUARTER-FINALS + THE PHOTOS

+ BÊTE NOIR: The Cellar – Indie-metal noise from The Quarter-Finals, plus Strokes-inspired new wave pop from The Photos.

SKYLARKIN: The Brickworks

SABOTAGE: The Zodiac

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LIVE

ELTON JOHN

Oxford United Stadium

This is my first visit to the Oxford United Stadium, or any stadium in fact, and a kindly soul informs me that young men play something called 'football' here. Tonight it is also revealed as a perfect venue for larger gigs: efficient transport, good acoustics, friendly stewards – hopefully this is the first of many.

Elton John is nothing if not a consummate professional. He wastes no time on costume changes, special guests, rambling introductions or fancy light shows. All his energy goes into 2¼ hours of astonishingly perfect pop music. Think of an Elton hit - he plays them all. Except the shit ones. From the opening 'Benny and the Jets' to the closing 'Your Song', he seals his reputation as the writer of some of the most beautifully complex and unique music on the planet.

Unsurprisingly, the set leans towards the first five years of his career, up to 1973's 'Goodbye Yellow Brick Road', an album on which (according to some) he invented punk rock with 'Saturday Night's Alright for Fighting', and acid house with 'Benny and the Jets'. As usual a few songs are treated to extended workouts: 'Take Me To The Pilot' has long been a live honky-tonk favourite but the real treat is 'Rocket Man', which he completely deconstructs and rearranges into a rather spooky, tripped-out opus that plays on its drug-related lyrical content. Thankfully, he's never made the mistake of dabbling in dance music, bar the odd slip up. He's a pop singer who plays the piano, and he's never forgotten that. That said, many of his 70s singles broke through in America on black radio, a proud achievement he shares with Kraftwerk.

Long-time fans are glad to see Davey Johnstone still strumming his guitar tonight after 37 years' continuous service, and Nigel Olsson still twirling his sticks. They also provide the classic backing vocals that make the old songs sound so great, particularly handy since Elton seems to have lost the upper extreme of his vocal range and has transposed certain lines accordingly.



Odd to say, but this is a very intimate gig, like most people I spend much of it just sat there, chin in hand, losing myself in the experience. The highlight? It has to be 'Tiny Dancer', a perfect composition and a great example of how Bernie Taupin's lyrics complement the music by never going where you expect them to. The chorus seems to capture the evening: "Hold me closer tiny dancer / Count the headlights on the highway / Lay me down in sheets of linen / You had a busy day today".

Art Lagun

TOPCATS / THE NINE-TON PEANUT SMUGGLERS

The Zodiac

So it's that time of the month again – oil those dancing feet, grease those skanking arms and get ready for Skylarkin Soundsystem. For the past three years, Aidan Skylarkin and co. have been gracing us with their presence at the Zodiac to showcase the finest of the old jocks, octogenarian ska legend DJ Derek. Subsequently they've also been putting on some of the best ska and reggae acts around, notably Ska Cubana and Max Romeo.

Kicking off tonight with Sir Bald Diddley and cohorts, Skylarkin's seven-piece house band The Nine Ton Peanut Smugglers warm up the house effectively with some simple yet swinging ska, some sing-alongs to get even the most bored looking of guests involved.

Now it's really time to break out the one-foot skank! Topcats take to the stage. Comprising of the guys and girls who put the Ska into Ska Cubano, including saxophone supremo, Miss Megu, (who has all the dogs on Cowley Road wondering what's going on with her unfathomably high-pitched notes) plus one of the most energetic frontmen I've ever seen, Natty Bo, who has us all doing the 'uptown downtown' dance and the one foot skank. Some brilliant original ska hits the Zodiac with some force, including a blistering cover of 'Lollipop'. Two fantastic bands in one night. And there's yet more to come: Bristol legend and Massive Attack granddaddy DJ Derek keeps everyone entertained for the next two hours with a mix of swinging ska, blues, reggae, r&b and dub.

Derek will be back next month, and I'm sure Skylarkin won't keep us waiting too much longer for the return of Natty Bo & Co!

DJ Indecision

THE SLEEPY JACKSON

The Zodiac

I've always been drawn to the mercurial musical genius. These are the guys driven enough to follow what they believe in, yet volatile enough to shoot off on a tangent if the whim takes them. People like Luke Haines, Julian Cope and latterly Luke Steele, he of The Sleepy Jackson. Not everything they do works, but you're always intrigued to see what they'll do next. When failure occurs, it's usually glorious.

Three years on from the wonderful 'Lovers' album, The Sleepy Jackson return to the Zodiac. This time they're upstairs and it's only half full. Which is ideal on such a hot night, but sad that more people don't want to witness this. Part of the problem is probably due to the new 'Personality' album not being released until the tour is finished. As the band wander onstage Steele starts dispensing shards of noise from his guitar while the band build up a steady rhythm. It's almost like a warm up routine. But then...well nothing really. What follows is some finely crafted leftfield pop, played by a good band rendered incomprehensible by muddy sound. Two of the greatest things about The Sleepy Jackson, the lyrics and delicate melodies and arrangements, are lost in the quagmire. They attempt to rectify this by making it louder, but this only compounds the problem.

Because of this the semi-acoustic numbers stand out, highlighting Steele's deft touch and way around a heartfelt melody. Aside from that the only other things worth anything are the divine 'Good Dancers', which explodes near the end of the song into a wall of noise. This moment should kick start the set, but the momentum is lost. 'Rain Falls For Wind' is the other highlight, a song from a higher plain that transcends any mere problems.

Luke Steele, genius delayed. For now.

Russell Barker



!!!

The Zodiac

Preempting the inevitable first question to a band named after some punctuation, the !!! bio makes clear that it's pronounced as any three sounds you like. It's not every day you're offered a linguistic free reign by a popular beat combo, and under other circumstances this review would start to look like an AOL chatroom, so we'd better take advantage.

Chikchikchik are, basically, the funk band that cooler-than-thou indie kids always wanted to love, but couldn't until they got picked up by Warp. Driven along by Justin Vandervolgen's relentless, shake-that-thang basslines and swathes of multi-layered percussion from anything to four members at a time, the band peak with almost Afrika Bambaataa-esque electro-funk moments. It's delightfully odd, and, above all, LOADS of fun, right down to Nic Offer's dad-at-a-wedding dance moves. 'Pardon My Freedom' is exceptional, a cavalcade of profanity that you'd brush off as a pointless tirade in the hands of someone more po-faced, marching across a bed of synth washes and percussive chugging. And only a band as artfully ridiculous as Woowoo can get away with wilfully banging in as much swearing as they can into one song.

Bofbofbof do tread a fine line, though: what starts off as a boundary-pushing union of The Art-Rock and The Funk sometimes veers into horrible noodling and comes out somewhere near Planet Jamiroquai, but thankfully those moments are brief, and few. It was close for a minute there, though.

At their finest, they create what is essentially beer keg, frat boy party music for sensitive indie fops, giving leftfield music the good, solid funk-shaped kick up the arse it's always secretly wanted but has been too afraid to give itself. Yeah!yeah!yeah!

Stuart Fowkes

MALEFICE / SANZEN / XMAS LIGHTS / GEHENNA

The Bullingdon

A popular excuse for the current stale state of the metal scene is its perpetuation of rampantly codified behaviour, from fans and artist alike. Well you can check your pretensions at the door, as tonight is resolutely about taking metal back to its fundamentals. The opening salvo is fired by Bicester's Gehenna, who eschew traditional edifice in favour of Will Haven's do-not-pass-go spaz outs. They do come down firmly in the hardcore camp, but while we sit here splitting hairs, these guys split skulls.

Trying even harder to break the mould are locals Xmas Lights, who suffer immensely through a terrible mix and lack of bass player to emerge triumphant. Initially these "Mars Voltas of metal" are lost in a quagmire of progression, where moments of sublime musicianship are squandered by vocal histrionics. But they pull the proverbial cat out of the bag with lyrical gems like "Let's go shopping in Baghdad, I've heard it's good this time of year", to emerge as Oxford's answer to the Locust.

If the Bully crowd are not quite

ready for Xmas Lights, they certainly react well to being completely poleaxed by Sanzen. Their blend of hardcore metal and rock and roll excess goes down a treat, much like chugging a pint of Refused while some evil agent of darkness forces another of Fear Factory down your throat at the same time. Jon Eley's vocals are the most powerful so far tonight and he zooms around the venue, seemingly having read Nailbomb's 'How To Be A Lead Singer' very, very recently.

The military style assault reaches its logical conclusion with headliners Malefice, undoubtedly the most metal band of the evening and accordingly not short on precision. They take Sepultura's bottom heavy riffage to monolithic proportions and then make a gallant effort on Dillinger Escape Plan's dynamics, all the while retaining a devoutly traditional edge.

So much so that it looks like the only thing preventing Malefice's ascent to metal superstardom may be the inability to pronounce their name.

Matt Bayliss

SLEEPLESS / BHASKER / AMBERSTATE

The Music Market

So, as the World Cup dives and butts its way off into the distance, it's back upstairs at the Tavern to three fledgling bands, all giving the chance for the keen observer to gauge if the initial influences are being shed like fluffy nest feathers as they take flight into originality, or whether they'll plummet like a chicken.

If I were Sleepless' manager I'd get her brood of squawky Black Crowes on the first flight to Newark USA and play every available Hardware Bar (where folk go to get hammered, screwed and nailed, all in happy hour) in New Jersey. These are places where they love this tight, pure red-blooded bar rock with all the Richie Sambora widdly guitar solos, where music stopped evolving around the time of The Knack, and Joan Jett, and they'd get all the mobbing they deserve.

Witney's Bhasker are so tall, thin and young that their indie clothes seem to just hang from their shoulders. They are what has been good about Thom Yorke's influence on the city, a new generation of thinking musicians, heads down and discovering to their surprise they are quietly talented. It's very early

days and they still swerve between the bad legacy of Thom, that of the hard screeching Muse, and the fine effect of 'Street Spirit' crossed with the understated 'This is Your Captain Speaking'. Within a year the vocals will find more conviction, then we'll really be talking.

AmberState have nuclear-scale glamour fronting them in the delightful form of Emma De Lacey. As a band they are certainly at the crossroads. They have classical training stamped all over the four of them and you can see they are caught between using it to just write songs for their parents, in the vein of, Judy Tzuke or Evanescence, or instead, as they did in a couple of tentative numbers, where Emma unbuttons her emotional jeans, puts on the bedroom eyes and sashays at you like Alison Goldfrapp or Dot Allison holding two unpinned grenades. It all hinges on whether her vocals and songwriting can be dropped to a lower register, forcing her goddess rather than the girl to the surface, then entwining them more closely with Rob Thomas' dazzling electronica to stop them becoming so stagey.

Paul Carrera

BRICKWORK LIZARDS / BORDERVILLE

The Cellar

Comprising assorted members of The Evenings and The Keyboard Choir, and featuring Joe Swarbrick, late of Sexy Breakfast, on vocals, Borderville were always going to deliver a show. Decked out in bowties, waistcoats and cravats, their image is half fop, half Dickensian urchin, and sozzled in an eccentric theatricality that also laces their music. Unashamedly grandiose, they trapeze through glam riffs, vaulting synths and smokily decadent piano parts with infectious brio. There is more than a touch of music hall here, especially on the opening track, whose multi-layered vocals build into the kind of bombastic chorus that Sondheim would be proud of. Toying with the spectres of both Bowie and Prince, Joe's expansive vocals are a celebration of nostalgia. The lyrics feature a roll call of dead stars – Judy Garland, Vivien Leigh, Marlon Brando – that looks back to a golden age which enshrined its celebrities at a worshipful remove. The danger of this sounding potentially trite is swept away by its affecting conviction, and by the sheer energy which the band bring to the set. It ends emphatically with four fifths of its members simultaneously whacking the drums like a street gang laying into a slumbering tramp as the music compresses itself to sampled loop. Engaging stuff.

Although their sound couldn't be more

different, headliners The Brickwork Lizards also splice influences hailing from a time which the intervening decades have enshrouded in glamour with contemporary references. With a cello, a hand drum and an East Asian lute amongst their arsenal, they play laidback 1940s jazz overlaid by the old-time croonings of vocalists Tarik and Gary. It's refreshing to see something so wildly divergent from the rock majority of local music, and their set sashays in a pleasantly silly manner through cover versions including the Dick Dale track which featured in Pulp Fiction. However, it is not until the band are joined on stage by Tomohawk of the sadly defunct Big Speakers that things start getting interesting. He dispenses soliloquys in a voice which shifts through barely perceptible degrees from Louis Armstrong-cum-Kiora crow to the hip-hop delivery of his former band. It's like listening to a tape recorder gradually running out of batteries, albeit infinitely more entertaining, and although he's essentially a cameo role player, the stage misses him between turns.

It would be interesting to see the band push things further to create a more unified hybrid of their jazz/hip-hop parts. As it is, though, memory lane proves to be a diverting break from the usual thoroughfares.

Emily Gray

UNITING THE ELEMENTS

The Exeter Hall

You may find a section in your local record shop called World Music. To be honest, it's a pretty meaningless genre, and I for one have never heard music from any other planets, despite owning albums by David Bowie and Sun Ra.

It's also arbitrary which local styles are allowed entry into the World enclave: if Nigerian blues and Cuban jazz are recognised neo-folk micro-genres, why not Glaswegian indie or Middle European stadium rock?

It is the latter that Uniting The Elements arrive toting, and whilst this ought to be enough to send us all home feeling nauseous, there's something in the quality of UTE's superb performance that excuses cardinal taste crimes.

Scarlet-haired and spring-loaded vocalist Dawn boasts an impressively agile, strident voice, and guitarist Ola may have a full armoury of classic rock tricks and giant amps, but it's the drummer who steals the show, spraying beats like an out of control hole punch even whilst she bolsters everything with rigid steely rhythms. It's a praiseworthy performance by anyone's standards, but nobody that

slim and delicate has any business making like a punk John Bonham for forty minutes!

Musically, UTE keep the surprises to a minimum: of course the ballads are a bit rubbish, of course the electronic backing track is occasionally tacky, of course the lyrics work better when they're enquiring whether you wouldn't be averse to punching the air than when they're cogitating life's mysteries. But this is party music, and shouldn't be scrutinised too closely.

Better to remember that UTE quit their jobs in Germany to live in a caravan, playing 250+ gigs a year, and surely nobody with a tiny hint of rock romance in them can deny a little respect for that. A grotesque cross between The Quireboys and Rednex, UTE are as ridiculous as No Doubt and as two-dimensional as The Archies...but, fuck me, I'm a convert.

It's time to get drunk, put on implausible outfits and dance in a field. Just remember to recycle your rubbish, though, we're in Europe now...

David Murphy

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TRUCK FESTIVAL

Saturday

A few thousand miles away Lebanon is burning. We may even be witnessing the opening shots of World War III. Closer to home the A34 is melting in the monstrous heatwave and a car has spontaneously combusted causing a huge tailback. With the thermostat in Nightshift's ancient banger threatening to go into the red we make it to Steventon just in time for the heavens to open as thunder rumbles ominously across the sky.

Appropriate then that the first band we encounter, in the barn are **XMAS LIGHTS**, whose apocalyptic industrial metal is entirely fitting with the tumult battering the site. Their breezeblock metal sends a fair few punters running for their lives, trying to push their brains back into their ears. It's a thoroughly brutal set, but it's not entirely unrelenting. There are times when the band drop the full on aural assault for a moment and indulge in some almost ambient passages of keyboard skulduggery, which for some reason seem even more menacing than when they're shredding their guitars and vocal chords. Mummy, we want our cosy, rustic Truck Festival back! You know, the one with the mild yet sunny disposition and Goldrush playing gentle, pastoral country-pop on the back of a flatbed lorry. Instead, God seems to have declared war on Steventon. We blame **HARRY ANGEL** whose thunderous drum intro was the queue for those black clouds to mass on the horizons.

A bit of electro nonsense is what's needed; after all if dirty black riffs got us into this, then surely sunny beats and a wicked sense of humour can get us out? Apparently not; **TOUGH LOVE** may well be the kind of band to plaster a smile on your soaked face, but putting the sun back in the sky is beyond their rocked up electro-anthems. Somewhat disturbingly, as the trailer park tent flashes and shudders from the storm outside one of their songs samples War of the Worlds. If Judgement Day is scheduled for today, why isn't it in the programme?

Still sheltering in the barn we encounter **KILL CASINO**, a garage-rock three-piece fronted by a bassist who is not only the tallest woman on the planet but appears to have a storm-ravaged Persian cat instead of hair. Simple, noisy fun, akin to early Hole, they attempt to blast the rain back into the sky while their smoke machine struggles to compete with the steam rising from 300 warm, wet bodies.

Of course this weather buggers up the real joy of Truck – wandering between the six stages, glimpsing odd and occasionally inspired pop unknowns who'll probably never be heard of again but who for half an hour in a field in south Oxfordshire can shine like stars. It's also a real pisser – quite literally – for those bands playing on the main stage, faced with an empty field as everyone huddles in the barn and various tents. And so we stick around for **MESAPLEX**, formed from the ashes of Meanwhile, Back In Communist Russia. Weird thing is though that we can't tell the difference between them and

the Depeche Mode CD the soundman has been playing between bands – industrial rhythms, future factory synthetics and a singer who bears an uncanny vocal resemblance to Dave Gahan. It's like The Mode if they'd just got back from a week at Sunnyvale Noise Sub-Element's boot camp. Now there's an idea.

We brave the outside to get chips while everyone else is avoiding the food queue. The salt shaker is saturated. Chips without salt? It's inhuman. Our heart may thank us but our tastebuds rebel.

As the torrent becomes a heavy drizzle we head towards the main stage for **GOOD BOOKS** who are jangling happily like it's summer or something. Really, they're far too jolly for this weather, though as their set progresses they begin to sound more and more like The Cure. Rain does that to people.

We pity any poor band that will have to play to what will most likely be a very empty and very wet field. Sam Duckworth, aka **GET CAPE WEAR CAPE FLY**, has no such problem as his perfectly written ballads succeed in encouraging people to brave the weather and have a good time in spite of it all. A giant hokey cokey in place of a moshpit, yet another piece of rain damaged equipment, and a stupendous tune in the shape of 'The Chronicles of a Bohemian Teenager' and Get Cape is well on his way to being one of the best sets of the day. Not so **CO-PILGRIM** who moans his way through songs of death and misery on his acoustic guitar. On any other day, we'd have some sympathy, but it's there's enough rain outside without having to hear about the downpour in Co-Pilgrim's heart.

We're instead drawn to **THE WALK OFF**'s digital hardcore death disco in the Trailerpark tent where a heaving mass of bodies down the front are frugging aggressively to what sounds like the soundtrack to a bad night in Beirut, only with more screaming and better beats.

Back in the barn comfort zone (comfortable as in warm and slightly sticky as opposed to warm and wet through) we manage three songs of **AGENT BLUE** before we realise we'd rather get rained on than spend any longer in the company of a second-rate cooper Temple Clause fronted by a Bobby Gillespie wannabe playing old Black Sabbath songs, so we find refuge with **BRAKES**, who are ace and are shouting stuff about pineapples and porcupines and putting some serious bounce into their caustic indie disco rock and then play a cover of 'Jackson' which perfectly suits the mood of the festival because.... IT'S STOPPED BLOODY RAINING! At precisely 4pm the sun starts shining. Just like the woman on the BBC news said it would. People are unfurling picnic blankets and cracking open the kettle chips and dips. A devil's coachhorse beetle scurries past. We haven't seen one of those monsters since we were about ten years old. Proof that a) we're in the countryside and b) it really is summer. Over by the hedge next to the main stage, meanwhile, a girl is vomiting cider through her nose as her



poor boyfriend attempts to hold her upright. Proof that a) this is a proper music festival and not a wildlife documentary and b) cider is inherently evil.

Even though it's dry and sunny outside **BATTLES** attract the biggest crowd of the day in the barn, with scores turned away at the door. They keep everyone waiting an age as they fiddle with stuff and set up the tallest cymbal stand in the world. The Oxfordshire post-rock massive are frothing with excitement. So who are this widdly diddly muso jazz wank band we hear? Oh lordy. But wait, what's this? It's becoming strangely compelling. African tribal rhythms and aggressive drum&bass beats rub up against spasticated funk and a clanging metallic dissonance. Before we realise it we're hypnotised. It's like James Brown's backing band reincarnated in a space-age jazz bar on Pluto. The set is spellbinding to watch as vocals are sampled, complex jazz guitar riffs are hammered out and keyboards are fingered apparently randomly, quite often all at the same time. There are times when it descends into pointless noise, but just watching drummer John Stanier thrashing away at that sky cymbal is almost entertainment enough on its own. Hypnotic in a more simple fashion are

Futureheads



Some people. In a field. And not a cloud in the sky.



Get Cape, Wear Cape, Fly



Battles



Kill Casino



Xmas Lights

BROTHER FRANCISCO, creating a heavy-duty narcotic drone rock racket, all flanged guitars and piercing synth hums. The vocals are slightly incongruous but the minimalist lyrics take on an almost mantra-like feel and you feel if they can really let loose with the drones they could consume the world.

:(provide us with the most annoying band name of the weekend, but redeem themselves with a set of nothing but Nintendo tunes, computer beats and bellowed vocals. It's made all the more curious by the use of a computer keyboard played like a guitar. It's like watching someone play Daley Thompson's Decathlon in the midst of a technological meltdown and is therefore totally fantastic.

Despite vowing to avoid The Usual Suspects as far as possible we can't completely miss Truck Festival founding fathers **GOLDRUSH** who today are rocking out far more than most folks ever give them credit for. Similarly **WINNEBAGO DEAL** who are rocking out far more than... well, anyone. Ever.

Spectacle of the day, and one that has everyone who saw it asking everyone else they speak to whether they saw it or not, is **ANAT BEN DAVID**, part of Chicks On Speed, in the Trailerpark, topless except for a pair of

strategically-placed strips of gaffer tape, shouting about Ikea in the style of Nico impersonating Hitler's Nuremberg address. Sounds interesting? Really, it isn't. More like an early-80s GLC-sponsored feminist poetry marathon. Crap then, but plenty of folks (okay, men) are intrigued enough to hang around for the duration.

FORWARD RUSSIA! lose a bit of their impact on an outdoor stage but they're still one of the best live rock bands in the UK at the moment – At The Drive-In colliding with The Pop Group fronted by one-man energy ball Tom Woodhead who's possessed of the vocal histrionics of The Associates' Billy MacKenzie. Raucous, frenzied and wired, in a more confined space they'd tear the place apart.

Local favourites **SUITABLE CASE FOR TREATMENT** are stretching out their new songs, and causing ripples of nervous laughter in the Lounge Tent (a joke on some imp's part, surely?). They implore everyone to be quite with a whispered 'Shhhhh' and then lovingly bludgeon the audience with a sonic sledgehammer.

SKINDRED in the barn is as close to a party band as metal gets. Frontman Benji Webbe

toasts and raps and roars in equal measures, one minutes demanding the crowd show him the devil horns, the next getting them to shout "Love" and asking if this place has bounce factor as molten riffs pour in torrents from the stage, like the floodwaters earlier.

This years headliners are **THE FUTUREHEADS**, a band that is quite content to recycle the riffs of 25-year old new wave bands, despite having the word 'Future' in their name. There is no doubt that they are a thoroughly professional band, however. Their performance is so slick, there are no notes dropped, and they build a reasonable rapport with the crowd. Hell, they even have a couple of good songs too. 'Skip To The End' is a great single, and if you can forget that 'Hounds of Love' has anything to do with Kate Bush for a minute, you can't fail to love it. But they are not a particularly engrossing live prospect. Their songs promise much but deliver little. The Futureheads have feet of clay; as do most of the audience by this time thanks to the thick mud clogged round their shoes.

And so, that's the end of the day as far as the live music is concerned. But not, thankfully, the end of the world we were expecting. In the words of the late, great George Formby, "turned out nice again, hasn't it?"

Dale Kattack and Sam Shepherd

TRUCK FESTIVAL

Sunday

Rather than sleep, we'd rather spend the evening listening to songs about zebras and horses. And to deafening conversations about Jonty, his frankly ludicrous pharmaceutical intake, and how that may or may not relate to the disappearance of a stash of coconut macaroons. And so it is, at stupid o'clock on Sunday morning, with joy in our hearts and lead in our eyelids, we make our way towards the Trailer Park Tent, and **THE KEYBOARD CHOIR**. Not for us the laid back jazz fare of the acoustic tent. The best wake up call in our little world is the combined chatter of myriad keyboards creating waves of Pro-Plus electronica. The stage is awash with robots built from cardboard boxes and silver foil. If this were *Blake's 7* it'd be the end of the world, but right now, it seems like the perfect way to start the day.

In the barn, **THE DODGEMS** try to get us down by proving that almost every band in possession of a guitar and a few feathercuts must put the word The in their names, and secondly must strictly adhere to a diet of 'Funhouse' and MC5. When will it all end? Soon we hope.

It's not exactly sunny yet but it is warm and dry and the traditional Truck ambience of laidback *bonhomie* has descended, though perhaps everyone's simply feeling the effects of the previous night. Reading's **THE RACE** are having none of it however, shouting about chavs in their home town, while sounding a lot like neighbours The Cooper Temple Clause. Must be a geographical thing and they probably think all bands from Oxford sound like Radiohead.

Which they patently don't as proved by **HARLETTE**, who are running full tilt through their hungover Babes in Toyland-inspired set. In the past few years they've tightened things up a little, but they still exude a brash, no frills attitude. When their guitar amp dies on last track 'My Online Boyfriend and His Myspace Affair,' the subsequent pouting, looks of total anger and wide-eyed bemusement sum the band up perfectly.

Somewhere in the future, Harlette could end up becoming a little like **THE PRISCILLAS**. An all-girl band that specialise in riffs straight from The Runways song book, and whose dress code is surely inspired by *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. There is absolutely no way that a right thinking person would ordinarily fall in love with this band. But for some reason, songs dripping in cheese, heavily backcombed hair, and a plastic moulded rock and roll attitude make for a shamefully enjoyable show.

It must be a day for all-girl bands as **SHIVURA CURVES** are doing their thing in the lounge tent. Their thing, unfortunately, appears to involve playing two repeated notes on a cheap Casio keyboard while three of them warble out-of-tune harmonies. Credit to the Truck organisers for giving bands like this a chance year on year but this will doubtless be their only festival appearance ever. Unless someone starts up a festival dedicated entirely to twee, tuneless toytown tuc.

CHRIS MCMATH is over on the Truck Stage manfully confusing the hell out of everyone. It's folk alright, but it's been bent out of all recognition. Whether we're just not in the mood for this prog noodling twang fest is uncertain;

what we do know is that the beer tent looks mighty inviting.

The outside acoustics hamper **THE ROCK OF TRAVOLTA** somewhat, detracting from their almost symphonic dynamics but it's still a timely reminder that the band who played their first show ever at Truck back in the mists of time and then seemed to disappear and die, are back and are still one of the best acts Oxford has ever produced. And when, during the last number, ex-members Phill Honey and Dave Crabtree appear stage-left to jam along, it's pure Spinal Tap.

In the acoustic tent **THOMAS TRUAX** provides yet more genius, only this is the kind of thing you might find lurking around the corners of Salvador Dali's mind. At heart he's a singer songwriter in the truest sense, with a voice that yells Bob Dylan and Hank Williams as influences. Somewhere along the line he got a little twisted, and started to produce his own instruments. These include a drum machine that looks as if it has been designed by Escher and a bizarre French Horn/Guitar/Sampler. For all the oddities though, his songs, voice and performance make him one of the most entertaining shows of the weekend.

It's post-rock hour at Truck anyway, following on from TROT's set, which coincides with And No Star in the lounge tent and then **YOUTH MOVIE SOUNDTRACK STRATEGIES** in the barn.

Having arrived extra early for Youth Movies and then decided we couldn't face yet another soundcheck we go off for a short wander only to find it's impossible to get back in, such is the volume of people who want to see them. No wonder – their rise and rise is testament to their sheer class. We listen through the wall. Sounds great. You just can't argue with pure skill.

The barn is equally rammed for **65 DAYSOFTATIC**, and again a large crowd with no hope of actually seeing the band gathers outside just to hear them play. It's a big step from when they used to play to about fifteen people at The Wheatsheaf on a rainy Thursday night, but every time they play they just get better and better. Their style of Warp-inspired post rock is perfect for the barn, with the bass bins causing the floor to throb incessantly as guitar lines are built up and deconstructed before a spell bound audience. Any acoustic problems are swallowed up in the cacophony of sound that 65DOS can conjure up, and despite a heavily shortened set, they are absolutely phenomenal this afternoon.

As are, in relatively more sedate fashion, **BELARUS**, a band who, like Fell City Girl, seem to be able to write songs that touch the sky without really trying. They're built for a life of filling stadiums; any familiarity of sound can't hide the fact that they have half a dozen anthems and gorgeous ballads, notably 'Standing In The Right Place' and the divine 'Reaction'. This is their first ever appearance at Truck. Next year's headliners? Place your bets now.

Shit, **ELECTRIC SOFT PARADE** are on. Quick, everyone hide. Maybe they'll get the message and not come back next year. Somehow you just know they will.

Country and folk acts tend to fare better on the main Truck stage than harder bands as a general



Keyboard Choir



The Priscillas

rule, and so **SETH LAKEMAN**, who's become something of a star concern since he last graced this festival, seems tailor-made for the occasion, especially in what is now blazing sunshine. Maybe it's just coincidence though that his stand-out track is called 'The Storm'.

So too **PINEY GIR** whose Country Roadshow – replete with line dancers – brings a bit of gen-you-ine hillbilly fun to the acoustic tent (which we've badly neglected for most of the weekend due to the hazards of the bog previously known as a path up there). Away from her trademark synth-pop, Piney does a pretty darned good impersonation of Tammy Wynette and pulls the biggest crowd in the acoustic arena all weekend.

No chance of **A SCHOLAR & A PHYSICIAN** going country and western any time soon. What was once a simple electronic duo now boasts nine members – apparently everyone they've ever met – including seven keyboard players and a bloke who plays a pair of scissors and looks like he'd rather be anywhere other than on stage. "I booked a table for two because I love you!" screeches A Scholar. "What!" bellows A Physician in response. And so it goes on. In the end it's like watching a gay couple having a violent domestic row over the top of an old Tubeway Army album. Rather good, in other words. Next year we'll probably up there with them. And you.

Fellow electro-philés **CHICKS ON SPEED** are considerably less fun. Music as art is always treading dodgy ground and here it's definitely music as arse. Actually there are a few of those on show on the band's enormous backdrop screen, showing various 'art happening' events involving nudity and the sort of paintings toddlers do and

Regina Spektor



The Rock Of Travolta



get no credit for because they're not called Tracy Emin. There are only two of COS today, due to illness apparently, though maybe the rest of them finally came to their senses and realised that dressing up as a panto dame, hitting cymbals randomly and ranting and swearing over a bad tempered drum machine will never make them their fortune. They hold up a sign declaring 'The Worst Band In The World' and in the face of such astute self-awareness we feel strangely redundant. We join the mass exodus to catch some of The **SOUND MOVEMENT** who are struggling with a messy sound that bludgeons their spangled pop out of shape, although recent single, 'A Million Lost Dogs' is an absolute joy, one that Robert Forster would have been proud of. The bass player is quite a spectacle too, resplendent in pink and white and looking like an angel.

With stage times getting confused, **REGINA SPEKTOR** and **MYSTERY JETS** are dangerously close to clashing. When Spektor takes to the stage, she too looks absolutely angelic. When she begins to sing, a hush falls over the barn for the first time this weekend. It's quite something to be in a room so in thrall to a magical voice that sounds so delicate it could snap with ease, yet can still conjure up an almost oppressive reverence. Spektor provides a masterclass in quirky songwriting which has as much in common with Danny Elfman as it does with Tori Amos. It's stunning stuff, but we must depart to take in the Mystery Jets closing set on the Truck Stage. They really have come a long way in a short space of time. From demo of the month in these hallowed pages a few years back, and an early

Mystery Jets



Thomas Truax

afternoon slot here last year, they've now got an album that sells in supermarkets and a headline slot at Truck. Their psychedelic-fused rock is a perfect way to end the festival. In a week where Syd Barrett passed away, Mystery Jets seem like a band capable of continuing to write skewed and irreverent pop tunes. After all, this is a band that features a floppy haired fop perched behind a makeshift percussion set up and a guitarist of at least 50 years. Normal band dynamics evidently don't apply where Mystery Jets are concerned. Thank goodness for great songs then, which by the time 'Zootime' closes their set, have driven the crowd into a bouncing masses of toothy grins.

THE ORGAN look bored senseless on stage. Or maybe they're just very, very shy. Certainly singer Katie Sketch barely opens her eyes, never mind communicates with the crowd throughout their set, but when she sings it's incredible. Slight, almost boyish, she's possessed of the glorious, strident tones of Debbie Harry and dominates the sound, even more than Deborah Cohen's chiming, Johnny Marr-like guitar or Jemmy Smyth's organ, which has The Organ printed across its front to just to remind us who and what we're listening to. A bit of a mess at times, albeit a glorious one, 'Memorise The City' is not only the best song we hear all weekend – and worth the wait – it's probably the best single you'll hear all year. So buy it and make them properly famous. Truck Festival – it's where the acorns that will grow into tomorrow's great pop oak trees are first sown. All they need is a little of rain to make them grow. They certainly got plenty of that this year.

Sam Shepherd and Dale Kattack

*Enough with the guitars! Saturday night at Truck is all about DANCING! We sent **Matt Bayliss** to frug himself to a pulp. Here's what he found.*

There is a school of thought that regards the ability to DJ as being about the biggest have in the history of music, due to the 'gods' behind the decks managing to convince everyone that they have put on a show us mere mortals on the dance floor are incapable of pulling off ourselves. It does only take a minimal amount of practice to master the basics (believe us) and if we all bothered, we could easily be DJs. The average person starts off with a ratio of 'track selection' to 'mixing skills'. Newbies start the equation with 100% concentration on mixing (lest their reputation end in tatters on the first night) and whittle that down with practice. The trick is, the sooner you master the track selection/mixing equation, the better (here is a tip – don't worry too much about mixing. It's 2 in the morning and everyone is *far* too wasted to care). Aaaanyway....

The electronic side of things kicks off at roughly 9ish across four of Trucks' six stages. Now if it was even possible, dance music genres are even more divisive than those in the 'real instrument' world. So much so that a disagreement over electronic tastes is akin to a character assassination – literally. So in the efforts of representation, most of the stages are at least frequented. After a cursory glance at the Fresh Out Of The Box tent, with its glitch and enjoyable breaks/house styles and an even shorter stop off at the Lizard Lounge Late Sessions' effort at recreating God's Kitchen on a tiny scale, we decide that the barn wins tonight by a sheer DJ calibre knock out. It is host to three of the UK's top drum&bass DJs tonight and (having missed Fu, Lunar & D to answer a grumbling tummy) things kick off with a 'live' d&b session from ex-London Elektricity member JD. As if to provide a bridge between the rock music diet of the rest of the day and the unabated abandon that is sure to ensue, JD slams the drums with awesome ferocity and precision. It seems pretty full-on at the time but with hindsight it is a very natural progression to Total Science's female-vocalist-assisted blend of funky tunes. Unlike a lot of DJs out there TS (Q-Project and Spinback) have set their reputation on a stonking back-to-back live show and by involving themselves heavily in the production side of things. So much so that this duo have produced a large quantity of the genre's 'greatest hits'.

Although they forgo a retrospective tonight and instead keep their hour snappily paced but hardly heavy on the dark dancefloor fillers we have known them for. God forbid you should keep the throbbing barn's patrons waiting for music, so DJ Marky's MC heralds the Brazilian's introduction in a typical 'props' fashion. The crowd goes wild and all that. Always having a soft spot for South American drum&bass, with its overtly jazzy influences, the last hour was spent with smile on face and feet a-swinging. Marky keeps things light and funky, but still frenetic, throughout and when the music abruptly finishes, the packed venue are equal parts disbelief and eyes-pointing-in-different-directions-euphoric. Which goes to prove, as long as you don't take dance music too seriously, you'll be fine.

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DEMOS

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DEMO OF THE MONTH

A BROKEN FRAME

A Broken Frame is the work of one Zube Chaudhry, brother of Umair whose regular demo offerings always cheer our days, what with their brutal electronic punishment beatings and bleak industrial landscapes. So what's sibling Zube all about then? Well how about twenty minutes of brutal electronic punishment beatings and bleak industrial landscapes? Nice one. There's some clamouring digital crunch and battering ram beats, the melodies (oh yes, he's got them) are distorted to buggery and sound like theme tunes to lost android western movies. With huge guns. Harsh, brutal and exhilarating at its best, the demo marches and scours, occasionally taking on guitars as extra weaponry and cranking them up in insistent krautrocking fashion. Really, we hate to think what the average Chaudhry family get-together is like. The Partridge Family they ain't.

SNAKE EYES

Previously purveyors of cheap'n'cheerful instrumental metal of the old school in a decidedly Iron Maiden-meets-Thin Lizzy vein. Back now, older and wiser so they tell us, Snake Eyes have gone and got themselves a singer of all things, which ain't such a bright idea on this evidence. Now they come in a more bluesy vintage. Chugga Chugga, Oi Oi! they go before they widdle away on yet another Snowy White-style flight of fancy. The vocals are too abrupt and shouty, the guitars a bit tinny and none of it seems to have any great purpose other than unearthing the lost sounds of John Lee Hooker and The Groundhogs. An elongated pony trek when we were hoping for a full cavalry charge.

ELECTROLYTES

Local songsmith Mark Crozer returns with his band what used to be called Grunt and Groove Productions and who won our Demo Of The Month award with their last offering. Why the gratuitous name change we don't know (except that maybe Grunt and Groove Productions wasn't very representative of their cloud-gazing psychedelic pop), but the sound hasn't taken too great a detour. The fluffy, lysergic dreaminess remains, hinting at Ride

and The Byrds at its best, West Coast pop with a shoegazing shuffle, even tripping into Jesus and Mary Chain's softer side on 'My Redemption', but there is a tendency to fall into earnest soft rock, as on 'Fridge' which simultaneously seems too laid-back and not laid-back enough.

BEARD OF ZEUSS

With a name like that they just gotta be great, right? And those song titles: 'Emperor Of Doom'! 'Half Tonne Man'! 'Medieval Rape Song'! They just gonna rock, right? Well, kind of. Beard Of Zeuss are (they tell us) a stoner metal band out of Enstone (a place where, let's face it, there's bugger all else to do except smoke dope and form rock bands). Problem is, they're too darned stoned to go into a proper studio to record their demo, preferring to lay it all down live in rehearsal using a single microphone, which the singer then hogs mercilessly, sicking up a steady stream of bile and nails while the guitars chug and churn apologetically in the background. It's a right old bloody mess to be honest, more a random collision of instrumentation than music as such. And so we leave it to ramble and rumble on to its conclusion, like a fight outside a pub that promised to get a bit tasty but ended up being a prolonged bout of shoving and shouting.

FROM THE ASHES

From The Ashes are "Five disparate individuals with a yearning for savage metal" they tell us. We love them already. Mind you, the rest of the press blurb is a right old load of self-aggrandising, cliché-ridden bunkum, going on about passion and emotion and fury. And the clichés don't end there, neither. The first track kicks in with an air-raid siren wail and closes with the sound of smashing glass and in between juggernaut guitar riffs try to disguise a vocalist who sounds worryingly like Tony Hadley out of Spandau Ballet crossed with that bloke out of Poison. No matter, soon he's screaming like a fizzy drinks machine being ripped apart by goblins while a portentous piano gets stabbed repeatedly. You can easily imagine that these guys repeatedly punch the air with their fists while they're playing, even during rehearsals. You see what a bit of passion can do to people? Makes them go all mad and noisy, like.

VESTIBULE

Armed with a heavyweight list of post-rock and nouveau-prog influences – from Radiohead and Biffy Clyro to Youth

Movies and 65 Days Of Static – Vestibule weigh in with a small avalanche of distorted guitars and crashing drums, seemingly intent on serious business. But then comes a sudden, and perhaps inevitable, pocket of ponderous calm and some plaintive hollering from the sparsely-employed vocalist. Thereon in the two-track demo undulates and meanders with steady purpose but little originality through the sort of stuff you've heard a thousand times over from a host of Mogwai-influenced droners. Hopefully it's all, as the band name suggests, an entrée for greater things to come.

ASHES OF STEEL

Big in the Witney area, according to a biog and letter which contradict each other by suggesting they've now had two debut demos. Maybe the real first one was such a disappointment that, like those crazy religious types in America, they've undergone a special ceremony to win back their virginity. Any road up, this one is a pretty rudimentary blues-rock chug with hoarse, shouty vocals that sound like a bunch of pissed geezers attempting to song footie songs at closing time. "Saturday night and it's party time / We're gonna get drunk on cheap red wine" they bark as a lyrical introduction, but the demo never threatens to live up to such violent promise and it's a bit of a trudge really, like driving an old Ford Anglia with a dodgy gear box up a particularly steep hill.

SILLY LOVE

Ah yes, the spirit of 1986 lives on. Boy-girl duo Silly Love here present an album-length demo (yeah, cheers) although the first four tracks are all you need. The first track, 'Paint It Up', is bloody great: a sweet Talulah Gosh and Shop Assistants-inspired jangle, cheap and simple and slightly awkward about itself but with a really quite lovely female lead vocal and a five-second burst of guitar noise that's nicked completely off 'Intersellar Overdrive' (and what better time to raise a glass to the late, great Syd Barrett, eh?). Silly's Love's strength seems to be knowing their limits and not trying anything fancy, just scribbling a pretty tune and letting it breathe. 'All You've Been' could be nearly as good, led as it is by an excellent 'Telstar'-style synth buzz, but the male singer makes David Gedge sound like Scott Walker and keeps flying off key. They dip into airy if hesitant folk-pop for a while before hitting their stride again with the dreamy 'Norma And Charlie' with its delicate guitar chime that makes the whole thing sound like mid-80s jangle

heroes The Razorcuts, and if the rest of the demo is treading water in a similar style with ever diminishing returns, they leave us with at least two lovely summery pop moments to cherish and that's more than most folks here can manage.

PHIL WHITE

"She was more than just a neighbour / More than just a friend" screams Phil White over a vaguely Latin-tinged acoustic strum, sounding like the hysterical jabbering of a recently bereaved psychopath who's just butchered the local spinster who the voices told him was really his wife / mother / The Virgin Mary. "I'm going to make you a star!" he bawls and we get worried. But hey, it really is a song about butchering a young lady. He's pulling the trigger. He's singing two opposing vocal parts, like the opposing urges in his demented brain. Shit, shit, shit. Loony alert. Say something nice else he'll be calling up our answerphone at all hours making strange threats. Hey Phil, it's really nice, okay? We love you! And we love your doo-wop folk rap on track two. But we can't honestly say we particularly enjoy the third-rate Oasis power ballad at the end. We prefer you in mental mode, okay?

THE DEMO DUMPER

MARK HUSSEY

Not, we hope, any relation to Wayne Hussey of The Mission, although saying that we'd far rather listen to Ver Mish's less than exotic blend of second-rate Led Zep rip-offs and 5th form goth poetry than this hunchbacked jazzy lounge blues with its cheesy electric piano and constipated vocals. You can easily picture Mark sat in the corner of a bleak market town pub or ruining a wedding reception with his turgid tales of women who done him wrong. And by thunder we'll do him bloody wrong if he ever turns up in our local (which, incidentally is called The Rampaging Viking, whose manager is a renegade Dalek and there's nowt but Motörhead on the jukebox). Blimmin bloody fucking Nora this is terrible: weary, elongated guitar solos, expensive-sounding but unimaginative keyboards and a soulless croak of a voice. Listen Mark, if you, at any point, met the Devil at the crossroads and exchanged your soul for The Blues, ask for a refund cos he done you like a kipper, sunshine.

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

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

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