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NIGHTSHIFT

Oxford's Music Magazine

Free every
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FELL CITY GIRL

On top of the pile and still
looking up - interview with
Oxford's brightest rock
hopefuls - *inside*

Plus - Academy Group buys Zodiac

The Young Knives on their amazing year

The Best of Oxford music 2006

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NEWS

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THE ZODIAC has been bought by the **Academy Music Group**. After almost a year of speculation, Zodiac owners Nick Moorbath and Adrian Hicks sold 100% ownership to the live music venue chain.

In a statement, AMG announced: "Academy Music Group Ltd (AMG) has today announced the successful conclusion of negotiations... to purchase the Zodiac live music and club venue in Oxford, bringing the total number of AMG owned and operated venues across the UK to eleven."

Commenting on this new acquisition, Chief Executive Officer John Northcote said:

"Having grown up in Oxford, it's a very special city for me and it's also where I started in the music industry. I know just how important venues such as the Zodiac are to both the local and national live music circuit and we plan to work closely with promoters and agents to continue to build upon the Zodiac's reputation and success."

Zodiac founder Nick Moorbath added: "After

eleven years running and building up the Zodiac, Adrian and I feel its time to move on. It's always been important to me that the Zodiac remains a live music venue and that's what AMG are all about. I look forward to a continued relationship with them on the promoting side of things at the Zodiac and their other venues. I would like to thank all my staff, the bands, DJs, promoters and customers who have been involved over the years; we've had some fun and I wish AMG all the best for the future."

Carl Bathgate has been appointed General Manager of The Zodiac with immediate effect.

WHILE THE PURCHASE of the Zodiac marks the end of an era in local music – Nick and Adrian spent over a decade building the Zodiac up to be one of the best venues in the UK – AGM's acquisition paves the way for a much-needed refurbishment of the venue. Although AGM are remaining tight-lipped on the exact plans and timetable for work on the building,



Nightshift understands that plans have been submitted to Oxford City Council for an expanded 900-capacity venue downstairs, a revamped 500-capacity music room upstairs, plus a 200-capacity bar venue on the ground floor.

As for the immediate future, gig-goers will see little change to the way the Zodiac is run. All the current music promoters, including TCT's Alan Day, remain in place. One change has been to the venue's ticketing arrangements. Anyone buying tickets in person from the Zodiac box office will no longer be charged a booking fee, while the ticket phone line has changed to **0870 771 2000**. Online tickets are available at www.ticketweb.co.uk. The old Zodiac box office number, 01865 420042 is still available for general enquiries.

ALAN DAY, the man behind The Club That Cannot Be Named and TCT Music, is currently the Zodiac's main live music promoter. Nightshift asked him how AMG's acquisition would affect his gigs.

"I will now be hiring the venue from them and not Nick Moorbath. This means that essentially nothing's going to change, other than the potential this situation provides for the whole Oxford music scene to improve. Nick is relocating his desk to my office and together we will continue to promote at The Zodiac.

"Contrary to most opinion, I have never worked for The Zodiac. I have always been independent and hired the venue for each and every one of my shows. I will, therefore, just hire the venue instead off the Academy Group. I am still booking the same kind of acts, with the same agents, using the same ticket agencies etc.

"The Academy Group are keen for myself to continue as I do, because I fill the place on regular basis. The Academy Group are investing money in the venue to improve facilities for bands and customers. The combined experience of our promotion of acts in Oxford, together with the AGM's venue management expertise, means that together we will become a very strong team. No one can argue that the venue needs a little shake up. We need toilets fixed, money spent on sound equipment and a lot more. There may be a few shows now being booked by national promoters, such as Academy Events, SJM, Live Nation etc. but at the end of the day, the Zodiac has always been open to these people. It's always up to the bands and their booking agents who they choose to promote their

shows and most like the way we work! I am glad the venue is still being run as a live music venue.

"For local bands, well, not enough local bands ask me for shows anyway! A blind demo sent to the Zodiac doesn't get you a show, bands need to send demos to promoters. Contact us at www.tctmusic.co.uk."



SINCE AGM's INITIAL STATEMENT ON THE PURCHASE OF the Zodiac, Nightshift has spoken to AGM's publicity officer **Louise Kovaks** and asked her, firstly why the Academy Music Group had chosen to buy the Zodiac and what its acquisition would mean for local bands, gig-goers and promoters.

"Oxford has a great musical heritage and the Zodiac is a much loved venue both locally and boasting an excellent national reputation. AMG's CEO John Northcote holds a special bond with the City, as it's where he started in the industry, working for Sunshine Records on Little Clarendon Street, before moving on to take the Music Mart chain nationwide. John recognises just how important venues such as the Zodiac are to the national and local live music scene and it's crucial they remain as concert venues in the regions, supporting new and emerging talent as well as bringing international touring acts to the area.

"In the short-term we will be looking to improve standards of service for our customers, decor, facilities front of house, general improvements to customer facilities and for artists we are currently looking to make improvements to the production, namely sound and lighting specs for touring artists and local bands who want to play in a professionally-run venue. We will also look at implementing our knowledge and expertise for marketing shows nationwide, which can only be a good thing for local bands and look towards helping artists move forward to play within our larger network of venues across the country.

"We've just taken on the Zodiac as a fully operational venue, so it's very much business as usual, nothing is changing in the relationships with local promoters and local band nights or any existing diary commitment. the Zodiac does have an exceptional musical heritage and great bands have come out of Oxford, so we hope this may long continue and with the full support of AMG, we hope local bands will be exposed to potentially new audiences, playing new venues in new cities across our venue estate.

"Alan Day is currently the most prolific promoter at the venue and in the Oxford and Reading area and he will continue to play a significant role promoting shows with the full support of the venue. We look forward to working closely with him to bring a wide range of artists to play The Zodiac. Various national promoters currently use the Zodiac and I'm sure will continue to do so. Hopefully, our improvements mentioned above such as PA and lighting upgrades, may increase the volume of shows and events to the Zodiac by all promoters."

THE YEAR OF THE KNIVES

THE YOUNG KNIVES have just enjoyed their most successful year, with a clutch of hit singles and album, 'Voices Of Animals and Men' entering the charts at 21. The band sold out two nights at the Zodiac on their recent UK tour as well as selling out the Astoria in London. They have been hailed as one of the most exciting new bands in the UK and House of Lords was recently included in *NME*'s Cool List for 2006. Nightshift talked to singer **Henry Dartnell** about the band's year.

"The year has obviously been pretty special for us but we aren't wallowing in any glory, it's been pretty exhausting and never seems to end. Months just roll into each other and I never get a chance to mow the lawn. As we were getting closer to quitting our day jobs the reality of how much work it was going to be was quite daunting. We are all inherently lazy and I certainly had images of years on the road in a transit van grinding me down. But in reality it has been a bit too exciting, so that we constantly live in a slightly adrenalized state. I think we all need a bit of normality soon but we know that it could all be over as quickly as it has started so we are not complaining.

"The highlight of the year was probably doing

Later with Jools Holland. Just because it was a childhood dream. It was mad to be asked and we couldn't quite believe it. Then when we were doing it we couldn't quite believe it. Now we have done it we can't quite believe it. Don't you think it is really quite boring listening to bands say how much fun it is being in a band?

"Playing at the Zodiac was like another gig but we knew we had more to prove in a way. Funny thing is that we were only part of the Oxford music scene for a few years it feels like. I guess it was because we are not originally from Oxford and we always felt like outsiders a bit anyway: all our schoolmates live in Ashby or around the Midlands. We now get all these old friends coming out of the woodwork for gigs in Nottingham or Birmingham, so we get the same sort of feeling of expectation for those gigs."

The Young Knives have always been a very prolific band; how has being on the road for so much of the year affected that? Are there plans already to go back into the studio?

"It does stop your writing in its tracks a bit, but we have been writing on the road. The thing is that we have written another album's worth of material for the b-sides. There are 15 b-sides



over the singles done for this album, some of which we think are as good, if not better, than the album tracks. So we are still writing and have about four or five completed tracks for the next album. We are going to have January and February for more writing because we want to get the next album out next year. It means we are going to have to sacrifice the current trend of spending six months touring the US. Shame."

MORE NEWS

AFTER MONTHS OF

speculation The Wheatsheaf looks set to remain as a live music venue for the foreseeable future. A buy-out of the pub recently fell through and rumoured plans for the pub to be turned into a wine bar and restaurant now look unlikely to happen. Wheatsheaf landlord Al has given music co-ordinator Joal Shearing the go-ahead to book gigs well into next year and the venue's PA system is due to get a full overhaul in the near future. Meanwhile, the news means that Klub Kakofanney now returns to the Wheatsheaf after briefly shifting operations to The X.

ANDY YORKE returns to the Zodiac for a rare live performance



on Thursday 21st December. The former Unbelievable Truth frontman has a new album out next year and will be joined for the show by former bandmates Nigel Powell and Jason Moulster. Tickets are on sale now, priced £6, from the Zodiac's new ticketline: 0870 771 2000.

FOALS have signed a deal with Transgressive Records after being pursued by a number of labels. Last month's Nightshift cover stars now join neighbours The Young Knives on what is widely considered to be the UK's coolest indie label. Foals recently took part in Transgressive's Northern Roadshow, alongside The Young Knives, Mystery Jets and Larrikin Love. A new single is planned in early 2007; meanwhile most of the band are in the process of relocating to Brighton.

SUITABLE CASE FOR

Treatment have an album's worth of unreleased recordings available for free download in the wake of their recent split. 'Eduard Mephisto and His Grande Soundingblock', which was given away at the band's farewell gig at the Zodiac in October, features eight tracks, including iTunes singles 'Cow', recorded with Channel 4 newsreader Jon Snow back in the spring. Check out www.myspace.com/suitablecasefortreatment for details.

THE X is filming a number of its Shush Open Mic nights this month for a DVD to be broadcast on MySpace and Youtube. The venue's Tuesday night sessions have been one of the most popular local open nights. Filming takes place on the 5th and 19th December. Each artist gets a two-song set with sets handed out on a first come, first served basis. Artists wanting to be included on the DVD are asked to pay £12 towards the filming costs.

EQUITRUCK returns in January with a full day of live music at the Port Mahon. The mini-festival takes place on Saturday 20th January, starting at 1pm. Bands confirmed are Dusty Sound System, The Epstein, Morrison Steam Fayre, The Quarter Finals, Brother Francisco, Ciccone, The Schla La Las, Prohibition Smokers Club, Rebecca Mosley, David Fulbrook, Trevor Williams and Tristan & The Troubadours. Tickets are on sale now, priced £6, from the Port Mahon or online from wegottickets.com.

PLACE ABOVE reform for the first time in a year for a one-off gig in aid of Rosie's Rainbow Fund. The charity provides music therapy at the John Radcliffe hospital. The emo rockers play at the Zodiac on Friday 15th December, a venue the band sold out last time out. Tickets are on

sale now from the Zodiac ticketline: 0870 771 2000.

SOUNDWORKS Recording Studios in Blackbird Leys have announced the dates for their next Foundation Course in Sound Engineering & Music Technology, starting in February 2007, and there are still a few places available. The course covers the operational skills required for work in recorded and live sound, and gives a grounding in the technical, creative, and practical elements of sound engineering and music technology applications. See www.soundworks-oxford.co.uk for more details.

STEV FEST is looking for bands to play at its charity event on June 23rd next year, in north Oxfordshire. Bands interested can leave their details on the festival site at www.stevfest.co.uk

AS EVER don't forget to tune into The Download on BBC Radio Oxford 95.2fm every Saturday between 6-7pm. The local music show features new songs by local artists as well as interviews, a clubbing guide, Tim Bearder's dubious sense of humour and a local demo section with Nightshift editor Ronan Munro, which is easily the very bestest and funniest bit of the show. The Download is also available to listen to all week at bbc.co.uk/oxford.

A Quiet Word With

FELL CITY GIRL

2006 WILL GO DOWN AS ONE of the most important years in Oxford music. The current crop of local bands is the strongest – and most diverse – since Radiohead and Supergrass first rose to prominence. Just look at what we've got: The Young Knives, Youthmovie Soundtrack Strategies, Winnebago Deal, Belarus, Foals, Ivy's Itch, Xmas Lights, and of course Fell City Girl.

Two years ago Nightshift heralded Fell City Girl as the best new band in town. Since then they've never once looked like letting us down. Last year they hit us with debut single 'Weaker Light', which topped our end of year Top 20; they stole the show at Truck Festival and played the Carling Weekend Reading and Leeds Festivals. This year they hit even greater heights, signing to Lavolta Records and releasing two astounding EPs, 'Swim' and 'February Snow', and playing a series of sold-out shows at the Zodiac, each a stadium-sized homecoming triumph in miniature.

This month Fell City joined a select group of bands to top our end of year hit parade more than once (Radiohead and The Young Knives being the only others) and the first to top it two years running. Just as The Young Knives took the sound of young Oxford to the masses in 2006, so 2007 looks ever more likely to be the year Fell City Girl follow suit.

FELL CITY GIRL ARE A BAND who can restore your faith in guitar music. While comparisons to the likes of Snow Patrol and Muse are not without foundation – in particular singer Phil McMinn's lyrical imagery, all romantic snowy landscapes and sweet sorrow – their roots lie closer to Echo & The Bunnymen, Ride, Sigur Ros and Cocteau Twins – Joe Gibbons' delicate guitar twinkle swept off its feet as songs soar skywards, bridging the divide between shoegazing introspection and heroically epic rock and roll. The most remarkable element of the band's recent live shows is hearing the crowd singing along to all but the very newest songs, as if Fell



City Girl were already performing their greatest hits. The band have an entire set of anthems in waiting. 'Send In The Angels' was the song we picked as our Number 1 this year but it could have been any one from half a dozen. Certainly 'Swim' was one of the most ambitious and unselfconsciously grandiose collection of songs we've encountered this year.

NIGHTSHIFT CAUGHT UP with Phil just after Fell City Girl finished yet another round of live dates in support of 'February Snow', he, along with Joe, bassist Adam Drake and drummer James 'Shrek' Pamphilon juggling the demands of touring and maintaining jobs that will pay the rent as they pay their musical dues, steadily building up a following of fans who are prepared to travel the country

to see every gig.

How was 2006 for you?

"Massively up and massively down to be honest, on a band level and a personal level. It was a bit calmer at the beginning and then 'Swim' came out. We toured it at a time when I was in a bit of a weird place about us as a band and that kind of impacted on that tour a bit, but by the end of the 'February Snow' tour this year we've never really been happier. We've learnt so much about being in a band it's unreal."

What was the main highlight and any lowlight?

"The main highlights were the Zodiac shows. I was absolutely the happiest I've been onstage - we haven't had much national press on the scale of things but we sold the upstairs out three times in a year, which I'm super proud of.

Recording 'February Snow'... the XFM session... Radio 2 airplay... 200 people turning up at the Virgin Records instore gig... Cornbury Festival... playing acoustically on my own in front of a massively over-sold Zodiac with the Cooper Temple Clause... So many!

"Lowlights were perhaps how some people have perceived Fell City Girl - anyone who knows us knows we're about as far away from the world of Snow Patrol and the like as we could possibly be but some massively incompetent journalists don't want to look past an A-side and that was a bit frustrating."

How did it feel at the last Zodiac show with so many people singing along to the songs?

"Amazing. The crowd absolutely ruled and made us feel worthy. That took a month to sink in and when it did there were a few tears!"

'SEND IN THE ANGELS' IS Nightshift's Number 1 song of the year, beating The Young Knives' 'She's Attracted To' and Thom Yorke's 'Black Swan'; what are Phil's feelings about that, and about becoming the first band ever to top the list two years running – chances of completing the hat-trick in 2007?

"Of course we're flattered! Thom Yorke's record was really great; it took a while but I still go back to it. I served him once at work and he got a bit cross with me for fucking up his card transaction, so I wouldn't want him to worry - we know who the real genius is. We have some really, really good new material that we've been banding around so I'd like to think we could stake our claim to the hat trick."

This year was the year The Young Knives really broke through into the mainstream; is there a feeling that 2007 will be Fell City Girl's year to do the same?

"Perhaps. But the initial frustrations we've had about not conquering the world overnight have died down - we're very out of sync with the current wave of bands, and I wouldn't have it any other way. It matters to us that we just put out what we feel is right now. The rest of the world will

catch on eventually! Label wise – we’re doing another EP February or March time on Lavolta. We have a couple of the songs for it finished and already I’m way too over-excited about it. It pisses on our last two EPs already. Who knows what then.”

Which other Oxford bands would you most like to see following you into the limelight?

“Always – The Half Rabbits. It’s the same answer every time. They’re one of the few bands who aren’t hitching a ride on the back of some new movement in the hope the NME picks up on them. I feel like a proud dad watching them. Other than that I’ve spent all year playing Fell City Girl shows so I haven’t wanted to go to any other gigs on my days off.”

IN A RECENT CONVERSATION

at the Zodiac Phil said he felt Fell City Girl were at odds with the prevailing guitar music mainstream. You can see his point: their romantic soul, the existentialism that lurks at the heart of everything from ‘Weaker Light’ to ‘Helplines’, has little in common with the trivial documentary style of so many current British indie bands. What does he feel about bands like Kooks et al? Which bands around at the moment would he feel most, or any, kinship with?

“All those bands that are successful at the moment serve a purpose, you know? The Kooks don’t relate to my world. I work 30 hours a week on top of doing Fell City. The one requirement I have of music I listen to is not to remind me of work, or of Great Britain. I have to be taken somewhere else that isn’t real – hence those words like ‘cerebral and ‘soaring’ that get applied to us – it’s obvious but it’s escapism. I would say we have some kinship with 99 percent of bands that are touring as hard as possible, without much money behind them, all the while skipping out of work or begging people to pay your bills for you in order to keep going. We played some shows with Dartz! and a band called New Cassettes who sonically sound nothing like us, but I feel we all know what it’s really like to be in a band.”

SIGNED TO INDEPENDENT

label Lavolta, Fell City Girl’s releases thus far have been limited edition affairs, with only 500 copies of each EP pressed: EPs that are sure to become collectors’ items in the future as their name becomes better known. Is there an

acceptance that when things do really take off for the band, they’ll have to re-release songs like ‘Weaker Light’ and ‘February Snow’ or have they got a stock of new stuff saved up for release?

“Yes of course – both those releases have had massively limited releases – 500 CDs of both, so that doesn’t bother me, other than a hardcore few who might get a bit pissed off. They’ll get fully released in time but the beauty of signing a small deal with a small label is there isn’t this pressure to do that straight away, hence we’ve had a chance to learn what works and what doesn’t.”

When you first formed the band and began to play gigs, where did you realistically expect it to go? How far do you think you can go from here?

“I don’t know where I expected it to go but playing in a band brings all sorts of different versions of success – the most ‘successful’ I’ve ever felt in Fell City Girl was when I demo-ed an unreleased song called ‘The Day Matilda Solved The World’ that hardly anyone has heard but I felt somehow like I’d achieved something massive, without anyone else approving. Having said that, we want this music to touch as many people as possible, or why bother? And I think it will, it’ll just take a long time due to the nature of the industry right now. We’ll never stop, we love it way, way too much, and our ambition musically is pretty far fetched.”

What advice would you give to a young, aspiring Oxford band just starting out now, hoping to emulate your achievements so far?

“Remember why you started a band in the first place. That’s something I’ve had to learn this year – make the music you want to make and that’s all you can ever do. Oh, and most reviews are usually wrong. Ha!”

Yeah well, you can believe him or you can believe us: we’ll not repeat the superlatives we’ve aimed at the band in recent months, lest we make the poor lad blush. Instead we’ll simply state that Fell City Girl are an incredible band. Their place at rock’s top table is reserved; now they’re on their way to claim it.

‘February Snow’ is out now on Lavolta. Fell City Girl support The Delays at the Zodiac on Tuesday 19th December. Check out www.myspace.com/fellcitygirl for news and live dates.



December

Every Monday

THE FAMOUS MONDAY NIGHT BLUES

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4th **PETE BROWN & THE INTEROCETERS** (UK)

11th **GILES HEDLEY & THE AVIATORS** (UK)

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Friday 1st **i-Magazine launch party** - Oxford's

Delicious new lifestyle magazine. With **GREEN ONIONS** (UK Blues Brothers Tribute) 7pm £5

Saturdays

2nd **SIMPLE** – Funky House with Erol Arkan plus residents. 9-4am

9th **WALK ON THE WILD SIDE 2** – Oxfam Fundraiser with live bands plus DJs Kevin Mulhaney & Aiden Larkin. 9-3am

16th **OX4** – Drum'n'Bass 9-3am

23rd **ROADRUNNER with PAMA INTERNATIONAL** (Ska, rocksteady and soul supergroup) 9-3am Tickets on sale from Bully and Polar Bear, £8.50 adv.

Sundays

3rd **LIVE STAND-UP COMEDY** with **REGINALD D HUNTER + JAMES DOWDESWELL** plus compere SILKY. 8-11pm; £7 (£6 students)

10th **MORANG FINDLAY** (from Canada) + **MARIA ILETT**

17th **THE RUINS + THE REVS + IDEA MOTION.** 8-11pm £4

NEW YEAR'S EVE

BARN'S COURT REUNION 9-3am

Coming Up

Sat 27th January

HOMESPUN featuring DAVE ROTHERY

(Beautiful South) and **SAM BROWN**

Tickets on sale now from The Bully - £10.

TRACKS OF OUR YEAR

Each and every year since we've been documenting the Oxford music scene we've compiled our end of year Top 20, but never has it been such a close-run thing for top spot as this. 2006 may have been The Young Knives' year of triumph, moving above and beyond their stature of local rock heroes to become one of the most lauded young bands in the country, but it says so much about local music that Fell City Girl can nick pole position. Two bands of quite spectacular talent, both from very different sides of the musical coin, but equally destined for great things. Looking beyond these two the field is strong and diverse. Fell City Girl now become one of only three bands to top out Top 20 more than once, Radiohead and The Young Knives being the others, and the first to do so in consecutive years. Anyway, here's this year's essential list. You can disagree if you want. But you'll be wrong.



1. FELL CITY GIRL: 'Send In The Angels'

Bettering last year's debut single, 'Weaker Light', was always going to be a Herculean task but when Fell City Girl's 'Swim' EP hit the Nightshift stereo back in May jaws dropped and hearts leaped with unrestrained joy. Here was a band who understood that guitars could be used as tools for something greater than simply hacking out lumps of indie rock. Four superlative tracks harked back to the days of Cocteau Twins and Echo & The Bunnymen, but also to the more ethereal side of 90s alternative rock – Ride and Slowdive. Atop all this was Phil McMinn's cracked, emotive voice, alternately soaring and plaintive. Pick any one of four and you've got a classic. 'Send In The Angels' is our personal favourite. And to think they're able to simply tuck songs like this away in the middle of a limited edition EP. If it wasn't so damn great, it'd almost be a crime.

2. THE YOUNG KNIVES: 'She's Attracted To'

2006 was the year The Young Knives fulfilled every ounce of expectation Oxford had held for them and, like Fell City Girl, you could have picked one of half a dozen oddly-shaped pop gems from their album, 'Voices Of Animals And Men', to perch atop this pile. This brazen slab of virulent new wave madness steals ahead of 'Here Comes the Rumour Mill' for conjuring up the delicious image of Henry Darnell scrapping with a future father-in-law under the porch light. "Who are these people? They are too stupid to be your real parents" he snarls before the song careers to its barking conclusion of 'You were screaming at your mum and I was punching

your dad". Less of a pop song, more an impulse smack in the teeth. There's simply no point trying to reason with great music when it's in this mood.

3. XMAS LIGHTS: 'Threat Level Is Orange'

When metal has over-mined every conceivable seam of originality, it's time to create exotic new alloys. Initially a local supergroup, formed by various members of Vena Cava, Near Life Experience and Outofinto, plus local electronics warlock Umair Chaudhry, Xmas Lights became so much more than the sum of their parts with this immense, sprawling epic, mixing up equal parts Tool, Earth, Trans Am, Skinny Puppy, Eno and Wagner: an unholy, atmosphere-heavy

journey into symphonic hardcore that rises like a tide over the course of fifteen minutes into a raging storm with a Terminator-like heartbeat. Awesome is the only word that does it justice.

4. THOM YORKE: 'Black Swan'

Thom Yorke's debut solo album is, like recent Radiohead opuses, best listened to as whole, the all-encompassing black mood of 'The Eraser' perfect for these encroaching winter nights. Taken as individual pieces each loses a little context but 'Black Swan' is the torrid soul of the album, Thom opining "This is fucked up" like a reverse self-help mantra, or perhaps a final prayer for the end of days. The bleak highlight of a spectacularly desolate album.

5. REBECCA MOSLEY: 'Queues'

Folky female singer-songwriters are ten-a-penny, but a few rare specimens are worth their weight in gold and with this gorgeously stark campfire lullaby, Rebecca Mosley shows her true value. Rooted in traditional English folk she breezes into more exotic 60s psychedelia, notably Jefferson Airplane, capturing the feeling of loss and isolation that is the modern human condition. Timeless stuff; pure and haunting. Go on then, it's really quite lovely.

6. THE WORKHOUSE: 'Chancers'

For too long The Workhouse have been a musical wonder close to our hearts but overlooked by the world at large. With their second album, 'Flyover', the band's sheer aural beauty is clear to even the most cloth-eared philistine. Here is where guitars shimmer like dying stars and ethereal, orchestral plateaux of noise rise up to drown you in sound. Time to start rebuilding the sonic cathedrals.

7. BELARUS: 'Standing In The Right Place'

Along with Fell City Girl Belarus flew the standard for epic songwriting in Oxfordshire. After changing their name from Spacehopper, 'Standing In The Right Place' was the band's first single, now under the wing of former-Blur manager Andy Ross, and sounds like the kind of stadium-proportioned anthem that could burst the walls of any venue they fill. From slight, acoustic beginnings to its bombastic finale, they find the perfect meeting ground between Keane and Feeder. Bigger things are sure to follow.

8. FOALS: 'Try This On Your Piano'

Having re-invented themselves somewhat since this debut release back in May, Foals have entered a new world of disco-fied post-punk and rhythmically complex guitar pop; 'Try This...', meanwhile, is the sound of a fax machine trying to seduce a computer – scattershot sequencer pulses and jittery jazz-inflected flourishes, like the musical equivalent of a disturbed ants nest.

9. HARRY ANGEL: 'Watching Her Drown'

Gawd bless Harry Angel and their unquenchable thirst for pop fizz. The lead track from recent EP 'You Are Your Own Disease', here are grunged-up guitars that have no concept of gear change, let alone where the brake pedal might be. Instead they head full-pelt for the horizon in an amphetamine-fuelled rush to reach the end, there to explode in a ball of feedback and superfuzz froth.





10. IVY'S ITCH: 'Roses'

Possessed of a voice that alternately sounds like hell vomiting up its breakfast, or a child's ghost whispering for its mother, Eliza Gregory is one of Oxford's most startling vocal talents and now backed by a band able to fully complement her, including Suitable Case's Jimmy Hetherington and former Death By Crimpers bassist Jo Reid, Ivy's Itch are making their best music yet, including this recent single, a bi-polar aural exorcism that opens a window onto a whole mental ward of nightmares.

11. WITCHES: 'In The Chaos Of A Friday Night'

A Bo Diddley guitar rhythm, Mariachi trumpets, a plaintive country lament and finally a squalling, chaotic climax that sounds like a punch-up at a Mexican wedding: Witches – led by former-Eeeblee frontman Dave Griffiths – signalled their arrival in some style, effortlessly defying easy categorisation and showing off a band willing and able to touch more bases than the American airforce.

12. SUITABLE CASE FOR TREATMENT: 'Cow'

The cheek of it – Oxford's most inventively awkward rockers recruit sternly benevolent Channel 4 newsreader Jon Snow for a one-off download single, reading a Jabberwocky-style piece of nonsense poetry over the band's uncharacteristically mellow and spaced-out psychedelia. Next thing you know, they're on The Richard & Judy Show. Stranger things may have happened, but only in Philip K Dick novels.

13. FAMILY MACHINE: 'Flowers By The Roadside'

"Don't leave me flowers by the roadside / It's not the place I loved, it's just the place I died", croaks Jamie Hyatt over a jaunty country trot, instantly cutting to the essence of Family Machine – darkly humorous life observations and an almost casual knack of penning irresistible pop nuggets.

14. ZUBY: 'Start All Over'

Unusual even by Oxford's hip hop standards, University student Zuby eschews the lo-fi sounds of local contemporaries in favour of a slicker rapping style, akin to Jay-Z and Nas, fluid and accomplished and backed by simple but full-bodied samples. 'Start All Over' is the highlight of his debut album, 'Commercial Underground', as fresh as any aspiring teenage UK rapper could hope to be.

15. SUNNYVALE NOISE SUB-ELEMENT: 'I Love You Every Time You Smile'

Brutal, grating, musically confrontational – one thing Sunnyvale are rarely accused of is being tuneful, but here's evidence to the contrary, probably the band's most melodic effort to date, a rhythmically-powerful mash up of splintered post-hardcore guitars and crunching electronics, like The Normal in a bust-up with Shellac.

16. THE JOFF WINKS BAND: 'Juniper'

The superior b-side to Joff's somewhat lachrymose single 'Share My Blues', 'Juniper' bobbled with a stoned hippy pop vibe, Supergrass' pastoral reflection jazzed up by Steely Dan, the whole thing filled with nonchalant 60s folk-pop and rising on a softly circling keyboard riff. We reckon Joff's the new Donovan.

17. NINE-STONE COWBOY: 'Closer'

While the world descended into war, former-Candyskins guitarist Mark Cope delivered very different take on the Middle East crises, here dealing tenderly with the subject of a young suicide bomber on a tube train – his mind in turmoil as he spots a pretty girl and wonders

what might be. A sweet, simple ballad with no judgement passed; it's a classic love song with a brilliantly tragic twist.

18. WINNEBAGO DEAL: 'Venomised'

Winnebago Deal's third album, 'Flight Of The Raven', packed few surprises but never needed them, simply and uncompromisingly reinforcing the duo's strengths – straight-ahead hardcore stoner garage punk metal, all whisky-sodden knife fights and fuel-injected highway burn-outs. This sludgy molten guitar work-out, topped by Ben P's lava-gargling growl, reminiscent of the mighty Killdozer, was the album's punishing highlight.

19. MARY'S GARDEN: 'Mary's Garden'

Just why goth should be a dirty word in this day and age is anyone's guess when bands like Mary's Garden can make it sound as cool as this: a moody barnstormer that billows up from its lullaby beginnings over an epic seven minutes, full of pomp and portent and led by Laima Bite's wonderfully exotic Grace Slick-meets-Sinead O'Connor growl.

20. HALF RABBITS: 'These Rumours'

More gothic goings on with the decidedly dark Half Rabbits, perennial favourites on the local live scene, mining a rich seam of 80s-styled post-punk, notably The Chameleons and Sisters Of Mercy. They're an uptight storm of fuzzy, hollowed-out noise and this single, released at the end of the summer, just in time for the cold, dark autumn nights, hit the (coffin) nail squarely on the head.



LEST WE FORGET...

2005

1. FELL CITY GIRL: 'Weaker Light'
2. HARRY ANGEL: 'Death Valley Of The Dolls'
3. THE YOUNG KNIVES: 'Coastguard'
4. THE RELATIONSHIPS: 'English Blues'
5. THE FACTORY: 'Servant's Hand'

2004

1. THE YOUNG KNIVES: 'The Decsion'
2. LAIMA BITE: 'Did You Used To Love?'
3. SUITABLE CASE FOR TREATMENT: 'Dead Pigeon Teacher'
4. THE EVENINGS: 'I Didn't Remember'
5. WINNEBAGO DEAL: 'Knife Chase'

2003

1. THE ROCK OF TRAVOLTA: 'Everything's Opened Up'
2. SEXY BREAKFAST: 'Fade To White'
3. RADIOHEAD: 'Sail To The Moon'
4. SUITABLE CASE FOR TREATMENT: 'Brand New Loafers'
5. BRIDGE: 'Harvester'

2002

1. THE YOUNG KNIVES: 'Walking On The Autobahn'
2. SUPERGRASS: 'Grace'
3. GOLDRUSH: 'Same Picture'
4. COMA KAI: 'Fury'
5. WINNEBAGO DEAL: 'Whisky Business'

2001

1. RADIOHEAD: 'Pyramid Song'
2. THE ROCK OF TRAVOLTA: 'Lukewarm Skywater'
3. MEANW HILE, BACK IN COMMUNIST RUSSIA: 'Morning After Pill'
4. EEEBLEEE: 'Apologise'
5. GOLDRUSH: 'Love Is Here'

2000

1. NARCO: 'Teen Suicide Explosion'
2. RADIOHEAD: 'The National Anthem'
3. VIGILANCE BLACK SPECIAL: 'Don't Chase Your Demons'
4. UNBELIEVABLE TRUTH: 'Agony'
5. X-1: 'Alpha Male'

RELEASED

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OCTOBER FILE

'Hallowed Be Thy Army'

(Candlelight)

Professing to make music that flies in the face of "indie bands who sound like their mums

packed their guitars for them", October File never come close to reneging on the deal. This is vicious hardcore punk of the first order, born of the loins of Killing Joke, programmed to kill. Fronted by former-Jor shouter Ben Hollyer and featuring Plastic Head supremo Steve Beatty on bass, October File pile on the tom-heavy, sheet-metal guitar-driven relentless noise across three breakneck tracks. And if most of it sounds like it could have been wrenched kicking and screaming off the last couple of Killing Joke albums, all the better. Primary amongst these is 'Friendly Fire', Ben spitting his lines out over one of the most monstrously persistent guitar purges we've heard in years. The whole EP deals with holy war, again a subject much beloved of Jaz Coleman and chums.

Aw hell, just buy this and then spend the rest of the evening playing it at top volume as you break every single piece of furniture in your house. If the neighbours complain, kill them.

Dale Kattack

JUNKIE BRUSH

'Eyeing Up The Enemy'

(Own Label)

Hello punk rock my old friend, I've come to talk with you again, as Simon and Garfunkel



most certainly didn't say. But punk rock in its classic British form is like an old friend who you used to have a laugh and a few scrapes with but whose number you've lost, so you end up hanging around with Chardonnay-drinking work colleagues whose idea of rebellion is using their mobile whilst driving. Always welcome, then, to hear Junkie Brush, keepers of the flame and a band with a neat line in expletive-ridden lyrics and songs about state surveillance. The spiky, melodic thrash and phased vocals of 'So Fucking Me' initially promise The Rezillos and The Adverts but the bull-necked aggro side of Junkie Brush can't keep its mouth shut and from then on we're freewheeling through Anti-Pasti territory, political outlook courtesy of Crass ("How does it feel to have your name on file? If you've done nothing wrong you've got nothing to fear"). They cram five tracks into twelve minutes, rarely let up the pace and even then manage to spend a whole minute making industrial cattle noises. It's like Green Day and Blink 182 never 'appened.

Ian Chesterton

BLUE RAIN

'Love Man'

(Vegastunes)

There is a world of musical thought, alien to us here at Nightshift, that believes that spending years learning how to do clever stuff with expensive guitars, followed by a career wrecking

the lovingly-crafted work of past masters for the dubious enjoyment of ale-swilling philistines of a Saturday night is somehow not a pointless waste of time worthy of a bolt gun in the back of the skull. Here Otis Redding's 'Love Man' is neutered by skilled but shark-eyed musos, all soul scraped out by six-string scalpels. Evil, for all the wrong reasons.

Dale Kattack

SHARRON KRAUS, MEG BAIRD & HELENA ESPVALL 'Leaves From Off The Tree'

(Bo 'Weavil)

Sharron Kraus has making some fascinating music on the fringes of the Oxford scene for over a decade now, mostly on the more gothic side of folk music. In that time she's worked with many of the American music underground's leading lights, and with this latest album she's teamed up with Meg Baird and Helena Espvall from Espers, prime exponents of the new dark folk movement. There is obvious kinship between the trio and the chemistry works a treat as they carve out nine tracks of sombre traditional music with no concession to the last 50 years.

Sharron's most obvious vocal counterpart is near-namesake Alison Krauss and there's a definite bluegrass feel to some tracks here (notably 'John Hardy'), although it's the songs of the Scottish Islands and Highlands and northern England that provide the greatest inspiration. The songs here sound so pure and untarnished by attempts to sound contemporary that they simply wash away all memories of forty years of folk-rock fusion. Occasionally haunting, Sharron's voice dances over the delightfully simple guitar and cello melodies.

'Leaves From Off The Tree' is music from a far off world, but set against so much music in these cynical, over-marketed, over-commercialised times, it sounds fresher than almost anything else around.

Victoria Waterfield



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GIG GUIDE

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FRIDAY 1st

THE MIGHTY ROARS + IMOGENE + ANIMAL MATHS + CHARLOTTE ROSE:

The X, Cowley – Top-notch night of noisemaking with London's Mighty Roars cutting it up in the vein of Elastica and Pixies and now signed to One Little Indian Records. LA's Imogene mix up psychedelia and narcotic blues pop in a way they describe, quite accurately, as Pink Sabbath, while Animal Maths create a rawer brand of stoner garage blues.

Monday 4th

JOAN AS POLICE

WOMAN: The Zodiac

What's this, a new lounge music revival? Seems like it as, following in the wake of Anthony & The Johnsons and Bat For Lashes, here comes New York's Joan Wasser, going under the name Joan As Police Woman. Having already worked live and in the studio with Nick Cave, Rufus Wainwright and Anthony (who duets with Joan on the track 'I Defy' on debut album 'Real Life'), she now makes her own way in musical life, already drawing praise from Elton John and Scissor Sisters. No surprise really, she's got a sublime voice, sweetly soulful with an emotive jazz heart, akin to Nina Simone with just a hint of Dusty Springfield. 'Real Life' breathes life into spectral, almost funereal jazz torch songs. As well as possessing a beautiful voice, Joan's a pretty mean pianist and violin player and these instruments dominate proceedings. While you feel she'd make for perfect cocktail accompaniment, there's enough darkness and tampering with traditional arrangements to make for some gently unsettling listening.



DECEMBER

LITTLE MAN TATE: The Zodiac – More post-Arctic Monkeys indie punk rocking from Sheffield neighbours Little Man Tate, following a similar line of simple, frantic guitar pop and lyrical swagger, tipping their musical hats to The Jam and Pulp along the way. Recent single 'Man I Hate Your Band' is a cracker.

GREEN ONIONS: The Bullingdon – Launch party for new local lifestyle magazine 'i' with UK Blues Brothers tribute act Green Onions, plus DJs.

OXFORD FOLK CLUB OPEN NIGHT:

The Port Mahon

BANDS & SINGERS NIGHT: The Victoria, Jericho

FRIDAY FOOD: The Market Tavern (12pm) – Lunchtime live music from the Sunday Steamer people: two quid gets you a selection of local acoustic acts, plus a bowl of soup and a roll. C'mon! What's not to like?

BREAKBEAT with DJ SHAKER: The Market Tavern

BEAT ROOT: East Oxford Community Centre – Hip hop, drum&bass and dancehall mash-up.

SATURDAY 2nd

ALLY CRAIG + GULLIVERS + VON BRAUN: The X, Cowley – Occasionally sublime singer-songwriter fare from Ally, finding the meeting point between Jeff Buckley and Sonic Youth. Bicester indie punkers The Gullivers support.

STORNOWAY + ANNA LOG + THE CONSCRIPTS + LITTLE

COSMONAUTS: The Port Mahon – Lovely, gentle-natured folk-pop melancholy from Stornoway.

FUTURE OF THE LEFT + THE HALF RABBITS + ONIONS FOR EYES + THEO: The Wheatsheaf – Former-McLusky frontman Andy Falkous, one of the UK's great underrated songwriters, returns with his new band, teaming up with one-time Jarcrew drummer Jack Eagleton and continuing his journey into south Wales darkness, coming on like a Southern Baptist Big Black along the way. Local new wave-inspired gothsters Half Rabbits provide support, along with experimental newcomer Theo, mixing guitar loops with live drumming in the style of Ill Ease.

BARRY & THE BEACHCOMBERS + SUBMERSE + MARK BOSLEY + NUGGET: The King's Head & Bell,

Abingdon – Skittle Alley unplugged music night with wacky punkers B&TB headlining.

THE DRUG SQUAD + JC's DIGITAL KITCHEN + FRIENDS OF BENEFIT: The Market Tavern – Upbeat ska-punk from The Drug Squad, plus support, at tonight's Delicious Music session.

SIMPLE: The Bullingdon – Funky house with Erol Arkan plus resident DJs.

WHEATLEY PARK SCHOOL SOUL BAND + MR CHILLOUT + RISING STARS + HAWKS AND DOVES + LIZARD + DAVID GILL: Risinghurst Community Centre – Benefit gig for the Oxford Transplant Trust with local bands, singers and poets.

STRANGE VINTAGE + LEOPARDSKIN: The General Elliot, Hinksey

SUNDAY 3rd

FRANCOIS + HOLIDAY IN VIETNAM + SLEEPING STATES + ROXANNE: THE EARLY YEARS: The Port Mahon – Lo-fi indie rocking from France's Francois, plus support from improv mentalists Holiday In Vietnam, experimental lo-fi folk from Sleeping States and local songwriter Roxanne: The Early Years.

ELECTRIC JAM: The X, Cowley – Jam along with the in-house band, The X Men.

DELICIOUS MUSIC OPEN JAM SESSION: The Music Market

MONDAY 4th

PETE BROWN + THE INTEROCETERS:

The Bullingdon – One-time stalwart of the Harvest Label (home too to Syd Barrett) and collaborative lyricist with Cream in the 60s singer, percussionist and trumpet-player Pete runs through tracks from his 40-year career, including his time with 70s cult act Piblokto! from 60s beat pop, through blues and jazz.

JOAN AS POLICEWOMAN: The Zodiac – Dark'n'sweet lounge jazz siren – *see main preview*

PINK MARINES: The Port Mahon – Frantic trash punk in a Ramones and Misfits vein.

WATERSON: CARTHY: Nettlebed Folk Club – The Royal Family of English folk return.

TUESDAY 5th

THE HUMAN LEAGUE: The New Theatre – Synth-pop legends bring their peerless greatest hits to town – *see main preview*

THE DAMNED: The Zodiac – Dave Vanian, Captain Sensible and chums bring their horror-punk hits and more back to the Zodiac.

JAZZ CLUB with ALVIN ROY: The Bullingdon – The Bully's weekly jazz club night hosts local artist Alvin Roy tonight.



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SHUSH OPEN MIC SESSION: The X, Cowley – Weekly all-comers night.

JOE ALLEN & ANGHARAD

JENKINS: The Port Mahon –

Contemplative Bright-Eyes-influenced acoustic pop from Brookes student Joe Allen with backing from local violinist Angharad Jenkins.

ACOUSTIC OPEN MIC SESSION:

The Hobgoblin, Bicester

DELICIOUS MUSIC JAZZ SESSION:

Bar Milano, Pizza Express – With Eddie Thompson and Pawel Kuterba.

WEDNESDAY 6th

THE PLAUDITS + JAMES BELL +

GLENDIA HUISH: The Port Mahon –

Local bands night featuring former Jod and Counter Zero frontman Jeremy Leggett's new band, The Plaudits, plus Phyal singer Glendia Huish.

SHIRLEY + ADORE: The Wheatsheaf

– Bouncetastic 60s pop with a sweet Latin twist from Shirley.

FOLK SESSION: The X, Cowley – Weekly trad folk session.

OPEN MIC SESSION: Marlborough House – Weekly session with prize for the best act on the night.

CORNERSTONE MUZIK: East

Oxford Community Centre – Roots reggae session with DJs Nico and Baps.

THURSDAY 7th

THE BLOOD ARM + HEY

WILLPOWER: The Zodiac – LA new wavers very much on the up, in no small part due to the patronage of both The Stokes and Franz Ferdinand, as well as having supported both Killers and We Are Scientists on tour. They tick plenty of the post-punk boxes (The Fall, XTC), but instead of the usual sharp-elbowed guitar attack they let the piano lead the way, giving them a lurching, slightly drunken feel, even as they stab out rocking anthems like 'Suspicious Character'.

SABOTAGE: The Zodiac – Weekly rock club night spinning the best new metal, punk, hardcore and alternative sounds.

PORT MAYHEM with

RAGGASAURUS + THE TREAT: The

Port Mahon – Reggae with a North African flavour from Raggasaurus plus 60s-influenced acoustic rock from The Treat.

OXFORD UNIVERSITY JAZZ

SOCIETY NIGHT: The Market Tavern

JOE McCANN + JOHN KESTON-HOLE + JJ SOUL + BOB LLOYD + MICK HENRY + ECLIPSE: The X, Cowley – Assorted local songwriters team up for a benefit night for Amnesty International.

WITCHES + THEY DON'T SLEEP + HER NAME IS CALLA: The Cellar – Esoteric rocking from Witches, blending electronica, alt.country, Velvets-inspired rock and Mariachi trumpets, plus Leicester's Her Name Is Calla, an intriguing blend of melancholic folk and proggy rock.

THE EPSTEIN: QI Club – Country rocking in a Flying Burrito Brothers vein from the local favourites.

CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford

Community Centre

OPEN MIC NIGHT: The Half Moon

FRIDAY 8th

GAMMY LEG PRODUCTIONS with KING FURNACE + SCHMOOF +

BABY GRAVY: The X, Cowley –

Eclectic bill at tonight's GLP club night, including local funk-metallers King Furnace, cool, kitsch synth-pop duo Schmoof and oddball jazz-punk starlets Baby Gravy.

OXFORD FOLK CLUB with VICKI

SWAN & JONNY DYER: The Port Mahon

QUICKFIX presents HARRY ANGEL + BEELZEBOZO + ACTION & ACTION

+ TOY #1: The Wheatsheaf – Searing grunge-pop from Harry Angel, certainly one of the best local live bands around, plus doomy metal grinding from Beelzebozo.

SILENT NIGHT SILENT DISCO: The

Zodiac – No DJ and DJ OD bring their wireless headphone club night to the Zodiac after its success at Glastonbury and Glade Festivals. You get your headphones, they play the records. You no longer need to communicate with your fellow clubbers. It's just like staying at home with your iPod, except they get to pick the tunes, not you. Tis the future.

BANDS & SINGERS NIGHT: The Victoria, Jericho

BACKROOM BOOGIE: The

Bullingdon

FRIDAY FOOD: The Market Tavern (12pm)

ACOUSTIC NIGHT: The Market Tavern

MISH MASH: East Oxford

Community Centre

MARK BOSLEY: Witney Utd FC –

Dark folky-pop from the local singer.

SATURDAY 9th

VASHTI BUNYAN + GOLDRUSH Vs

PEDRO + THE EPSTEIN + KTB: The

Zodiac (upstairs) – English folk's lost princess returns to her Oxford roots – *see main preview*

PETER, BJÖRN & JOHN + LAAKS:

The Zodiac – Gentle-natured Swedish pop types easily mistaken for Peter, Paul and Mary, but closer in spirit to The Beta band and Crowded House, mixing sweet, unassuming folky-pop with hazy psychedelia.

UNITING THE ELEMENTS: The X,

Cowley – Energetic Euro-rocking action from the ever-touring Germans.

HOOLIGAN SWAMP +

SKULLTHRASH + MANTUS + SKY

BABIES: The Wheatsheaf – Described as "a cock-rock feast" by the promoter, which sounds yummy, scrummy. Local heavy rockers Skullthrash and Mantus add a stoner-metal element to proceedings.

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Wed 6th KARAOKE 8.30pm FREE ENTRY

Thu 7th OXFORD UNI JAZZ SOCIETY 8pm, FREE

Fri 8th LIVE ACOUSTIC GIG - Details TBC 8.30pm

Tue 12th ART-IN-THE-PUB 8.30pm £2

Wed 13th KARAOKE 8.30pm FREE ENTRY

Thu 14th OXFORD UNI JAZZ SOCIETY 8pm, FREE

Fri 15th DEADBEAT SOUNDS presents THE DOMES OF SILENCE / MONDO CADA / SAVAGE HENRY / THE 32 8PM, £4

Tue 19th DMR TUESDAY BLUES 8pm, £4

Wed 20th KARAOKE 8.30pm FREE ENTRY

Thu 21st POLITAN / REMOTE CONTROL KID 8.30pm, £4

Sat 23rd SATURDAY SOUP The Christmas edition of Friday Food! Acoustic sets throughout the day from 12, £2



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Tuesday 5th

HUMAN LEAGUE: The New Theatre

Quite simply one of the greatest pop bands planet earth has spawned, The Human League are, incredibly, well on their way to being 30 years old as a band. Saying that, they're a very different outfit from the hissing, spitting experimental electronic quartet that emerged from Sheffield in the late-70s, when singer Phil Oakey joined Ian Craig Marsh and Martyn Ware (later to form Heaven 17) and projectionist Adrian Wright to produce seminal albums like 'Reproduction' and the epoch-making single 'Being Boiled'. After the original line-up split, Oakey kept the band name, recruited a new band and two backing singers, Joanne Catherall and Susan Sulley, and 'Dare' was released, still, 25 years on, an astonishing synth-pop album. A dozen Top 20 hits, including immortal Number 1 'Don't You Want Me', have cemented the band's reputation and as the 80s pop revival continues apace The Human League's standing shows no sign of waning. Last month they played to 16,000 people at the Hollywood Bowl and this latest UK tour should be as much about introducing a new generation to their pure pop genius as an exercise in nostalgia for older fans. Expect all the big hits and the odd unexpected lost gem.

MARK CROZER: The Port Mahon – Local songsmith taking inspiration from The Jesus and Mary Chain, Jeff Buckley, Ride, The Smiths and more.



WEDNESDAY'S CHILD + MOOCHER + FULL METAL WAISTCOAT: The Market Tavern – Delicious Music local bands night.
WALK ON THE WILD SIDE II: The Bullingdon – Benefit gig for Oxfam featuring bands, to be confirmed, plus funk, soul and reggae from DJs Aidan Larkin, The Spiralist's Jason King and Black Jack Tabac's Seedi Jarvis.

REGGAE REMEDY: East Oxford Community Centre – Sir Sambo, Trenchtown Rockers and King Elijah compete for the Oxford Revival Cup as part of the East Oxford Community Centre Music Equipment Fund.

MARK BOSLEY: The Magic Café (1pm)

SUNDAY 10th

CATO STREET CONSPIRACY + OUR OWN DEVICES + THE SIEGFRIED SASSOON + RATFACE: The Port Mahon – Swiss Concrete promotion featuring anthemic, sloganeering punk band Cato Street Conspiracy, abrasive Shellac-meets-Million Dead hardcore noise from Our Own Devices, twisted post-rock from Surrey's The Siegfried Sassoon and uptight post-hardcore noise from Ratface.

MEN, WOMEN & CHILDREN: The Zodiac – Unexpected electro-disco project from former-Glassjaw guitarist Todd Weinstick, spreading the gospel of Prince, Earth, Wind and Fire and Devo to the emo masses; last seen at the Zodiac supporting Panic! At The Disco.

THE TALC DEMONS + JESSICA GOYDEN + SAM POPE & ELISE DARCHIS: The X, Cowley
MORGAN FINDLAY + MARIA ILETT: The Bullingdon – Canadian singer-songwriter with support from local electro-acoustic songstress Maria Ilett.

DELICIOUS MUSIC OPEN JAM SESSION: The Music Market

MONDAY 11th

GILES HEDLEY & THE AVIATORS: The Bullingdon – Midlands-based guitarist, singer and harmonica player and UK blues veteran with a career going back to the 60s. Long-standing favourite on the European blues festival scene, Hedley's rootsy slide and bottleneck guitar playing, along with his simultaneous mouth and nose harp playing draws on traditional Delta and Chicago blues, but given a funky edge by jazz-styled bassist Richard Sadler.

UISEDWR: Nettlebed Folk Club

TUESDAY 12th

MELVINS: The Zodiac – Ultra-heavy hardcore behemoths keep it slow and nasty – *see main preview*

JAZZ CLUB with THE TOM GREY

QUINTET: The Bullingdon

THE TWIZZ TWANGLE BAND + THE NEW MOON + JEREMY HUGHES: The Port Mahon – Weirdo pop craziness from maverick local genius Twizz, plus acoustic surrealism from The New Moon.

SHUSH OPEN MIC SESSION: The X, Cowley

DELICIOUS MUSIC JAZZ SESSION: Bar Milano, Pizza Express – With Latin guitar duo Los Hombres.

WEDNESDAY 13th

FOLK SESSION: The X, Cowley
MILES DOUBLEDAY & MALCOLM ATKINS: The Port Mahon – Oxford Improvisers night, featuring two of the Improvising Orchestra's leading lights.
OPEN MIC SESSION: Marlborough House

ARAWAK: East Oxford Community Centre – Roots and dub mix with Addis Ababa sound mix.

THURSDAY 14th

SKINDRED + DUB TRIO: The Zodiac – South Wales' party-friendly hardcore dub metallers return to town after their impressive showing at this summer's Truck Festival. Enigmatic frontman Benji Webbe is the alternately genial and ferocious host, toasting and roaring over the molten metal riffs.
SABOTAGE: The Zodiac

Saturday 9th

VASHTI BUNYAN: The Zodiac

Vashti Bunyan's must be one of the most remarkable stories in music: after a failed pop career mentored by Andrew Loog Oldham in the 60s, she and her husband travelled by horse-drawn wagon to Skye to join a commune started up by Donovan; she wrote her debut album along the way. 'Just Another Diamond Day' was dismissed by critics and peers and Vashti gave up on music for three decades, raising a family and living a traveller's life. When she finally entered the modern world and bought a PC she Googled her name and found 'Diamond Day' fetching £900 on ebay and a cult following around the world. Amongst that following were nu-folk pioneers Devendra Banhart and Joanna Newsome who helped her record her long-overdue follow-up, 2005's 'Lookaftering'. Musically time hasn't changed her at all: the tremulous, wistful and ultra-simple folk lullabies are still there, Vashti's ethereal, almost medieval voice still a stunning instrument in itself. Of course, her songs are now being used to flog mobile phones on telly so she's obviously no longer misunderstood. Tonight is her first Oxford gig since she lived here in the 60s and it's bound to sell out. Support comes from Goldrush who team up with local electronic artist Pedro, plus The Epstein and KTB.



DUBWISER: The Port Mahon – Low-key gig for the longstanding local reggae favourites.

OXFORD UNIVERSITY JAZZ

SOCIETY NIGHT: The Market Tavern

DIRTY SCI-FI + KNIVES + TWAT

TROT TRA LA: The Cellar – Epic goth rocking from Dirty Sci-Fi, plus experimental noise from Twat Trot Tra La.

PAT FISH + THE NEW MOON: QI Club – The man sometimes known as The Jazz Butcher returns to his old manor, still knocking out some sublime 60s-inspired pop noise, plus local acoustic duo The New Moon.

CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre

OPEN MIC NIGHT: The Half Moon

FRIDAY 15th

THE ROCK OF TRAVOLTA + PHYAL + SUNNYVALE NOISE SUB-ELEMENT + SPACE HEROES OF THE PEOPLE + HYBRID FORM + THE DELTA FREQUENCY: The X – Excellent local bands bill at tonight's Grinning Spider club night. The mighty Rock crank up the space-age synth-core again to spectacular effect, while Phyal kick out the punk-metal jams, Sunnyvale make with the electro post-rock, Space Heroes cross the experimental electro/krautrock line and The Delta Frequency add a dash of rock theatrics. Unmissable.

DARKEST HOUR + BETWEEN THE BURIED AND ME + MISERY SIGNALS: The Zodiac (upstairs) – Victory Records tour featuring Washington DC's Darkest Hour, mixing up thrash, death-metal and punk into a breakneck ball of fun; support comes from North Carolina's doomy mechanical metallers Between Me & The Buried and Wisconsin's Misery Signals.

PLACE ABOVE + 20/20 VISION + ACCIDENTALLY INNOCENT + THE JAYES: The Zodiac (downstairs) – The local emo youngsters reform for their first gig in a year, previously selling out the Zodiac. Tonight's gig is in aid of the John Radcliffe's music therapy charity, Rosie's Rainbow Fund. Noisy, melodic rocking in the vein of Feeder and 100 Reasons.

DOMES OF SILENCE + MONDO CADA + THIRTY TWO + MANTUS: The Music Market – Darkwave rocking from Domes of Silence, coming in where The Doors meet Depeche Mode, plus pedal-to-the-metal grunge noise from Mondo Cada in a Mudhoney vein.

VACUOUS POP NIGHT: The Wheatsheaf

OXFORD FOLK CLUB OPEN NIGHT: The Port Mahon

BANDS & SINGERS NIGHT: The Victoria, Jericho

FRIDAY FOOD: The Market Tavern (12pm)

BACKROOM BOOGIE: The Bullingdon

THIS IS SKA'D: Witney United FC – Gloucester-based ska band.

THE PETE FRYER BAND + REDOX:

The General Elliot, Hinksey
BEAT ROOT: East Oxford Community Centre

AMOROUS JAZZ: The Magdalen

SATURDAY 16th

DIRTY PRETTY THINGS: Brookes University Union – Carl Barat and his motley bunch of Dickensian indie waifs wash up once again, proving there's life beyond The Libertines.

YOUR SONG: The Zodiac – The annual Christmas celebration of inspired and atrocious cover versions charges its glass once again, this year featuring The Family Machine, Smilex, Mondo Cada, The Keyboard Choir, TV Baby, Fork, The Plaudits and 100 Bullets Back.

INEMO: The Zodiac – Paris-based Nigerian singer and guitarist Inemo Samiama launches his new album, 'Afro Funky Beats', a return to his West African roots after his acclaimed 'Mr Bushman', which mixed up African melodies with techno, jungle, hip hop and dub.

DIVE DIVE + WITCHES: The Wheatsheaf – Oxfordbands.com celebrate Christmas with local pop-punk heroes Dive Dive and glitch-country rockers Witches.

COLLISIONS AND CONSEQUENCES + YOU IN MOTION + NMD: The Market Tavern – Delicious Music's up and coming local bands night.

JOHNNY'S SEXUAL KITCHEN: The Port Mahon – Jazz and blues-tinged rock.
OX4: The Bullingdon – Drum&bass club night.

TREVOR WILLIAMS: The Sweatbox, Wantage – Local acoustic balladeer.

OX:UN & WYRD: East Oxford Community Centre – Drum&bass and breaks night.

BLACK JACK TABAC: The Duke, St Clements – Funk, soul, jazz and 70s rock with DJs Seedie Jarvis and Van Mule.

SUNDAY 17th

PINDROP PERFORMANCE with THE PINDROP CHRISTMAS CHOIR: The Port Mahon (4.30pm) – From plainsong to Bing Crosby from the Pindrop Choir at tonight's Christmas special, plus a celebration of some of the local scene's best songwriters, including performances from Joe Swarbrick and Art House, Seb Reynolds, Oliver Shaw, Simon Davis, Chris Beard and Mark Wilden.

THE RUINS + THE REVS + IDEA MOTION: The Bullingdon – Ride and Smiths-influenced indie rockers out of Abingdon.

ELECTRIC JAM: The X, Cowley
RACHELLE VAN ZANTERN: The Jericho – Funky blues singer and guitarist from Alberta, Canada, currently touring around Europe and earning a healthy reputation for her rootsy slide style and drawing comparisons to Bonnie Raitt and Lucinda Williams. Tonight she's backed by assorted members and ex-members of Goldrush.

Rehearsal Rooms

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DELICIOUS MUSIC OPEN JAM

SESSION: The Music Market

MONDAY 18th

NEVER THE BRIDE: The Bullingdon – The Famous Monday Night Blues club celebrates Christmas with UK blues-rock favourites Never The Bride, featuring asbestos-lunged frontwoman Nikki Lambourn, likened to Tina Turner and Janis Joplin and rated as Britain's finest female blues singer by Roger Daltrey amongst others; power-rocking back-up from her band in the style of Heart.

ST. AGNES FOUNTAIN: Nettlebed Folk Club

TUESDAY 19th

DELAYS + FELL CITY GIRL: The Zodiac – Rising south coast indie stars play a warm-up gig for their Southampton Christmas show, having spent most of 2006 touring their 'You See Colours' album, mixing piledriving pop power with ethereal sweetness. Local heroes FCG support.

Tuesday 12th

MELVINS: The Zodiac

Doubtless destined to be remembered best as Kurt Cobain's favourite band, Melvins, initially inspired by Black Flag's nascent hardcore punk sound combined with the ultra-heavy noise of Black Sabbath and Swans, have become a byword in heaviosity. Emerging from Aberdeen, Washington, the same hometown as Cobain, the links between the two go back a long way with Melvins drummer Dale Crover playing on early Nirvana demos as well as touring with them in support of Sonic Youth, while Kurt once auditioned (unsuccessfully) to join Melvins and later produced them. Core Melvins members Crover and singer-guitarist Buzz Osborne have been joined by myriad bass players over the years, including Shirley Temple's daughter Lori Black, the band's awesome reputation and cult following born from their trademark super-slow brand of metal and hardcore that is possessed of both musical idiosyncrasy and a healthy dose of humour. As well as being a major influence on grunge, they've inspired a legion of doom-metal bands but remained elusive to pigeonholing, one moment collaborating with Jello Biafra, the next producing an album of experimental electronic drones. New album 'A Senile Animal' is – relatively – accessible and tonight's gig should see a fair few local acolytes (Suitable Case, Sextodecimo, Winnebago Deal) in attendance. Mighty stuff.



JAZZ CLUB with THE TOM GREY

QUINTET: The Bullingdon

ABORT, RETRY, FAIL? With 100 BULLETS

BACK: The Cellar – 100BB's monthly club night enjoys its pre-Christmas party with the new wave-cum-synth popsters mixing up Wire, Heaven 17 and Blur to splendid effect. Plus DJs playing classic and contemporary electro-pop sounds.

DMR BLUES NIGHT: The Market Tavern

FROM ASHES TO ANGELS +

GREENACRE: The Port Mahon

SHUSH OPEN MIC SESSION: The X, Cowley

DELICIOUS MUSIC JAZZ SESSION: Bar Milano, Pizza Express – with local songstress Kate Garrett.

WEDNESDAY 20th

BEAR IN THE AIR + AMBERSTATE: The Wheatsheaf – Bluesy rocking from local newcomers Bear in the Air, plus ambient jazz-pop from Amberstate.

FOLK SESSION: The X, Cowley

BAD BOYS PROJECT: The Port Mahon

VACUOUS POP CHRISTMAS PARTY: The Cellar

OPEN MIC SESSION: Marlborough House

ROOTS LOUNGE: East Oxford

Community Centre

THURSDAY 21st

ANDY YORKE: The Zodiac – Erstwhile Unbelievable Truth helmsman Andy discovers a fresh lust for pop life after his old band's untimely demise. Emotive songwriting with an ear towards Jeff Buckley. Andy's new band features erstwhile Truth compatriots Jason Moulster and Nigel Powell. A new solo album is promised next year.

SABOTAGE: The Zodiac

WINNEBAGO DEAL + THE

MAGNIFICENT SHIMMERING BEASTS + COBRA + SPINECHRIST: The Wheatsheaf

– Hard, fast, loud: guitars that roar, drums that pound, songs about knife fights and whisky. This is Winnebago Deal's world and it rocks. Like a bastard. Top notch support of fast'n'furious types, including The Deal's own side project Spine Christ.

RESERVOIR CATS + BEELZEBOZO + THE PLADITS + WEDNESDAY'S CHILD: The X

– Hard-rocking blues from local stalwarts Reservoir Cats with support from super-heavyweight metallers Beelzebozo.

POLITAN + REMOTE CONTROL KID:

The Market Tavern – Emotive heavy rocking in the style of Biffy Clyro and Million Dead from Reading/Newbury-based Politan.

THE FOURTH CHAMBER + ALBATROSS PROJECT: The Cellar – Radiohead and Foo Fighters-influenced emo doings from local rockers The Fourth Chamber.

CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford

Community Centre

OPEN MIC NIGHT: The Half Moon

FRIDAY 22nd

THE THIEVES + A SILENT FILM: The Zodiac – The brothers Stokes return to Blighty once again from sunny California and their ongoing assault on the States' live music circuit for a hometown gig, displaying their fresh rock and roll spirit. Increasingly brilliant prog-tinged rockers a Silent Film support.



Saturday 23rd

PAMA

INTERNATIONAL: The Bullingdon

A perfect gig for anyone who fancies dancing into Christmas this year. Pama International recently became the first band to be signed to Trojan Records in 30 years, releasing their fourth album, 'The Trojan Sessions', on the label earlier this year. When you consider their pedigree it's no surprise they ended up there. Formed by Finny and Sean Flowerdew (The Loafers, Special Beat, Skooby and Skanga), the collective also features the talents of Fuzz Townsend (Bentley Rhythm Ace), Ernie McKoe (Galliano, Paul Weller, Candy Staton), Simon Wilcox (Steel Pulse), Lynval Golding and Horace Panter (The Specials) and Madness' Lee Thompson, plus leading UK reggae producer Nick Mannaseh. With appearances at Glastonbury and WOMAD behind them they've also earned themselves a hell of a live reputation with tours across the UK and Europe, mixing up soulful ska, 70s rocksteady and dub, playing with the likes of The Skatalites, Madness and Toots & The Maytells. Playing as part of Roadrunner's regular club nights, tonight will almost certainly be a gig to rival Ska Cubana's show at the Zodiac earlier in the year. You'll probably still be dancing come Boxing Day.

SHAKER HEIGHTS + STORNOWAY +

DOUG HODGE: The X, Cowley – Melodic guitar pop from Shaker Heights, plus Celtic-flavoured pop gentleness from Stornoway.

OXFORD FOLK CLUB with PETE

ORTON: The Port Mahon

BANDS & SINGERS NIGHT: The Victoria, Jericho

FRIDAY FOOD: The Market Tavern (12pm)

BACKROOM BOOGIE: The Bullingdon

THE TRUTH: Appleton Village Hall

MISH MASH: East Oxford Community Centre

SATURDAY 23rd

PAMA INTERNATIONAL: The Bullingdon – Soul, ska and rocksteady superstar collective – see main preview

SATURDAY SOUP ALL-DAYER: The Market Tavern (12pm) – An afternoon of acoustic music plus soup from the Friday Food brigade.

DELICIOUS MUSIC CHRISTMAS PARTY: The Market Tavern – With live bands and DJs Shaker and Bastard Son Of Jacqueline du Pre.

THE RUINS + KANED CITIZEN: The X, Cowley

DIVINE COILS: The Port Mahon – Spooky drones and ambient menace from the local experimentalists.

SUNDAY 24th

THE X MEN: The X, Cowley – Christmas Eve party with the X's in-house band.

MACKATING: The Zodiac – Traditional Christmas Eve gig for the local reggae favourites.

DELICIOUS MUSIC OPEN JAM

SESSION: The Music Market

THE TWIZZ TWANGLE BAND: The General Elliot, Hinksey – Christmas Eve pop lunacy from Twizz and Mark Bosley.

MONDAY 25th

CHRISTMAS DAY! No gigs today. Indulge yourself in other ways instead. Organising a pitchfork-wielding mob to chase Razorlight from these shores forever, for instance. Or shooting The Kooks. Or putting Razorlight and The Kooks in a pit together after two weeks' starvation and making them fight to the death for an apple. So much more rewarding than the Queen's Speech, don't you think?

TUESDAY 26th

BOXING DAY! Further festive entertainment involving sticking The Kooks' severed heads on spikes outside Virgin Records' HQ as a warning to their A&R team not to do it again. And then off down the boozer to kick Orson's backside into the middle of next week.

WEDNESDAY 27th

FOLK SESSION: The X, Cowley
OPEN MIC SESSION: Marlborough House

THURSDAY 28th

BHASKER + VON BRAUN: The Port Mahon – Rambling, funk-infected indie rocking from Bhasker.

SABOTAGE: The Zodiac

KING FURNACE + ANDNOSTAR + THE QUARTERFINALS: The Cellar – Chili Peppers-styled funk rocking from King Furnace, jazzy post-rocking from AndNoStar, plus new wave pop from the Quarterfinals.

CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre

OPEN MIC NIGHT: The Half Moon

BLUEGRASS & OLD TIME JAM

SESSION: Fox & Hounds, Abingdon Road

FRIDAY 29th

SAM KELLY'S BLUES BAND: The X, Cowley – The five-times British Blues Connection Drummer Of The Year brings his band back to The X.

BANDS & SINGERS NIGHT: The Victoria, Jericho

BACKROOM BOOGIE: The Bullingdon

GHOST + SOS CREW + TOM

BURTON + JIBBA + ROGUE +

INDECISION: The Cellar – Hip hop, funk, soul, breaks and drum&bass club night plus open mic session.

SATURDAY 30th

THE OBSCURE: The X, Cowley – Cure tribute.

SUNDAY 31st

NEW YEAR'S EVE PARTY: The Zodiac

– Turn the entire past twelve months into a blur at the Zodiac's traditional NYE knees-up. Upstairs it's Your Song with local bands providing the dodgy covers action, plus Aidan Larkin's Disco Shed pumping out party reggae, ska and soul tunes. Downstairs it's Trashy's 80s Prom Night party. And the next day you can vow never to act like that ever again. Until next time.

OLD YEAR'S PARTY: The X, Cowley – The Cheese graters host the X's NYE party. Sup up and get another one in. It's good for the soul if not the liver.

REDOX + OPAQUE + THE PETE FRYER BAND + STRANGE

VINTAGE: The Magdalen – Live music action into the midnight chimes with space-funk crazies Redox and the dubious talents of Mr Fryer and chums.

BARN'S COURT REUNION: The Bullingdon – New Year's Eve club night party.

Nightshift listings are free. Deadline for inclusion in the gig guide is the 20th of each month - no exceptions. Call 01865 372255 (10am-6pm) or email listings to Nightshift@oxfordmusic.net. All listings are copyright of Nightshift and may not be reproduced without permission

DR SHOTOVER

A Very Merry Xmas To All Our (Little) Bleeders

Shiver me timbers, here comes Christmas! And here's another reason to hate it - Polar Bear, that mighty purveyor of CDs on the Cowley Rd, is closing down! As if we didn't already have enough on our festive plates, what with municipal baubles on our sleety streets, hanging like the sword of Damocles over our heads, pensioners being mugged for lattice mince pies by carol-singing hoodies, and all those horrendous whingers writing to the Daily Express as follows: "Dear Fellow-Nazi, Have you noticed that Christmas gets earlier every year, plus my granddaughter wasn't allowed to dress up as the Virgin Mary for her school nativity play – it's political correctness gone mad!" Deep breath. Where was I? Ah yes, Polar Bear. It's the latest in a fine line of independent music shops to feel the pinch due to rising rents - I recall with a certain whiskery fondness Manic Hedgehog, Green River Records and Chalky's, not to mention Sunshine Records on Little Clarendon St and the Music Market shops... blah blah, music was worth buying then... blah blah, things haven't been the same since the decline of the wax cylinder (falls off bar-stool, still mumbling).
Next month: Nightshift Xmas Office Do - The Inside Skinny!



A Daily Express Reader takes exception to everything that has happened in this country since Winston Churchill died.

NIGHTSHIFT

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LIVE

LUKE HAINES / COWBOY X / ALLY CRAIG

The Zodiac

Firstly, apologies to Ally Craig for missing your set. The number of people who have raved about your work seems to constantly grow, and one day – *one* day – I'll pull my finger out and eat my dinner more quickly. Anyway, on we go with Cowboy X, who my companion likens to talent show entrants, due to their individual talents, solid musicianship, happy-smiley demeanour and careful toeing of a risk-free line. There's nothing particularly wrong with their blend of Belly-style guitar pop and Bangles-style mainstreaming; it just seems curiously passionless and soulless. The inclusion of a couple of by-the-numbers covers – Blondie's 'Hanging On The Telephone' and PJ Harvey's 'Dress' – serves to exacerbate the stylistic gap in the band's performance. More bile! More edge! More *something*, please.

Luke Haines has long been regarded as a wry commentator on the darker sides of life and history, through his impressive work with The Auteurs, Black Box Recorder and Baader Meinhof. With a largely solo set like tonight's, only aided for a few songs by John Moore's excellent theremin-like bowed saw playing, he seems painfully aware of his perceived persona. The performance is more like watching a musical comedian than a musician, with frequent jokes between and even during songs. With such sparse, almost bland strummed guitar as the main backdrop to his vocals, Haines is more about the lyrics than anything, and that's in part a problem: the songs are littered with cultural references (Peter Sutcliffe, Gary Glitter, Jonathan King, Sarah Lucas and so on), and they work wonderfully when you understand such references. However, it can seem somewhat hollow, smug and in-jokey when a vague sense of emotion and realism is swamped with such self-conscious irony and cynicism. Whilst a band like Denim could pile on the cultural touchpoints and combine



photo: Richard Hounslow

them with a warm sense of humour and a rich musical mix, Haines for the most part seems detached, cold and bitter. If he could turn his hand to once again breaking hearts rather than making jokes, in the way that his previous bands often did, it'd be a far more memorable show.

Simon Minter

AUDIOSCOPE 2006

The Zodiac

Another year, another all-day feast of music's more leftfield treasures, and it's a mark of Audioscope's slowly-growing stature as a fixture in the Oxford music calendar that this year sees the show take to the larger upstairs stage for the first time.

Making the most of the bigger sound are **Trencher**, whose wall of noise threatens to rip our eardrums clear out of their fittings. Grinding, doomy passages segue into Hammer horror hardcore, stabs of cheesy Casio synth providing a narrow top end to a bass-driven swirl so evil there's practically purple smoke coming from the stage. First-rate, if a little frightening for half past three in the afternoon. More familiar territory comes in the welcome form of **The Rock of Travolta**, who don't disappoint with their symphonic bombast. In fact, they seem to be growing with every performance at the moment.

Kids In Tracksuits, at first glance, seem a bit out of place between the Rock and I'm Being Good, a bit like DJ Hype thrown in front of an audience of devout Fugazi worshippers, but on a day like this, it makes sense. Crunching breakbeats and some impressive turntable dexterity win a whole load of new friends, bearing comparison to the likes of Stanton Warriors and achieving the non-inconsiderable

feat of getting some indie kid ass-shakin' going on before teatime. Someone had to let the side down, and unfortunately it's a bit less **I'm Being Good**, and a bit more I'm Being More Of The Same Angular Art Rock That's Getting A Bit Boring These Days. It's a pretty unconvincing performance from a band with a healthy pedigree behind them, and while they might have been trailblazers of stop-start awkwardness five or six years ago, it's starting to sound superannuated, albeit in a charming old grandfather clock sort of way.

Already a legendary band to some, there's an eager crowd gathered for a rare showing by **Piano Magic**, waiting to see which of their many personalities we'll see tonight. It's the doe-eyed, sensitive Piano Magic that turns up tonight which adds up to a blissful half hour of twinkling, heartfelt, but surprisingly noisy paeans demonstrating why this quietly confident band mean so much to so many. As one song tells us, music might not save us from anything but silence, but they give it a damn good try.

Parts & Labor, meanwhile, are a revelation: one of that rare breed of experimental bands who manage to keep in mind the need actually to pen a killer tune or two amongst all the noise. Something along the lines of Husker Du with a whole digital village full of samplers or Built To Spill teaming up with Bob Moog, they're an absolutely exhilarating blend of skronking

keyboard noises and perhaps the most uplifting pop songs of the festival. Band of the day, hands down.

While 'The Man Who Ate The Man', **Magnetophone**'s last record, is a simply gorgeous piece of Labradford-meets-Future Sound of London ambience, from time to time the live experience is less dreamy than soporific, **Sonic Boom**'s contributions in particular amounting to noodling niceties. When they do lock into a groove, as on 'Benny's Insobriety', it's fabulous stuff with an impressive kick to it, and a perfect appetiser for the main course.

It's true that an hour of **Clinic** is more than long enough to expose the often-cited criticism that one song is pretty much the same as another, and that the band have been in a spiral of diminishing returns ever since the remarkable 'Internal Wrangler'. While it's true that an objective overview could peg the band as something of a one-trick pony, it's quite a trick. Chugging Velvets-style grooves race Electrelane-esque keyboard dashes to the finish line, while Ade Blackburn's sneer, half threatening, half comforting, mutters incantations through his surgical mask. Brilliant stuff, really, and from new single 'Harvest' to the reception afforded to 'The Second Line', more than enough reminders that it'll be good to have them around for a while yet.

Holly Temperature

SOLVEIG SLETTAHJELL / ILMILIEKKI QUARTET

Holywell Music Room

My Finnish dictionary says that Ilmikiemi means open fire or full blaze and this quartet of young Finns – the oldest is 27 young in jazz terms – certainly live up to their name. They have an eclectic, open approach that makes it pleasingly hard to label them. Free jazz is very much in the mix but so is melody and feeling. They explore a variety of styles, often in a single number. Sometimes it's cool minimalism, sometimes it's like a calculated assault, a clashing wall of raw sound out of which melody emerges. Particularly likeable is their total commitment to being out there taking risks, both collectively and individually, whether playing their distinctive take on an Ornette Coleman or Tom Waits tune or on their own compositions. Verner Pohjola on trumpet and, briefly, melodica is already an exceptional player, probing different influences and styles and quirkily playing directly onto the piano strings. The others also have fine technique and bold imagination. This band gives much, and has masses of potential

to make more exciting music in the future.

Norwegian singer Solveig Sletthjell takes different risks. Usually she fronts a Slow Motion Quintet, but we get a very distilled take tonight as there is only her own piano playing and the low-key trumpet of Sjur Miljeteig to keep her voice company. Her trademark is exploring a song's words and even syllables by stretching them out with long notes and slow tempos, and tonight her voice is even more exposed than usual. After Ilmikiemi, Solveig's almost solo voice and particular style are almost shocking at first, like being doused with pure cold water. But her open, unfussy warm singing with no vibrato or vocal pyrotechnics is a slow burn. At its best, it draws you into the intimate details of a song though risks tipping over into being saccharine if the song's lyrics lack an edge. Sjur Miljeteig plays sensitively throughout, being careful not to overwhelm Solveig's simple but effective piano playing.

Colin May

TAPES 'N TAPES / THE NEON HEARTS

The Zodiac

If bands are like girls then The Neon Hearts are the sort you see on a train journey that are love at first sight. There they are, across a half-crowded room, all the way from Liverpool, earnest, charming and very watchable, drawing me from the bar to the very lip of the stage. They give you simple exquisite Americana songwriting: from the Flying Burrito Brothers to Motown, coming over as a cross between The Zutons and The Magic Numbers. Mop-top singer Sean Francis Butler's vocal duetting with flautist Kirsty Donaldson is the key to their sound, but if you factor in a Hammond organ player called AD 20/20, who looks like a cross between a Turin shroud Jesus and Ron Mael of Sparks, you are entering the realm of seriously compelling. 'Honey' is made for radio airplay with its 'Can't Hurry Love' bassline, while 'Mockingbird' further shows how they've skilfully created their own sound, shoving a seratin-packed Crazy Horse through a less scouse Coral filter. Methinks this is the

band that will be the hit of the summer festivals and that their future is so bright they'll need welders' goggles.

Tapes 'n Tapes on the other hand are the kind of girl who easily grades into college, but, short on charisma, promptly decides she's not going to fit in, and that the whole system / world is wrong and consequently makes you believe you don't think enough. If I sound *Twin Peaks*, it's because these guys get you to think like this. They are billed as the "Illegitimate redheaded stepchild of Frank Black and Stephen Malkmus", and I can't argue with that. They are fresh off a plane at Heathrow in front of a now full house, literally bouncing off each other while playing Beatles basslines over a pin-sharp hardcore Pixies mindset. No, I don't know the song titles, all I remember is the keyboardist has lugged a tuba all the way from Minneapolis through customs, to play midway through one track, and for that alone I am mightily impressed.

Paul Carrera

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SUITABLE CASE FOR TREATMENT / MULES / MARY BENDY TOY

The Zodiac

Halloween Night and Oxford's musical freaks are out in strength. Ostensibly tonight is all about bidding a fond farewell to Suitable Case For Treatment, but the supporting cast possess spirits that continue to burn brightly.

Mary Bendy Toy are a right bloody mess at times and spend the first couple of numbers barely in tune with each other, but soon they're carrying all before them in a malevolent torrent of gothic grunge noise, singer Louise Ivens whooping and shrieking like Lene Lovitch fronting Butthole Surfers on 'Ringtone' or camping it up on 'Spider', like a ghoulish industrial B52s. Their take on Th'Faith Healers' 'Reptile Smile' is brave and displays impeccable taste but wayward in its execution, but closing number, 'Wall Of Noise', lives up to its name, replete with WWII air-raid siren coda. As with each of the other bands on stage tonight, there's really nothing else like them around at the moment.

Mules are one of Oxford's less celebrated oddball gems: an energetic fusion of new wave tension and eastern European gypsy dance. Urgent vignettes about going shopping sound like a bizarre barrelhouse hoe-down between The Pop Group and Jacques Brel, harking back to Cooking Vinyl's initial nu-folk revolution. Utterly infectious.

But the stars of this black night are Suitable Case. Why we have to lose bands like this when a dozen insipid emo chancers carry on regardless is anyone's guess, but at least they leave us with nightmares that will haunt our slumber for years to come. A grand entrance heralds eighty minutes of music that crosses indecent boundaries and showcases colossal virtuosity. Here Beefheart fronts The Birthday Party, southern gospel preachers jabber along with brutal death metal, devotional bluegrass gets eaten by jazzed-up hardcore. It's like a musical AA route planner gone completely spanner. 'Wooga' is perfect evil kids' party dance music; their cover of 'Let The Circle Be Unbroken' is like a hellish gospel behemoth and encore 'Dead Pigeon Teachers' is all of the above condensed into six grotesquely thrilling minutes of squalling wonder. Here is a band infused with something dark and primal that exists in so few bands these days. And now they're gone. You might not miss them yet but you will. You will. YOU WILL!

Dale Kattack

SALMONELLA DUB

The Zodiac

The eschewing of an opening band by New Zealand dub/reggae outfit Salmonella Dub makes the wait for them to take to the stage almost unbearable. The polite but increasingly itchy-footed crowd are hankering for a good ol' fashioned boogie down, so when the six-strong crew assemble and guitarist Tiki Taane introduces their set via an eerie conch shell blast, an air of ceremony and ritual is most certainly felt.

This, the last night on their tour, initially begins as an improvised and heavily reggae-influenced jam. But the crowd, only gently swaying at this point, comes round with a bit more vigour once they settle in to the more familiar, song-based outings that we are used to back home. The music shifts and pulses, incorporating elements of dub (of course), trance, roots and even ska at various points. The sum however, is a great deal more transcendent than that of its constituent parts and this is primarily due to the use of entirely

live instrumentation. The highlights tonight, including the thumping, saxophone-led 'Push On Thru' and stripped down 'Version' are redolent of their uplifting, mesmerising performances of yore, thus instantly transporting me back to any number of the dozen occasions I would have seen The Dub play in NZ. As is par for the course, their live shows have proved to be somewhat inconsistent over the years, but tonight's almost two-hour set is easily as magical as their appearance at this very same venue almost exactly one year ago. The trouble though, and this would no doubt be felt as much by the band as the audience, is they are inevitably preaching to the converted, as it were. The almost 100% Kiwi presence laps up every second, but it is testament to the difficulty in puncturing overseas markets. However, if you live in a secluded island paradise 24,000kms away, such concerns are perhaps the farthest thing from your mind.

Matt Bayliss

SCRIPT / SMALLTEASERS

The X

The first night of Gappy Tooth Industries' new monthly club night, going under the title Gammy Leg Productions, is, in keeping with the promoters' ethos, a mixed bag, though maybe not in the manner they intended.

Singer-songwriter Dan Morgan manages to detach himself from the folk-pop gruel that passes for the majority of acoustic solo performers around by aiming for a more country'n'western approach, almost lapsing into cowboy speak at times, although the tendency towards Springsteen's more stripped down brand of rock is more appealing.

Smallteasers are billed as upbeat Housemartins-styled 80s pop fun. So we can only guess that the wrong Smallteasers have turned up tonight by mistake. Probably straight off the cruise ship where they've just spent the last month boring passengers senseless with their lumpen pop chug. Certainly they have none of the bounce their name suggests and even when they start chucking bags of Malteasers into the crowd and

attempt to capture a little of Long Blondes' pop drama, we can't warm to their unimposing brand of tedium.

Initially Script seem to have fallen under a similar spell, barely audible except for a fleeting glimpse of Morrissey fronting Ultravox on the electric piano-led set opener. But while there's a lingering feeling throughout their set of a band designed by a committee set on appealing to as many disparate tastes as possible, Script's stylistic manoeuvrings do provide a few winning moments, notably when they almost threaten to break into Stan Ridgeway's 'Camouflage', adding a country twang to their armoury before discovering a swagger that they'd previously only hinted at. On the one hand they wander too close to The Beautiful South's polished melancholy, but on the other they come close to Nick Cave's captivating morbidity. Which, ironically, is far more life-affirming than Smallteasers before them.

Dale Kattack

BILLY COBHAM AND ASERE

Zodiac

Billy Cobham at 19 was drumming with Miles Davis and he has Herbie Hancock, Gil Evans and John McLaughlin's Mahavishnu Orchestra on his C.V. No surprise then he sells out the Zodiac. Cobham has plans to re-visit his jazz-rock Mahavishnu legacy with the German NDR big band. Tonight it's a very different collaboration. Asere, from Havana, are exponents of Cuban Son which was forged in the east of the island in the 1880s during the Cuban struggle for emancipation from slavery. This Spanish-African mix now has many forms ranging from slow country Son, through to its transformation into urban NYC salsa. It's a music founded on rhythmic counterpoint played on congas, claves, and other percussion but not kit drums. So the set up on stage of a massive kit is intriguing. Is Billy going to blast through the boys from Havana?

Well no, Cobham is very much one of the band. For most of the first half he's low key perfection, a relaxed presence at ease and not stretching himself except to reach the furthest drum. His face partially hidden by a large Cuban straw hat, even the occasional breaks are

modestly and sensitively done to fit in with Asere for whom the electric bass, on as a substitute for the acoustic double bass, is the only change in the usual Son acoustic line-up.

A big solo starts the second half with Cobham on stage alone and going for it. This becomes a duo with Asere's brilliant conga player Vicente Arenciba and then a trio with the bass player, Cobham backing their solos.

Asere play their music from the heart and they communicate their enjoyment. Their music has style and they enhance the ambience by selling Cuban cigars at the back of the room. They have a wonderful trumpet player in Michael Padron, who announces himself with a blistering solo in the first minute of the gig. Cobham modestly describes his collaboration with Asere, whom he first met at WOMAD festival, as "like school on its highest level for me". This particular class ends with a joyful encore that has conga player Vicente on Cobham's golden drums and the man himself doing a lot by doing little on the two drums and cowbell of the timba.

Colin May

AMANDINE / THE LOW LOWS / THESE MONSTERS

The Port Mahon

Gigs with chairs are a funny proposition. I've never quite mastered the idea of sitting down to watch a gig. So, I find myself leaning awkwardly over a table as These Monsters try to get everyone else on their feet with their take on post-rock. It appears that nothing will shift them from their backsides though, which perhaps is not entirely surprising, as These Monsters don't really grip the imagination at all. Their attempt to be different involves placing a saxophonist at the centre of the stage. He's at the head of most of their songs too. This wouldn't be such a bad idea, if the sax was attacked with the zeal of someone like John Zorn, but it's all just a little bit smooth. Frankly it's terrifying for all the wrong reasons.

Unlike The Low Lows, who are terrifying for all the right reasons. Parker Noon might look like a backwoods trucker, but his vocals on these dark and mysterious country songs speak more eloquently than any tobacco chewin' yokel ever could. Calling to

mind the fragility of Sparklehorse, and the twisted humour of The Handsome Family, these are tunes that change the atmosphere of the room in seconds. It feels like the calm after a bar fight in here. This ain't music to stand up to admittedly; we should be slumped across a table instead, with a half drunk beer in one hand, and a cigarette down to the filter burning the knuckles of the other.

Amandine are not what we were expecting at all. For all the talk of Americana surrounding the band, what we actually find is a band that seem infinitely more folk. Not for them the porches of the Deep South or the harsh desert sun. Amandine sound more European, the violin sounding less ho-down and more elegant by far. These are gentle songs that are all too brief, seeming to disappear before they even begin. If The Low Lows supplied the dark realities of folk music, Amandine are providing us with the faerie tales and a little bit of magic to take home with us.

Sam Shepherd

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THE PHOTONIC EXPERIMENT

The Zodiac

The programme handed to the audience gives some substance to the anticipation that this wasn't going to be your run of the mill gig. Set out as a menu illustrated with quaintly surreal etchings, the itinerary promised entertainments over two Acts, taking in phenomena such as a 'Quadrille for Light Emitting Diodes' and a 'Fugue for Flash Guns'. The stage area seems as much a laboratory as a concert space, crowded with bizarre apparatus redolent of early science fiction films. When the show does get underway it is with 'A Demonstration of the Aural Attributes of the Incandescent Light Bulb' which basically involves an eerily pulsating glow and an awful lot of jarring electronic noise. Jolly synth-pop night it isn't.

The Photonic Experiment is a collaboration between three adventurous units – the sound and performance artists Project Dark and Blissbody, and the Birmingham-based music group Pram. If there is a basic concept behind the Photonic Experiment, it is the dynamic interaction between sound and light. But tonight's performance really tries to tap into the sheer visceral power of electricity via a very primitive aural and visual energy. So you have inventions like the 'Photo-Synth', which literally transforms light waves into sound and the 'Spark-o-phone', which produces both sparks and random and rhythmic noise. The music is broken down into different sections that showcase apparatus and instruments but also the genuine instrumental and improvisatory skills of Pram. There are some wonderfully atmospheric pieces with, variously, bassoon, trombone and theremin. At other times the soundworld is very abstract and dissonant, bringing to mind bands like Coil, Throbbing Gristle, as well as early Stockhausen and vintage era BBC Radiophonic Workshop.

The second half is a more focussed and darker musical set. Feeling rather less like a science demonstration, the playing develops some powerful hypnotic grooves, accompanied by surreal black and white film clips looped and projected onto large white spherical screens and a range of dazzling arcs and sparks of electricity. With so much improvisation and so much variation involved, there's inevitably some unevenness, but in the end the evening's risks seemed very worthwhile. A successful Experiment indeed, Professor.

Steve Thompson

YOUTHMOVIE SOUNDTRACK **STRATEGIES / BLOOD RED SHOES**

The Zodiac

Brighton duo Blood Red Shoes "want you to dance", my desire to do so gone after five minutes of this predictable garage-rock so popular a few years ago. BRS are an energetic and incisive act, but before long you realise they really have nothing to sing about: incessant crooning mindlessly fills the parts between one humdrum White Stripes riff and the next.

Their last date in a mammoth UK tour, Youthmovies know they're in good company as they plod to the stage, long fringes urging me to get the scissors out. As 'Ores' opens their set I'm worried that maybe they lack that 'epic' factor they had in the barn at Truck back in the summer. Where's the dry ice and huge reverb? Songs which Youthmovies have played for years too long must have felt pretty hackneyed for themselves; after all, the 'Hurrah...' mini-album is more than two years old. The heart-warming 'The Naughtiest Girl is a Monitor', with its brilliantly memorable chorus comes before the latest effort, 'So and So and So', which steals a trumpet line right out of the Steve Reich catalogue and comes complete with Youthmovies' stock in trade elements: edgy time signatures, plucked guitar lines and stop/start dynamics. An impressive song in itself, but compared to their old roster it sounds lacking desire to break new ground within themselves. Still, the power of 'A Little Late...' (which closes the set) is undeniable. It's the perfect Youthmovies song: erratic and meandering yet unshakeably catchy.

Youthmovies candidly admit it's been a while since coming up with much new material - but a new album is promised (being recorded in January) plus another tour in March. It will be interesting to see where they go from here - if they release anything as groundbreaking as 'Hurrah...' then their place in Oxford's music scene will be even more secure: prime candidates for the next Radiohead, perhaps?

Pascal Ansell

100 BULLETS BACK / SCHMOOF / **SPACE HEROES OF THE PEOPLE**

The Cellar

Synthesizers are great. Considered by some to be wimpy kid brothers of the mighty guitar, they can be used to create sounds a six string would shit itself trying to emulate. In a world of increasingly identikit guitar bands, tonight's electro triple bill shows three very different tangents that synth-pop can head down.

Space Heroes Of The People are playing their first gig tonight, their line-up featuring Tim Day and Jo Edge, both latterly of Eeeblee but here steering a far more esoteric path, mixing laptop glitchiness with almost classical pretensions and incessant beats from the metronomic drummer. Jo's upright electronic bass thumps out an angry waltzing rhythm while Tim's keyboard and sampler sprinkle tinny computer game noises, disembodied voices and random wobbles and wobbles over the top. A guest vocalist reads out a rambling list of the best dinosaurs, but it's closing number 'Groovy Dancer' that's the real killer – a monstrous motorik beat, portentous bass and evil synth pops that add up to a staggering krautrocking, synth-popping three minutes of pure joy.

London's Schmoof are more what you imagine a synth-pop band to look and sound like: clad in pink and black PVC, armed with guitar-synths and singing about boys and chocolate while a pixellated backdrop flashes behind them. Equally robotic and kitsch, they can rock out too, as on 'Dolly' and the camp cover of 'Sweet Child O' Mine', but the highlight of the set is new single 'Chocolate Boyfriend' where Bridget Jones' Diary meets Depeche Mode. Sexy, silly and silicon; Schmoof sound like they dropped out of the sky from 1980, but equally, they sound like the future.

If Schmoof's concession to humanity is singer Sarah's OTT sensuality, 100 Bullets Back's is a sort of laddish hoodie-wearing swagger that stands against the sound they're making. A wonderfully urgent, speed-fuelled mash up of Underworld, Heaven 17, Sheep On Drugs and the arty, angular end of early-80s guitar pop: the worlds of punk and disco discovering their sources of energy aren't so diametrically opposed after all. Dress them up in black leather and 100 Bullets Back would be huge on the London fetish circuit. On tonight's showing, they deserve far bigger things.

Dale Kattack

FORK / SHIRLEY / EMERALD SKY / THE RELATIONSHIPS

The X

Exquisitely English indie janglers The Relationships write the most perfect pop songs in Oxford. They look like they presented schools' science programmes in 1983, but they create the sort of elegant chiming little anthems that may have sprung up if The Byrds, R.E.M. and Noel Coward had all been signed to Postcard Records. Their inherent politeness is salvaged by the fine balance between the writing's crafted melancholy and the barely-controlled rock beast that is drummer Tim Turan. Okay, they're not as good on stage as they are on record, but very few in this town are likely ever to be.

Emerald Sky are a Cambridge-based female cock rock trio (notebooks out, anatomists) who seem to play Oxford every twenty minutes. Clearly certain promoters hear more in their AC/DC Zeppelin approximations than we. Their full-fat hammer-on rocking is amusing enough, but palls after repeated hearings. Emerald Sky are admittedly fun, but so is drunken Twister, and we wouldn't give that a good review.

We've been lukewarm in our reception of Shirley in the past, and we'd just like to say this: we were wrong. Wrong, wrong, wrong. Shirley are a brilliant party band. Whilst it's tough for demi-Gods like us to admit mistakes, the blow is softened by some of the most infectiously euphoric cod-latin pop-rock on the planet. Replete with piercing snare stabs and helium-light acoustic riffing, Shirley's songs are tight, bouncy and compact enough to make Buddy Holly look like King Crimson. Admittedly the vocals don't quite gel tonight, but the rhythm section sounds crisper than ever. We *even* tapped our feet for a bit, readers, it was that enjoyable.

Fork have been confusing audiences for a while now, by fusing six-string funk basslines onto tinny little punk frames. If this sounds like a recipe for a huge mess, for a while it was, but Fork have been improving steadily over the past year. This is partly due to the addition of Tim from Junkie Brush on drums, who adds not only a much needed sense of structure, but also cheeky roto-tom action. Also, leader James Serjeant has seemingly realised that he has a negligible range and changed his vocals to a malevolent hiss that works remarkably well. Yes, they could do with more like the abstract lounge-jazz of 'How Do I Get Out Of Here?', but Fork are moving in the right direction: if they aren't quite there yet, we're at least enjoying the ride.

David Murphy

THEO / CYBERSCRIBES

The Bullingdon

I'm more than intrigued when I see that Theo is a one-man show. Okay, that's not the interesting bit. It's actually that he plays the drums and guitar – AT THE SAME TIME. He has a foot pedal thingy which loops guitar riffs. While one's playing he'll stick in another layer and then another. From grinding guitar layers that create a fog of white noise to the lightest of tinkling and touches, Theo displays a fine mastery of techniques. Once he builds a unique groove going on the guitar he quickly sits and has a bash at the drums, charging it up often with Metallica-like triplets. Once the drums stop the process repeats. And this would be my only criticism. It's the same set up for every song. With so many good melodic guitar riffs, arrangements, and grooves he's creating I can't help think of what the potential would be with a full line-up and more actual 'songs'. But ten out of ten for creativity.

You may have heard of Cyberscribes more recently for their involvement with Oxjam. It seems that vocalist and guitarist Kevin Jenkins is great at music marketing (he's also the promoter behind tonight's gig). But what about the music? Well Cyberscribes seem like they would be much more at home playing r'n'b cover songs down their local pub where they're likely to go down a storm. Phoebe Mina shares (but should be doing all) lead vocals and has a rich soulful voice but more often than not she is competing against out of tune guitars and bags of effects. The set is loose and frankly forgettable. Phoebe often seems to be going through the motions until she comes to 'Malika', a lovely more traditional African number. Let's hope these are just some teething problems with the new drummer and things will only get better.

Katy Jerome

GUILLEMOTS

Brookes University

God, this is a tough one. Guillemots have easily caused more heartache and lost sleep than any other I've written about. I've watched them twice, listened to all their records endlessly, read everything I can find about them, and yet I still can't seem to engage with them.

Here's the story so far: four musicians from four corners of the planet fall into each other's arms and start producing music of profound but child-like intelligence with no regard for current trends, happy to bash out tunes on biscuit tins and toy keyboards. The songs are sweeping, heartrending epics with elements of pop and jazz, and a nod towards classic writers like Burt Bacharach. Few are actually calling main man Fyfe Dangerfield a genius, but many have come close. Overall, they're the cool, refreshing band that touches everyone's lives, and their meteoric rise over the course of this year is the proof.

Well, that's one version. Another is that they simply met all the right people at just the right time. One of their drawbacks is that the music is incredibly controlled. Several times they start to loosen up and go all freeform, and they're lucky to have part-time member Alex Ward's clarinet to help them here, but then suddenly everything goes quiet and we get a few ponderous, whispered words to remind us who's calling the shots.

'Trains To Brazil' is a good song, as are a few others, but they just don't stand up to repeated exposure. The lyrics are pitched between the prosaic and implied profundity, leaving us to take from them what we want: "There's poetry in an empty Coke can / There's majesty in a burnt-out caravan". Fair enough. The audience are predictably enthralled; a telling moment comes when the gaggle of thirty-somethings dancing at the front are asked to stop by a student, because "you might hurt someone".

I really want to like this band and feel strangely guilty that I don't, partly because drummer Greig Stewart is an old mate. He's just bought Spandau Ballet's drum kit, his third, for five hundred quid and deserves his fifteen minutes of fame. I just can't see the Guillemots' light burning this bright for too much longer.

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DEMO OF THE MONTH

HAMMER Vs THE SNAKE

Following on from their highly promising debut demo, university band Hammer & The Snake consolidate their standing with this four song EP. Harsh, metallic synths squelch all over jerky, robotic guitar stabs and urgently lost vocals, sounding like a meaty collision of Blur, Devo and Wire, even dropping a bit of Clash in for good measure. The wobbly funk and staccato, almost militaristic, rhythms of 'Blame' and 'Watcha Need' give the band a confident, strident feel, like they've been doing this for aeons, the frantic call-and-response vocals on the latter in particular demonstrating the band's accomplished but still fresh feel. They mix guitars and synths well, neither dominating the other or feeling tokenistic. 'Safe' is more dandyish, as if The Divine Comedy had somehow joined the post-punk love-in, though there's almost a reggae groove underpinning the whole thing. Excellent stuff generally and, despite the obvious influences, it's only on the last track, 'Life & Times', riding along on Franz Ferdinand's coattails, do they feel like they're playing catch up.

QUICKTORN

There's a lovely letter accompanying this demo, the work of one Prydwyn Piper, explaining his life story in gently self-deprecating style, as well as mentioning that he once played harp with Tom Rapp of Pearls Before Swine cult fame (one of the 60s' wyrd-folk's lost gems) before giving up on playing music in public for years until a departing girlfriend informed he couldn't sing. Fact is he can't really, but then his strangely reedy voice suits this kind of music just fine. It's almost medieval in its otherworldly folk style, and at a time when bands like Circulus and Espers are making their presence felt, there's no better time for Prydwyn to return to action. You see, if you wait long enough, fashion will always come back to meet you (and we speak as people who've held a flame for 80s synth-pop for over two decades). It can be a bit too slight at times, the woodwind, organ and acoustic guitar-led drifting along almost casually, but the Latin re-reading of an old Stone Breath song, 'Argentatae Cantus Coronae', is oddly intoxicating. The times are not it seems, as Bob Dylan said, a changing. At least not in Quickthorn's world.

LAURA LOST

Laura Lost's last demo suggested a band in thrall to The Pixies and able to capture a little of that band's pop zest, but early evidence from this new CD isn't quite so promising: 'Nancy', sung in a fake cockermee cor, luv-a-duck accent, sounds like Lily Allen fronting Sleeper, a feeling only made worse by the twee vignette about an over-trendy NME-reading scenester. It's a prosaic indie chug of no discernible vintage, but soon they're making amends with the frantic 'Suffer Lover', the singer yelping like a stropky teenager over some darkly-inclined, angular new wave guitar noise, the whole thing pleasingly akin to early Adam & The Ants, mixed up with Love Is All. 'Ice Lady' is maybe too shrill and fluffy, but shows they've got more than one string to their bow, while 'Troublemaker' is full-on spiky indie-grunge froth. A band, perhaps, who still aren't entirely sure who or what they want to be, but have the ability to play different parts with some style.

BEAVER FUEL

Rudimentary indie thrash from the caveman-bashing-two-rocks-together school of mindless simplicity from Abingdon one-man-band Beaver Fuel. Not that that's such a bad thing when he's hurtling from a to b without a thought for any diversions on CD opener 'Oblivion Is A Beautiful Word', his nasal voice and buzzsaw guitar coming on like an under-rehearsed Wedding Present. It's when the Bontempi organ turns up on 'Sci-Fi Romance' that things go horribly awry, making the whole business sound like a horribly twee joke, the like of which even The Pooh Sticks would have balked at. It wanders around aimlessly for a good five minutes, looking for a friend, like a Smiths fan at a drum&bass party before going and standing on its own and leaving on its own and going home crying and wanting to die. Passing swiftly over the thrashy political satire of 'Eurovision Political Favour Contest', Mr Fuel leaves us with – oh Jesus, no – an acoustic ballad that's as rubbish as anything you can possibly imagine. It sounds like Twizz Twangle without any sense of lunacy or humour. And really, what would be the point of that?

INCARNA

Excellent accompanying photo here of the band stood beneath a tree in their oversized shorts, looking like a reprobate boy scout field trip. Such sweeties. And then there's the prog-thrash musical storm, part Soulfly, part Mastodon, that grinds and

rages all night. They're gruff, growly, fast, tight and very 'eavy – what more do you want? Originality? Do us a favour, that's an unnecessary frippery. Just bang your head like a good boy scout – tomorrow we'll be teaching you to kill and skin your neighbours. Extra bonus points too for rhyming "parallel" with "lateral" – probably the only two discernible lyrics in the entire demo. Almost certainly not what Robert Baden Powell had in mind all them years ago.

HOUSE OF BLUE DOLLS

Bigging up your own band is one thing, but House Of Dolls' press letter over-eggs the pudding somewhat: "audacious!" "original!" "exciting and vibrant, with a unique yet vibrant style!" "musical brilliance!". In fact the word unique crops up a worrying number of times throughout, so by the time we actually stick the CD in the stereo we're expecting Martian disco opera at the very least. Instead it's some decidedly MOR 70s rock with just the merest hint of Latin spirit to it. It aims, admirably, to be nothing more than good time music but there's an awkwardness here that's surely not intentional. When they rock out a bit, as on 'Tangore', there's a bit of cabaret fun about them, but slow it down and they quickly sound stilted, while by the end they've slipped lazily into lounge funk. Not bad, but a long way from being as unique as they'd like to think they are.

TREV WILLIAMs

The latest demo offering from Faringdon-based singer-songwriter Trev, a man who's endured his fair share of good, bad and absolutely atrocious reviews in these pages. This new CD only has one song on it, so we're immediately suspicious: one-song demos have to be extra, extra special, or at the very least, insanely silly to make sense and this ain't in either camp. Saccharine acoustic pop with a modicum of bounce about it, emotive without tugging any heartstrings.... er, it's got a tambourine on it.... Look, we're struggling here. What else to say? It's a rather boring ballad. Is that all you've come up with since last time, Trev? C'mon man! Got writer's block? Where's your protestant work ethic?

ERNÖ RUBIK

Two people, two laptops and a mixer, apparently – no chance of acoustic balladry here, oh no. And thank God for that. Instead it's clattering, droning, wobbling, fretting electro doodling of a vaguely random nature, ambient string melodies at odds with the thrumming drum machine

skitter. They're best when they get a bit moody and atmospheric on our arses, sampled coughs making way for strutting drum&bass. Elsewhere they waft about in an ambient electronic haze, sounding like refugees from Ochre Records, or, perhaps more recognisably, simply robots trying out a bit of loft clearance.

ME & JAY

More pleasant but innocuous pop from duo Me & Jay, who claim they're too quiet for bigger venues and too loud for smaller, acoustic ones. And you can sort of see their point as they drift and mumble their way through what sounds like Simon & Garfunkel's 'Homeward Bound' with added fuzzy guitars. Although the aim seems to be for timorous, ethereal pop, they sound more like a rock band trying to introduce a sensitive acoustic break into their live set, lacking the delicacy needed for lift off. Instead they're closer to grunge on tracks like 'Drifting'. It's all quite pleasant but lacks character, songs wandering in and out without exerting their personalities. Until, that is, they change tack with 'Columbo', utilising a Jew's harp and fragmented female vocals over a simple snare beat to make for a hazy, oddball pop diversion. So why leave it so long? Maybe they'd simply sent themselves to sleep.

THE DEMO DUMPER

IMPINGE

As we read ever more hysterical stories about the waste of natural resources and its effect on the world's climate, we can only wonder which God or government allows bands like this to use up valuable electricity and plastic making albums? Impinge manage a mighty nine tracks here, and although at one point we went out to the shops to buy chocolate and suicide pills we sort of got the gist of the wretched matter. They clutch at stylistic straws, hoping something will stick, be it lumpen Oasis ballads or upbeat funk rock. At one particularly depressing point they even sound like Christopher Cross's 'Arthur's Theme', only with any semblance of thrill factor removed (and ain't that saying something?). Impinge are typical of a certain type of band who are proficient, well drilled and well produced but lacking in those other vital ingredients: charisma, originality, attitude, soul, a shotgun to blow their own stupid heads off and save us the effort and twenty year stretch of having to do it ourselves. Shitting bloody hell, play this album in its entirety in court and we'd be let off on the grounds of self-defence anyway.

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. Nightshift accepts no responsibility for deflated egos.

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+THE EPSTEIN**

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PETER, BJORN AND JOHN

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