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# NIGHTSHIFT

## Oxford's Music Magazine

Free every  
month.  
Issue 141  
April  
2007

### We Are The Robots!

*It's Man Versus Machine with*

# Keyboard Choir

**Plus: Festival Frenzy!**  
Oxford Punt, Cornbury, Cropredy and  
Towersey line-ups announced.

Truck Festival ticket info.

The Music Market to close and The X fights  
for its musical life - *see inside.*

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# NEWS

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**THE LINE-UP FOR THIS YEAR'S OXFORD PUNT HAS BEEN ANNOUNCED.** The event, which takes place on Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> May, features twenty of the best unsigned acts in Oxfordshire playing across six city centre venues on one night.

The Punt, now in its tenth year, has long been a showcase for emerging Oxford talent with previous events featuring the likes of The Young Knives, Goldrush, Winnebago Deal, Fell City Girl and The Edmund Fitzgerald, who went on to become Foals.

2007's Punt line-up is:

**Borders:** Jessica Goyder + Mr Shadown

**The Music Market:** Stornoway + Mary Bendy Toy + Brickwork Lizards + Borderville

**QI Club:** Joe Allen & Angharad Jenkins + Ape Has Killed Ape! + Les Clochards

**The Purple Turtle:** Foxes! + Colins of Paradise + Mephisto Grande

**The Wheatsheaf:** Mondo Cada + Baby Gravy (pictured) + Thirty Two + Mile High Young Team

**The Cellar:** The Delta Frequency + The Gullivers + Space Heroes of the People + Smilex.

Exact set times are yet to be finalised but Jessica Goyder will kick the Punt off at Borders at 6.15pm with Smilex rounding things off in raucous style at the Cellar at midnight.

Fans wanting to catch as many bands as possible can buy an **all-venue Punt pass** (limited to 100) for just £7 from Videosyncratic on Cowley Road, QI Bookshop on Turl Street in Oxford city centre or online from [oxfordmusic.net](http://oxfordmusic.net). Or you can buy passes direct from Nightshift (without booking fee) from PO Box 312, Kidlington, OX5 1ZU. Make cheques out to Nightshift.



**AFTER SELLING OUT THE ZODIAC** in March, rising Birmingham-based baggy revivalists **The Twang** return to Oxford on Friday 25<sup>th</sup> May with a gig at Brookes University Union. Tickets for the gig are on sale now, priced £8.50, from the Brookes box office (01865 484750) or online from [wegottickets.com](http://wegottickets.com).

Also coming to Brookes in May are **Biffy Clyro**, who headlined last year's Truck Festival. They play on Monday 21<sup>st</sup> May; tickets are priced £14.50.

Upcoming attractions at the Zodiac include **A Silver Mt. Zion** on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> May, **Andy Yorke** on Fri 4<sup>th</sup>, **A Hawk and a Hacksaw** on Sat 5<sup>th</sup>, **The Haunted** on Monday 7<sup>th</sup>, **Willy Mason** on Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup>, **Simian Mobile Disco** on Thursday 10<sup>th</sup>, and **Frank Turner** on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup>. Tickets for all Zodiac gigs are available from [www.ticketweb.co.uk](http://www.ticketweb.co.uk) or in person (without booking fee) from the Zodiac box office. The Zodiac is set to close for a major refurbishment at the end of May and will reopen at the end of September.

**THIS YEAR'S TRUCK FESTIVAL** will take place over the weekend of the 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> July at Hill Farm in Steventon. Local music fans will get a chance to buy tickets ahead of the rest of the country from Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> April when 1,000 tickets will go on sale at Fopp shops in Oxford and Reading as well as Dawson's in Abingdon. More information on how to buy tickets online is available at [www.truckfestival.org](http://www.truckfestival.org). No line-up details have yet been given.

**THE MARKET TAVERN** in Market Street, home to the Music Market venue, is due to close sometime in the next two months. The pub has been bought by a Japanese restaurant chain. The exact closure date is still not certain but sometime in May looks the most likely scenario. The Music Market has become a great established live music venue over the last few years under the management of Charis Sharpe and is host to many of Delicious Music's music nights. The Music Market is due to host the Oxford Punt on Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> May. In the event of its earlier closure, bands will be moved to another venue in the city centre.

In other venue news, **the Wheatsheaf** is due to undergo a major refurbishment over the next couple of months. The pub was taken over by Admiral Inns as of the 1<sup>st</sup> April and they seem to be committed to live music, which is excellent news. No date has yet been given for the refurb but it will involve a new PA and lighting.

**THE SECOND OXFORD ARTS FESTIVAL** takes place over the weekend of Friday 28<sup>th</sup> – Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> September at various locations around the county. The festival takes in music, art, photography, poetry, drama and dance. The organisers are now looking for acts to perform. Local bands and solo artists can submit demos to The Oxford Arts Festival, PO Box 339, Kidlington, OX5 NAY. The deadline for entries is 31<sup>st</sup> July with the line-up announced on 17<sup>th</sup> August. Wristbands are on sale now at [www.wegottickets.com](http://www.wegottickets.com), priced £12 for the weekend (allowing free entry to all venues, all weekend) and £7 for one day. Under-18s can buy tickets for £4 for the weekend. More information at: [www.oxfordartsfestival.com](http://www.oxfordartsfestival.com).

**THE YOUNG KNIVES** cancelled their headline gig at Brookes University Union scheduled for Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> March. The cancellation was forced on the band due to visa problems delayed their tour of the United States. No new date has been announced as yet. Meanwhile **Steven Seagal's** planned show at Oxford Town hall on Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> March was cancelled at the last moment when a decision was taken to film the following night's show in London, meaning production commitments affected the Oxford gig. But hey, never mind the poor sods in Oxford, Steve – just as long as your ponytail looks nice and neat on the DVD.

**GAPPY TOOTH INDUSTRIES** moves from the Zodiac to the Wheatsheaf as of this month. The long-running live music club night is making the switch in advance of the Zodiac's closure over the summer. April's gig features Space Heroes Of The People, Colours and Non-Stop

Tango on Friday 27<sup>th</sup>. GTI will then run on the last Saturday of each month at the Sheaf

**THE X** is discontinuing its Wednesday night folk sessions after seven years. The long-running trad folk night is coming to an end as many of the musicians involved are no longer able to commit to a weekly gig. Any promoters wanting to run a regular gig night at the X, which underwent an extensive refurbishment last year, should call Al on 01865 776431.

**KATE GARRETT** and Barney Morse-Brown from The Kate Garrett Band feature on a track for the upcoming 'Imagined Village' album, produced by Afro Celts founder Simon Emmerson and released on Realworld later in the year. The album also features Billy Bragg, Sheila Chandra, Eliza and Martyn Carthy and Paul Weller. Kate's band headline this month's Beard Museum club night at the Purple Turtle on Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> April.

**AS EVER**, don't forget to tune into the Download every Saturday evening between 6-7pm on BBC Radio Oxford 95.2fm. The dedicated local music show, which celebrated its second birthday last month, features new local releases and demos as well as interviews with local and touring acts and a gig and club guide.



**THE WATERBOYS** perform at the New Theatre on Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> May. Tickets are on sale, priced £22.50, from [ticketmaster.co.uk](http://ticketmaster.co.uk) or from the credit card phoneline on 0870 606 3500. The Scottish folk-rockers release their new album, 'Book Of Lightning' on April 2<sup>nd</sup>.



**BLONDIE AND DAVID GRAY** have been confirmed as headline acts for this year's Cornbury Festival. The two-day festival takes place in the picturesque Cornbury Country Park, near Charlbury, over the weekend of the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> July.

Chart-topping Welsh singer-songwriter David Gray tops the Saturday bill with support from The Waterboys, The Proclaimers, Scott Matthews and Imelda May. Also on the Saturday the World Stage features Echo & The Bunnymen, Midlake, The Broken Family Band, Betty Lavette and Dan Reeder.

On Sunday pop legends Blondie round off the festival and are joined on the main stage by The Feeling, Suzanne Vega, Hothouse Flowers and Osibisa. The Oxford Folk Festival stage is headlined by Seth Lakeman, with support from Flook, T & Latouche, Indigo Moss, Rafael and Lola and Wilber.

Tickets are on sale now, priced £80 for the weekend or £45 for each day from the credit card hotline on 0871 472 0420. Discounted childrens tickets and special VIP tickets are also available. More information about the festival is online at [www.cornburyfestival.com](http://www.cornburyfestival.com).

**SETH LAKEMAN**, John Tams and Barry Coope and The Battlefield Band are the main headline acts at this year's Towersey Village Festival, which takes place in Towersey, near Thame, over the August Bank Holiday weekend (23<sup>rd</sup>-27<sup>th</sup>).

The five-day festival specialises in folk, roots and acoustic music and includes ceilidhs, music workshops and youth and children's activities amongst its 150 acts and events.

Other acts appearing include Van Eyken, Sid Kipper, The New Rope String Band, Hotel Palindrome, Parallelogramme and Peatbog Faeries.

Tickets for the festival go on sale in May. Weekend passes start from £72 for adults, plus camping permits if required. Online booking and line-up details are available online at [www.towerseyfestival.com](http://www.towerseyfestival.com), or call the booking line on 1629 827016.

**THIS YEAR'S CROPREDY FESTIVAL** sees Fairport Convention celebrate their 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary and to mark the occasion the core of the band's original line up, including, Ashley Hutchings, Dave Mattacks, Simon Nicol, Dave Swarbrick, Richard Thompson and Chris White will be performing the whole of their classic 'Liege & Lief' album on the Friday night. Cropredy runs over the weekend of the 9<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> August with the current Fairport line-up, plus various guests, headlining the Saturday night.

Other acts confirmed include: Jools Holland & His R'n'B Orchestra, Seth Lakeman, The Strawbs, The Richard Thompson Band, Show of Hands, Viva Santana, Billy Mitchell & Bob Fox, Wishbone Ash and Iain Matthews.

Weekend tickets are on sale now, priced £67 online from [www.fairportconvention.com](http://www.fairportconvention.com). Children under 12 get in free.

## X IN PERIL

**THE EXETER HALL** may have stop hosting live music if it cannot pay a £3,400 Performing Rights Society bill, despite the fact that the vast majority of bands the pub puts on play original material and are not PRS registered.

The PRS collects royalties from TV and radio stations as well as any pub or venue where music is played, including jukeboxes. This money is then distributed to registered artists.

The X tends to run a no-cover versions policy and gives all door money taken to the bands who are playing.

In March the X's landlady Al was given a court order to pay the outstanding amount within eight weeks or face losing its music licence. Having spent a considerable amount on money last summer in completely refurbishing the venue to make it an even better venue for local bands, Al no longer has the money to pay and disputes the amount owed. With time running out to raise the money the X are hoping to stage a series of

fundraising gigs featuring some of the band who have benefited from the venue over the years.

Al would love to hear from any acts willing to play the following dates: April: Wed 4<sup>th</sup>, Sun 8<sup>th</sup>, Mon 9<sup>th</sup>, Wed 11<sup>th</sup>, Mon 16<sup>th</sup>, Sun 22<sup>nd</sup>, Mon 30<sup>th</sup>; May: Wed 2<sup>nd</sup>, Sun 6<sup>th</sup>, Wed 16<sup>th</sup>. After that date time will have run out to pay and Oxford may lose one of its best venues. Any acts interested should call Al on 01865 776431. Donations are also welcome.

Oxford desperately needs great venues like the X. Let's not let it go under!

## A Quiet Word With

# Keyboard Choir

### AMID ALL THE MYRIAD

musical pleasures available to Oxford's gig goers, one of the most startling and unexpected spectacles over the last couple of years has been Keyboard Choir.

As their name suggests they're not a band as such, more a mini six-piece orchestra of sound synthesists who let the electronics do the talking. So far, so egg-headed. But wait, Keyboard Choir rock. While their sound and set up owe as much to contemporary classical music as they do to techno's dark underbelly, Keyboard Choir's intention from the outset was to make electronic music with all the live energy and spectacle of rock. Something they achieve not just with musical dynamics but also lighting and robots.

### THAT'S RIGHT, KEYBOARD

Choir have robots on stage. How many rock bands have robots? Not even Cradle of Filth have robots on stage. Though they do have a scary Valkyrie backing singer in a leather bodice, which is pretty cool, so we'll give them that. But hey, robots. Robots rule.

And Keyboard Choir make the sort of music that robots might make in the future as and when they take over and herd us all into pens to be turned into human batteries to power their all-night electro-pop discos. You heard.

### KEYBOARD CHOIR FORMED,

sort of by accident, at a rehearsal session by local electro-rockers The Evenings. That band's two keyboard players, Seb Reynolds and Stuart Fowkes, were messing about while waiting for the rest of the band to do typically boring band things like tune up and had the same idea at the same time – a purely electronic band playing like a rock band. With his other commitments playing with Sunnyvale Noise Sub-Element, organising Audioscope and running Oxfordbands.com, Stuart didn't have the time to carry the project on any further so Seb set about recruiting likeminded musicians – and non-musicians – a shifting line-up eventually coalescing into today's settled band. Or, as, er... keyboard player Freddie Mason

*1-0 to humanity - Keyboard Choir take the fight to the robots*



explains, "It started off as a random collective and the process of evolution took effect to leave the strongest surviving. Sort of like *X-Factor*."

### REVIEWS OF EARLY

Keyboard Choir shows in Nightshift marvelled at how a band with such a sedentary stage set-up could summon such a rock and roll atmosphere and inject their nominally ambient sound with such gothic menace. The name Bauhaus was mentioned alongside Brian Eno and Pink Floyd.

This month Keyboard Choir release their debut album, 'Mizen Head To Gascanane Sound', recorded in an old farmhouse at Mizen Head in Cork, Ireland's most south-westerly point.

'Mizen Head...' goes some way to capturing Keyboard Choir's live, almost baroque, sound. It's also something like a potted history of electronic music, from the playfully glitchy 'Deathwank In Toytown', with its unconscious steal from The Tornados' 'Telstar', to the swirling, psychedelic magnificence of 'The Bugs' that could come straight from Pink Floyd's most pompous stadium extravaganza; from the monolithic 'Thinking Won't Help' which samples Liam Ingles-Reeves from Suitable Case For Treatment at his babbling best and comes on like prime Add N To (X) to the ambiently expansive 'Electrical Unity', wherein Eno takes on Mouse On Mars. On top of that you could throw in equal parts Kraftwerk, Orbital, The Orb

(especially the brilliant, trippy 'Skylab' featuring a snatched sample of Ivy's Itch frontwoman Eliza Gregory dreamily announcing, "I saw stars then"), Vangelis and Jean Michel Jarre. Taking all that into account, Keyboard Choir are a musically ambitious project and one that goes a long way to dispelling the enduring myth that electronic music can't be as much fun live as rock music.

### ALONGSIDE SEB (WHO AS

well as his work with The Evenings also performs with electro-jazz improv collective Holiday In Vietnam) and Freddie (also keyboard player in Baby Gravy) are James Cuning, Woody Woodhouse (keyboardist in Borderville), Guy Tasker and sound engineer Ady Wardle. According to James, Seb "bullied everyone into joining", the addition of Woody completing the line-up.

Despite the haphazard, almost unintentional evolution of the group, the intention was clear from the outset:

Seb: "I wanted to create music with the power and spirit of Godspeed You Black Emperor, and the only way to do this was to have people playing live. Techno Godspeed is a tag I can live with."

Ady: "Electronic music can be problematic in terms of energy in live performance - it's not always the case though. One of the key ideas behind the band is to get that energy and excitement that non-electronic bands can create on stage. To make an impression

visually, I still think we need to try a bit harder than more traditional bands - hence the elements such as robots and projections we incorporate into our performances."

Freddie: "One man and his laptop sets are very boring, visually, and occasionally musically too. The possibilities of modern electronic music are almost limitless, which raises standards but makes a lot of things sound bland."

### 'MIZEN HEAD TO GASCANANE

Sound' was recorded in possibly the most remote and rustic place possible. An odd choice for a purely electronic band?

Woody: "There's no electricity in Ireland and all the chairs are on the ceiling and clouds are made of sugar and it rains beetroot and they have one cow. We powered the equipment with lemon juice and a potato. In the future I want to record underwater."

Freddie: "Ireland was a perfect environment for harnessing creativity. In the future I'd absolutely love to be sealed in a bunker, but that's got nothing to do with recording."

James: "Clichéd post-rock locations are not for me. I would love to record in a beautiful place out in the country - and that is the reason Ireland was so special."

Seb: "That spot in Ireland is one of the most beautiful places on earth. I'll leave it up to whoever listens to the album to decide whether there is a particular atmosphere to the thing."

How does the songwriting process in Keyboard Choir differ from a traditional band? While there appears to be no clear-cut lead part in the band's live set, Ady seems to act as co-ordinator; Seb, meanwhile is the most animated performer.

Guy: "Seb is the dictatorial leader, and Ady is his calmer other half."

Ady: "I try to impose some kind of order, I think most bands need a benevolent dictator. However, songwriting is very much a collective process. Different songs come together in different ways; sometimes someone will have a rough idea worked out, sometimes things will come out of a jam. I'm a big fan of interesting mistakes."

Seb: "Like a lot of bands that have a strong communal attitude, someone brings an idea to the table and it gets developed as a band or in smaller units. No one person has veto, most creative decisions are made as a group."

Woody: "I just play and take credit for ex-members' bass lines."

In what way is the Keyboard Choir sound evolving and what do you envisage the next album sounding like?

Ady: "We're hoping to explore some more experimental angles, but also a few more pumping tunes for getting the crowd going."

Woody: "By the time the next album is finished, music won't be based on sound anymore. And James will be dead."

James: "If I live long enough, I hope the next album will have some more phat beats and a bit less of a post-rock influence; maybe something more rigid and beat driven."

**FOR NIGHTSHIFT, ONE OF** the joys of listening to Keyboard Choir is spotting the myriad electronic influences from the past few decades. As far as the six members are concerned however, inspiration tends to come from more traditional sources and especially from classical music.

Seb: "A lot of the influences on the band are non electronic. We have a shared love of classical, both contemporary and romantic, from Chopin to Reich, via Ravel. That's where those waltzes come from."

Guy: "I love Aphex Twin, and anything that has glitchy, non repetitive beats."

Ady: "I'm a big fan of the Butthole Surfers, but as far as the Keyboard Choir is concerned, all sorts of electronica, a bit of prog, and a good dose of post rock. The end of the world seems to be an influencing factor too."

Ah yes, the end of the world. Back to those robots then. Robots on stage have been a staple of Keyboard Choir shows since the band performed at Truck Festival last year, adding to their visual impact. Will robots eventually take over from us or turn on us? Will it be your fault when they do?

James: "I'm fairly sure robots will be the death of me."

Ady: "I, for one, welcome our new robot overlords."

Seb: The robots were born at Truck, they now have a life of their own, but can be called on if people fuck with us."

Keyboard Choir's Truck set was also notable for the band being approached afterwards by an

enthusiastic punter. Who just happened to be Brian Eno, one of the most important figures in the history of electronic music. What did he have to say and what did it feel like to be complimented by such a seminal figure?

Ady: "His main piece of advice was to look meaner, which was an excellent suggestion. I'm a huge fan of Eno, so I was on cloud nine for about a week after he saw us."

Woody: "It made me feel like a kid on Christmas morning."

Seb: "I didn't meet him, so I'm sceptical that it really happened; if he blags us a major record deal I might."

Ideally, what would the ultimate Keyboard Choir concert involve?

Ady: "Something like the Flaming Lips at the Albert Hall, crossed with Pink Floyd, but with more robots. We're very keen to develop the live show into a full-on production, but our ideas are bigger than our budget."

Woody: "Eventually we want to have a giant shed built around us on stage as we play, Pink Floyd's 'The Wall' style."

Freddie: "Or on a ship, in the middle of the ocean. Just us and the Navy."

#### AS WELL AS SAMPLING

local luminaries for the new album, Keyboard Choir have been moving into the remix business. Currently they're working on Trademark's 'Toe The Line' with plans to remix Fell City Girl in the near future. On top of this, the various members are involved with assorted other bands and have histories on the Oxford music scene. How do they feel they fit in with other local bands and how has Oxford shaped them?

James: "We've all got or had other bands, but I've only recently started to play with anyone other than Keyboard Choir. It's been interesting, and in general I've found the scene to be very helpful. We're really happy and grateful for all the support we've received. As for local bands, I love Borderville, The Half Rabbits and Baby Gravy."

Seb: "In terms of Keyboard Choir I can only be positive about the scene, Keyboard Choir was started as a half joke side project and we wouldn't be here now if it wasn't for Mac giving us gigs and supporting us, so cheers!"

**'Mizen head To Gascanane' is released at the end of April. Check out [www.myspace.com/thekeyboardchoir](http://www.myspace.com/thekeyboardchoir) for music, news and gig dates.**



## April

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14<sup>th</sup> **SIMPLE - Funky House with TOUCHE + GENERAL MIDI** + residents. 9-3am

21<sup>st</sup> **OX4 - Drum'n'bass. 9-3am**

28<sup>th</sup> **SKA NIGHT with HOPE & GLORY** + DJs 9-3am

Sunday 1<sup>st</sup>

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## TRADEMARK

### 'Raise The Stakes'

(Truck)

The Oxford battalion of the 80s synth-pop revival army returns with their second album, digital weaponry armed and ready. Since their debut album, 'Want More', Trademark have toured with The Human League and supported John Foxx, two of synth-pop's most revered luminaries.

On the evidence of 'Raise The Stakes' Trademark have earned their place in the upper echelons of the new electro movement.

While they occasionally incorporate strings and horns into proceedings – including a cornet

overture – it's the banks of technology that dominate; anyone who has seen Trademark live will know how much they revel in their role as futuristic boffins. And so we get the sweet, sleek synth lines and wobbling sequencer pulses of album opener 'Raise The Stakes' with its shared sense of uncomplicated pop to Pet Shop Boys, followed by the wired, far heavier throb of 'Come To Love', which echoes mid-80s cult stars Thirteen At Midnight. 'Self Pity' is almost hymnal, with a swooning, almost orchestral sweep. Contrast that with the deliberately clunky, robotic 'Where You Went Wrong' and the freewheeling 'Stuck In A Rut' and Trademark emerge as a band with a succinct grasp of what makes for great, simple electro-pop.

Cousins Oliver Horton and Stuart Meads, along with Paul Soulsby, grew up with bands like OMD, Depeche Mode and in particular Pet Shop Boys and they've taken to heart what made those bands work. If there is a criticism it's that the vocals lack variety, tending towards Neil Tennant's deadpan-style delivery, and anchor some songs too firmly when you crave some robotic siren to layer on some retro-futuristic sexuality. Adept at both songwriting and production, surely Trademark can make the connections to entice collaborators. With album highlight 'Toe The Line' already included on the soundtrack to *Goal! 2*, hopefully the exposure will bring Trademark the success they deserve.

**Dale Kattack**

## DAVID K FRAMPTON

### 'A Snapshot Of Dying Slowly'

(Eyeless)

David K Frampton's previous offerings have bordered on the scarily brutal, using heavyweight electronics to create the sort of incidental music you'd expect to hear on sci-fi horror movies as the protagonists scamper down dark, dank corridors to meet some gruesome end.

Since his last CD, however, David's become a dad (to twins he tells us, so congratulations on that count) and as we all know, having kids turns you into a BIG SOFTIE (or else a placard-waving, paediatrician-beating vigilante). And so it seems to be here. Gone are the throat-ripping, cranium-crushing slabs of electronic nastiness and in comes some moribund mumbling and somnambulating electro randomness.

Tracks like album opener 'Halloween' at least

have a degree of coherence, albeit in a ponderous devotional pop vein, aiming for some kind of Spiritualized level of divinity, but elsewhere it's hard work to keep a straight face as David stuffs cotton wool balls up his nose to sing 'Photography of Faith', like something Frank Sidebottom would have rejected as a bit too galling.

Further in it gets more pointless as rudimentary passages of lo-fi electronic noise amble aimlessly around looking dishevelled, while 'Unsung' is simply so jaw-droppingly godawful, you crave one of those sci-fi monsters to lurch out of the dark and rip it to shreds before our previous fondness for Mr Frampton's work is soiled any further.

**Dale Kattack**

## ANDENSUM

### 'Lucky Witness'

(Crash)

Previously a young teenage art-metal band displaying musical ambitions beyond their tender years, Andensum, on this debut album, still sound like a band that's been round the world a couple of times already. Such is their finely-honed professionalism and musical proficiency, two things that metal, like rap, relies on if it's to have any impact. As long as you keep it fast, heavy and tight, you can't go too far wrong in the realms of heavy, heavy rock.

Of course, things have moved on since men with long hair and funny-shaped guitars belted out speed-addled songs about girls and monsters and these days you apparently need a bit of sensitivity, a bit of artiness to set everything in perspective. And so for every full-pelt barrage of grinding thrash, Andensum have a moment or two's pause for thought, a chance for Mr Shouty to rest his tonsils and let Mr Nice Bloke have a bit of a croon. And thus it all starts to sound rather a lot like Lost Prophets after a while, albeit with an epic sense of prog that should be given a looser rein to stamp its authority on proceedings. The contrast between what Andensum do best and less so comes midway through the album. 'Just Another Reason' finds them at their heaviest and most bulldozingly immediate, but it's immediately followed by the album's title track, which could be Bon Jovi in a slightly bad mood.

Better than merely generic, Andensum do need to find their own identity; they also need to make their punches count more. There's no room for self-contemplation in this battle.

**Ian Chesterton**



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## TONIC

### 'Fooling Around'

(Own label)

If the words smooth, jazz and funk used in conjunction with each other turn your blood to ice, look away now. Tonic's is a world where those words walk hand in hand through summer meadows and across Po Na Na's dancefloor for blissful eternity.

This seven-track debut EP from the Oxford/Reading-based band lounges in the easiest corner of soul music's lounge bar, tip-toeing around the memory of Brand New Heavies' last party, perhaps worried people might notice Tonic actually have more in common with any number of *X Factor* hopefuls.

It's hard to pinpoint why they don't work: the musicianship is professional if unimposing, while Gabriella Romano's voice holds its own without really grabbing your heart. Bassist Mark Peace is no natural born rapper but at least his interjections break the mood up and give the band some fight. Perhaps it's unfair to judge a simple dance band on its lyrics, but their clumsiness doesn't help the cause.

In the end Tonic probably need a live stage to show off their strengths – simple, easy grooves that folk can dance to without breaking into a sweat or having their chat-up lines crushed by some bruising bassline.

Beyond that, they're simply too smooth to impose.

Sue Foreman

## THE ANYDAYS

### 'Sound'

(Super-Tone)

Having already enjoyed Radio 2 airplay courtesy of Mark Radcliffe, The Anydays' debut album is well timed. It brings with it a pretty authentic feel of early-60s pop, particularly The Beatles and Kinks and, clocking in at a short and sweet 27 minutes, it neatly ditches the contemporary compulsion to stretch an album over a whole hour and beyond. That the album was recorded at Toe-Rag studios (a favourite of White Stripes and local 60s revivalist Sir Bald Diddle) only adds to the period feel.

Fronted by local singer-songwriter Drew Atkins, The Anydays keep it simple and to the point, songs like 'Come On' and 'I Feel Free' setting the tone for the album: uncomplicated rhythms, sunshine harmonies and plenty of "hey hey heys", as well as some pretty simplistic rhyming. At their best they're alternately breezy and punchy, the odd Jam bassline or Who power-chord bolstering the effusive sense of retro fun.

There is a risk with something this straightforward that it'll get formulaic over eleven tracks and the likes of 'She's My Star' and 'Tell Me Something' follow too rigidly the trotting post-rockabilly beat, the latter just about salvaged by its Small Faces-styled psychedelic edge.

'Sound's highlight is undoubtedly 'Monday



Morning', classic summer-sounding 60s pop, although even the band would be hard pressed to deny it's nicked wholesale from The Monkees' 'Pleasant Valley Sunday', while its bassline is pilfered from 'A Town Called Malice'. But, hey, The Jam nicked the bassline to 'Start' from The Beatles in the first place. The Anydays don't seem to be claiming to be any great new force for originality anyway, content to mine their personal golden age of pop.

For all its lack of depth, it's hard not to fall for 'Sounds' simple charms, although the genuinely awful, laborious ballad 'It's Only Love' is a poor way to finish an album that for the most part retains a good-natured liveliness.

Sue Foreman

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Sun 29<sup>th</sup> Electric Eclectic Jam & Open Mic Night. Free entry

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# GIG GUIDE

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## SUNDAY 1<sup>st</sup>

**OXFORD FOLK FESTIVAL: Oxford Town Hall** – Final day of the fourth Oxford Folk Festival (fully previewed last month). Today's headliners are Eliza Carthy and The Ratcatchers in the main hall at 4pm, preceded by John Renbourn and Robin Williamson. Plenty more acts in the old library on the Cornbury Stage as well as workshops with festival players and activities and street music over at Oxford castle.

*Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> / Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup>*

## THE FALL: The Zodiac

Can there be anything left to say about The Fall that hasn't been said before? For 30 years now they've been the most consistently inconsistent band in Britain, if not the world: even their most die-hard fans – and Fall fans are extremely die-hard – find them frustrating and contrary in the extreme. What can never be denied, however, is that Mark E Smith is a musical genius. Since he formed the band in 1976 he's created some of the most startlingly original, awkward, exhilarating and obtuse music you're ever likely to hear. The Fall sound is a constantly mutating beast but forever remains unmistakably The Fall – an uneasy meeting of Beefheart, Can and Cochran, with an oddly arty edge to it, plenty of punk-inspired bile and a wit and grasp of social reality that few songwriters can equal. Smith has also managed to dispense with more collaborators than the entire Borgia family, occasionally 'informing' bandmates of their sacking with his fist mid-set. His current band are American and one of them even has a beard, something Smith once declared an impossibility. Gigs can be unpredictable but on their night The Fall remain, three decades on, more innovative and dangerous than any teenage rock rebels. A national treasure.



## APRIL

Later on at QI there's a Friends of Oxford Folk Festival-only gig by Spiers and Boden.

**THE DAMO SUZUKI NETWORK with YOUTHMovies + FUCK BUTTONS + SWORDWIND + TRAKTORS: The Cellar** – The former Can frontman returns once again to Oxford for another of his improvised shows, this time backed by local math-rock luminaries Youthmovies, whose complex, dynamic sound should make a fascinating counterpoint to Damo's cyclical chants. Support comes from suitably-named Fuck Buttons, providing an unhealthy dose of evil electronic noise and brutal rhythms that'll fuck your ears up, Witney power rockers Swordwind and Youthmovies side project Traktors.

**SCOTT MATTHEWS: Brookes University Union** – Biggest Oxford gig yet for the Wolverhampton-based singer-songwriter very much on the up and up, following on from two sold out shows at the Zodiac, armed with an intimate mix of rock, soul and funk, drawing inspiration from Led Zep, Jeff Buckley, Nick Drake and Robert Johnson.

**COVES + CANDLES + THE PLUTO: The Port Mahon** – Angular hardcore-meets-metal riffage from Coves, plus support from two-piece instrumental experimenters Candles and intense post-rockers The Pluto.

**SMILEX + LOKEI + DOLLS + THE KICKS: The Jericho Tavern** – Sleazy glam-punk histrionics, swearing and general rock'n'roll chaos from Smilex.

**DELICIOUS MUSIC ELECTRIC OPEN JAM: The Music Market**

**ELECTRIC JAM: The X, Cowley** – Open jam session with in-house band The X Men

**ENZO: The Black Horse, Kidlington** – Dire Straits tribute.

## MONDAY 2<sup>nd</sup>

**SHARRIE WILLIAMS & THE WISEGUYS: The Bullingdon** – Powerful rocking soul and gospel from projects-raised singer Sharrie and energetic backing band The WiseGuys, recalling Tina Turner at her 60s and 70s peak, as well as Etta James and Billie Holiday.

**TOBY JEPSON + EASY TIGER: The Zodiac** – Anthem trad rocking from former Little Angels frontman Tony Jepson, plugging his new solo EP along with plenty of old favourites. Local southern fried rockers Easy Tiger provide good time support.

**NICK BREAKSPEAR + NUMERNINE + JOHN HOLLINGSWORTH GOES TO LEEDS: The X, Cowley** – Solo gig for Black hats frontman

Nick, plus indie rockers Numbernine. John Hollingsworth heads off up north.

**ECLECTICA + KOMAKINO: The Port Mahon** – Frenetic indie rocking from Derby's Komakino.

**VIN GARBUTT: Nettlebed Folk Club** – Politicised North Eastern folk singer.

## TUESDAY 3<sup>rd</sup>

**THE FALL: The Zodiac (upstairs)** – First of a two-night residency (ah!) from Mark E Smith and his unexpectedly bearded new band – see main preview

**CHERRY GHOST + THE FAMILY MACHINE + STORNOWAY: The Zodiac (downstairs)** – Understated but luxurious homemade country pop, somewhere between Sparklehorse and Baby Bird, from Bolton's Simon Aldred, set to release his new single, 'Mathematics' after supporting Amy Winehouse on tour. Local countrified pop faves The Family Machine support along with sweet-natured celtic-tinged rockers Stornoway.

**JAZZ CLUB with THE TOM GREY QUINTET: The Bullingdon** – Free weekly live jazz club with resident and guest bands, plus r'n'b DJs until 2am.

**TOAD + DAVID K FRAMPTON + JON FLETCHER: The Port Mahon** – A night of acoustic doom.

**SHUSH OPEN MIC SESSION: The X, Cowley Road**

## WEDNESDAY 4<sup>th</sup>

**THE FALL: The Zodiac (upstairs)** – Another evening in the company of the elite gangsters of the damned.

**SIX NATION STATE + WITCHES + NINE STONE COWBOY: The Zodiac (downstairs)** – Reading-based indie-ska hopefuls in the vein of Zutons and Futureheads, plus esoteric rocking and countrified pop from local boys Witches and the return of Mark Cope's NSC.

**THE CONSCRIPTS: The Jericho Tavern** – Funk and post-punk at tonight's Crosstown Traffic gig.

**OPEN MIC SESSION: Marlborough House**  
**OPEN MIC SESSION: Temple Bar**

## THURSDAY 5<sup>th</sup>

**BRING ME THE HORIZON + I KILLED THE PROM QUEEN: The Zodiac** – Full-on screaming hardcore from Sheffield's BMTH, winners of Kerrang's Best British Newcomer award in 2006; support from Aussie hardcore metallers IKTPQ.

**DISQUES VOGUE: The Zodiac** – One-off Easter return for the near-legendary local easy listening club, spinning 60s and 70s lounge and bossanova.

**MEPHISTO GRANDE + SHIRLEY + NEIMO: The X, Cowley** – Wired, weird and wigged-out gospel blues and stripped-down rock mayhem



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from former Suitable Case duo Liam Ings-Reeves and Pete Ward. Jolly 60s pop support from Shirley, plus French indie rockers Neimo. **FATALLY YOURS + THE BLACK HATS + THE GULLIVERS: The Hobgoblin, Bicester** – Smiths-inspired indie rocking from Bicester's favourite sons Fatally Yours, plus guitar pop from Black Hats and indie-punk noise from The Gullivers.

**THE DELTA FREQUENCY + BROTHER FRANCISCO + THE FOCAL POINT: The Cellar** – Great, bombastic electro-goth rocking from The Delta Frequency, somewhere between Bowie and Marilyn Manson, plus krautrocking from Southampton's Brother Francisco. **PORT MAYHEM with GOG + ONE DOLLAR PEEPSHOW + JOHN THOMPSON: The Port**

*Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup>*

## BRYAN FERRY: The New Theatre

We might not be able to hold it completely against Bryan Ferry that he spawned vile wildlife-butcherer twonk Otis, but we can hold him responsible for the mess that was his last Oxford show: a truncated set at Cutteslowe Park where he obviously wasn't fit to perform but took the cash anyway. Still that shouldn't detract too much from the fact that Ferry is a genuine musical legend and one of the most distinctive singers of the past 30 years. From his beginnings at the helm of Roxy Music, who revolutionised rock music alongside David Bowie, through to his suave balladeering days, he's always exuded a sense of natural glamour and sophistication beyond the reach of mere mortal pop stars. As well as being a great songwriter (come on, we could fill this preview with the titles of every genius Roxy Music track), our Bryan is also a great reinterpreter of old classics, be it John Lennon or Wilson Pickett, and his latest album is his tribute to Bob Dylan, unsurprisingly titled 'Dylan-esque', wherein he stamps his own identity on songs like 'Knockin' On Heaven's Door' and 'Gates Of Eden'. Perhaps not the most radical move in musical history but one that again proves the man's abilities remain undiminished. Let's just hope we get the full show tonight.



**Mahon** – Sweet Cardigans-meets-Garbage rocking from One Dollar Peepshow.

**MARK CROZER + ANTONY ELVIN: QI Club** – Excellent scuzzy psychedelia, melancholic acoustic pop and shoegazing noise from local singer-songwriter Mark Crozer, who's just been recruited to play guitar in the reformed Jesus and Mary Chain. Oh yes. Scott Walker-influenced acoustic pop from Antony Elvin.

**CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre**

**OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon**

### FRIDAY 6<sup>th</sup>

**BORDERVILLE + THE SWAMIS + BIRDS OF WALES: The X, Cowley** – Excellent, theatrical space-rock, electro-funk and vaudevillian pop from Borderville, with support from bluesy rockers The Swamis.

**THE BLACKOUT + KIDS IN GLASS**

**HOUSES: The Zodiac** – Double bill of south Wales emo, both bands pretty indistinguishable from each other, or from Lostprophets for that matter, playing by-wrote shouty, jump up and down metal-lite. Still, over half a million MySpace site hits can't lie, can they?

**SMASH DISCO: The Zodiac** – Fortnightly indie, electro and post-punk club night with guest DJs. Tonight, Education DJs pay a visit.

**KLUB KAKOFANNEY with PRIMITIVE TIME MACHINE + AMBER STATE + LOOSE GRIP + G&T: The Wheatheaf** – Lively funk-rock from PTM headlining this month's Klub Kak. Trippy jazz-pop from Amberstate in support.

**THE RUINS + VELVET HEARTS + FOCAL POINT: The Jericho Tavern** – Ride-influenced indie shoegazing from The Ruins, plus harmony-heavy melodic rock from Velvet Hearts, a band featuring former-Elkie Brookes keyboardist Stevie Jones and Randy Newman's son John Newman. Noisy indie rockers Focal Point open the show.

**OXFORD FOLK CLUB: The Port Mahon**

**BACKROOM BOOGIE: The Bullingdon**

**DUGOUT: The Cellar** – Soul, rare groove and funk with DJ Jon Kennedy.

### SATURDAY 7<sup>th</sup>

**CLUTCH + THE SWORD + TAINT: The Zodiac** – Return of the legendary Maryland, US metal experimentalists, last seen sharing a stage here with Corrosion Of Conformity. Over the course of fifteen years, seven albums and 2,000 gigs the band's ever-changing sound has moved between metal, hardcore, punk, stoner-rock and most recently blues on album, 'Robot Hive'.

**JACK VIPER + ZEN MOTEL + PATCHWORK GRACE + DEMONSEED + DISARM: The Music Market** – Delicious Music unsigned bands showcase.

**GRAIN + FALZONES + MIKE FINLEY: The X, Cowley** – Hillbilly funk from tonight's eXposure club headliners Grain, with support from Kent's moddish popsters The Falzones and local sensitive singer-songwriter Mike Finley.

**KILL CASINO + GANGER DRAFT: The Port Mahon** – Full-throttle garage grunge and pop-metal from London's Kill Casino, plus support from former Verbal Kink and At Risk people Ganger Draft.

**ABORT, RETRY, FAIL? With FRIENDLY FIRE + NATIONAL PARKS: The Cellar** – Promising post-punk funk pop from St Alban's hotly-tipped Friendly Fires, aiming for a Talking Heads-meets-New Order sound at tonight's ARF? Electro club night.

**SOUL NIGHT: The Bullingdon**



*Thursday 12<sup>th</sup>*

## DEATHSTARS / MORTIIS: The Zodiac

If the thought of encroaching summer fills you with dread, here's your chance to rejoin the darkness with a double bill of Scandinavian doom. Norway's Mortiis is something of a legends in black metal circles, having played bass for Emperor way back when. Since then he's carved out a whole new niche for himself in an ambient black metal and darkwave vein, using synths as much as guitars to create bleak, unsettling sounds. His defining album, 'The Grudge', was declared a national artefact by the Norwegian government, though it's for his trademark prosthetic goblin mask he's best known. Sweden's Deathstars similarly rely on synthesizers as much as guitars for their sound, a beastly hybrid of industrial metal, goth and glam-rock. But then, what do you expect from a band whose singer is called Whiplasher and guitarist Nightmare Industries. Musically they find a middle ground between Rammstein and Sisters of Mercy. Black clothes, black hair, black hearts. Good, wholesome family fun. If your family name is Addams.

**MELTING POT with THE ANYDAYS + THE SHAKES + NOT MY DAY + ANOTHER LOST LEADER: The Jericho Tavern** – Effusive 60s retro pop in the style of The Beatles, Kinks and Monkees from The Anydays, launching their debut album, 'Sound'. Support from lyrically intense indie rockers The Shakes and local acoustic duo Another Lost Leader, leaning towards the Simon & Garfunkel scheme of things. **THE PISTACHIOS + TOMORROW IS GO: The Temple Bar**

### SUNDAY 8<sup>th</sup>

**JOHN POWER + BRIAN HOUSTON + DUSTY SOUND SYSTEM: The Zodiac** – Former La's and Cast frontman John Power continues his pop quest, leaving behind the pop anthems in favour of a new rootsy acoustic rock and folk direction. Irish folk rocker Brian Houston supports, along with Robin Bennett's folk-country project, Dusty Sound System. **DELICIOUS MUSIC ELECTRIC OPEN JAM: The Music Market** **BIG BAD CITY: The Port Mahon** – Chili Peppers-influenced funk rock from the band fronted by current Miss UK, Ellie Glynn. **DIATRIBE + KING FURNACE + BEAR IN THE AIR + ELLA CANAVAN: The Jericho Tavern** – Authentically scuzzy punk and new wave noise from Diatribe, plus lively funk-rock from King



*Friday 13<sup>th</sup>*

## MIDLAKE: The Zodiac

Because of vile Supertramp-aping bilge like *The Feeling*, soft-rock is rightly derided, but it needn't always be so. Take Denton, Texas five-piece Midlake, a band who all sport neatly-trimmed beards and doubtless spend much of their lives listening to bands like The Eagles, America and Fleetwood Mac. And yet they're still great. As was ably demonstrated by last year's 'The Trials Of Van Occupanther', an album that dwelt upon the life and trials of a rustic hermit of the same name. Musically Midlake ache for such a lost rural paradise, their lyrics are dreamlike and arcane, while musically the 60s folk-rock harmonies, strings, flute and banjo are possessed of a sweeping, wistful, almost lysergic nature. As well as the above-mentioned influences they point towards Neil Young's more tender moments as well as Peter Hammill and The Blue Nile, adding a rich darkness to their languid songs. Signed to ex-Cocteau Twins guitarist Simon Raymonde's Bella Union label (also responsible for discovering The Dears), they've spent the last year building up a sizeable cult following and hopefully a full breakthrough is now due to them.

Furnace and seriously downbeat lo-fi rock in a Nick Cave vein from Ella Canavan.

**LARKZ: The Black Horse, Kidlington**

## MONDAY 9<sup>th</sup>

**THE HAMILTON LOOMIS BAND: The Bullingdon** – Young Texan bluesman already mentored by Bo Diddley, Clarence Brown and Albert Collins. A virtuoso multi-instrumentalist as adept at piano, drums and blues harp as he is with his trademark Strat guitar, and adding a funky dash to Delta blues.

**SYBARITES: The Port Mahon**  
**BARNYARD SOUNDS + MEATYARD BRICK + BLUE BEAR: The Hollybush, Witney** – First night of a week-long live music festival in Witney with soul, reggae and funk DJs plus live ska and jazz.

## TUESDAY 10<sup>th</sup>

**BRYAN FERRY: The New Theatre** – The artists formerly known as Brain Fury promotes his new 'Dylan-esque' album – *see main preview*  
**JAZZ CLUB with THE TOM GREY QUINTET: The Bullingdon**  
**DELICIOUS MUSIC BLUES CLUB with BLUE MAMA: The Music Market**

**SHUSH OPEN MIC SESSION: The X, Cowley Road**  
**SIMON DAVIES + FREI ZINGER & CHRIS HILLS: The Port Mahon** – Acoustic night with local singer Simon Davies doing his English bossa nova thing plus psychedelic flautist Frei Zinger teaming up with tabla player Chris Hills.  
**ADAM WALTON + PETE HORSFALL: The Jericho Tavern** – Live jazz residency.  
**OPEN MIC SESSION: Mangos**  
**OPEN MIC SESSION: The Plough, Witney**

## WEDNESDAY 11<sup>th</sup>

**ALL THAT REMAINS + MISERY SIGNALS + TEXTURES + ETERNAL LORD: The Zodiac** – Global four-band package tour of metal and hardcore noise, with Massachusetts headliners All That Remains cranking up the thrash in the style of Shadows Fall and Killswitch Engage; smouldering metalcore urchins Misery Signals return to Oxford after their support to Darkest Hour last year; Holland's Textures prove that even the affable Dutch can rock like bastards, while Swindon's Eternal Lord open the show with their brand of sonic violence.

**OXFORD IMPROVISERS: The Port Mahon**

**OPEN MIC SESSION: Marlborough House**

**OPEN MIC SESSION: Temple Bar**

**PHONIK SESSIONS: The Cellar** – Live funk jam.

**TIM WILSON QUARTET + RICHARD**

**BALDING + NIGEL PEARCE: The Court Inn, Witney** – Live jazz.

## THURSDAY 12<sup>th</sup>

**DEATHSTARS + MORTIIS: The Zodiac**

(*upstairs*) – Darkness descends upon the Zodiac as Scandinavia's gothic overlords come to wreak Ragnarok – *see main preview*

**DIVE DIVE: The Zodiac (downstairs)** – Headline gig for the local pop-punk heroes, fresh from touring with Frank Turner.

**SABOTAGE: The Zodiac** – Fortnightly rock, punk, metal and alternative club night.

**THE AUSTRALIAN PINK FLOYD: The New Theatre** – Spectacular light and stage show and note-perfect tributes to Floyd's finest moments.

**OCEAN COLOUR SCENE: Brookes**

**University Union** – Return of the crown princes of dadrock. Rejoice.

**HELLO BRUNO + SEFTON: The X, Cowley**

**VESTIBULE + GENUINE FREAKSHOW +**

**FOCAL POINT: The Port Mahon** – Grunge and post-rock noise from Biffy Clyro-inspired locals Vestibule, plus downbeat indie rock from Genuine Freakshow. Noisy local newcomers Focal Point open proceedings.

**STIG + APATT: The Cellar**

**MORRISON STEAM FAYE + TRISTAIN & THE TROUBADOURS: Qi Club** – Blistering psychedelic country blues from London's rising stars of the alternative folk scene, MSF. Local ska-inflected indie popstrels T&TT support.

**ANTON BARBEAU: The Jericho Tavern** – Bucolic psychedelia from American songwriter Anton Barbeau in the vein of Robyn Hitchcock and The Beatles.

**CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre**

**OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon**

**SAMUEL ZASADA + BEE & THE BEAR: Rapture, Witney (5pm)**

**BEE & THE BEAR + MINWAH + SAMUEL ZASADA + BIG BAD BREAKFAST + THE TRUMPET SOCIAL CLUB: The Red Lion, Witney**

**DUNCAN QUOFF + BARNYARD SOUNDS +**

**ADY + SNAKE + WE ARE REASONABLE PEOPLE + BILLY BOB BEAR: The Palace, Witney**

## FRIDAY 13<sup>th</sup>

**VAN MORRISON: The New Theatre** – Jocular fun from planet Earth's most cheerful musician and an artist who is in absolutely no way over-rated to an almost criminal degree. Oh no. 'Astral Weeks' – great stuff. Really. He's back next month too doing an improvised comedy show with Lou Reed. Wet yourselves in anticipation, kids.

**MIDLAKE + ROBERT GOMEZ + STEPHANIE DOSEN: The Zodiac (upstairs)** – Lysergic 70s rock dreamers make their Oxford debut – *see main preview*

**DEAD CLASS + VAMOS + TRISTAN & THE TROUBADOURS: The Zodiac (downstairs)** – Frenetic Irish punks Dead Class promote debut album, 'Boo', hinting at Dead Kennedys and Ramones along the way, while support comes from fellow Irish rockers Vamos and local indie-ska types Tristan & The Troubadours.

*Thursday 19<sup>th</sup>*

## CAMERA OBSCURA: The Zodiac

Back in 1984 Scottish singer Lloyd Cole asked, "Are you ready to be heartbroken?" Two decades later Glaswegian gems Camera Obscura provide the answer on single, 'Hey Lloyd, I'm Ready To Be Heartbroken' in a moment of perfect pop symmetry. Perfect pop being the most apt description of a band capable of some of the most beautifully emotive lovelorn ballads in recent times. For all the string-laden, synth and horns-bolstered expansiveness of their sound, Camera Obscura are a sweetly simple proposition with songwriter Tracianne Campbell's voice carrying everything before her. The band are in the great tradition of such fellow Caledonians as The Shop Assistants, Belle & Sebastian, Orange Juice and Altered Images, shimmering and jangling along a winding road to Heartbreak Central. Imagine if Phil Spector had handpicked his girl groups from a run-down council estate in Strathclyde and given their blissful melancholy a sunshine-strewn wall of sound back-up. It's a formula to melt the hardest heart.



**DEPTH CHARGE: The Zodiac** – Drum&bass with Kenny Ken and Nicky Blackmarket.  
**GAMMY LEG PRODUCTIONS with HEADCOUNT + TOUPE + BLUE JUNK: The X, Cowley** – Authentic punk rock action from Headcount, where Therapy? and Motorhead meet Adam & The Ants, topping this GLP mixed bill. Zappa-esque funk grind from Toupe in support, plus jazz-funk fusion from Blue Junk.

**QUICKFIX presents THE QUARTERFINALS + THE BLACK HATS + SCARAMANGA SIX + PROHIBITION SMOKERS CLUB: The Wheatsheaf** – Good, varied bill of local acts with heavyweight new wave pop from Quarterfinals, plus indie rocking from Black Hats and lysergic jazz-punk-rock from PSC.

**BRICKWORK LIZARDS + POCKET PROMISE: The Jericho Tavern** – Stylishly eclectic mix of 40s film noir jazz, Egyptian folk and hip hop from the local collective.

**OXFORD FOLK CLUB: The Port Mahon BOSSAPHONIK: The Cellar** – Live jazz dance with Brazilian beats act Zeep.

**REDOX + THE PETE FRYER BAND + FILM NOIR + HUGH McMANNERS: The Magdalen** – 70s-styled swamp rock and festival funk from Redox, plus guests.

**BACKROOM BOOGIE: The Bullingdon DISAPPOINTED + NUVOLA: The Elm Tree, Witney**

**PEPPERMINT VANDALS + BETHANY WEIMERS + TINDERSCUSS + THE PENGUIN DISAGREES + HENRY HERRINGTON: The Red Lion, Witney**

### **SATURDAY 14<sup>th</sup>**

**McFLY: The New Theatre** – Pretty boy pop-punk jollity made from the left-over body parts of failed child actors. Those distressed hair-do's cost more than you earn in a year, sucker.

**WINNEBAGO DEAL + WINTERS + GEHENNA + MONDO CADA: The Zodiac** – A fun experiment would be to make all the kids and mums and dads who are going to see McFly tonight come to this gig instead, or simply put the Deal on as support at the New Theatre. That'd learn the little blighters how to rock proper.

**MORRISON STEAM FAYRE + TRISTAN & THE TROUBADOURS: The Port Mahon GREEN ONIONS + RESERVOIR CATS + A PINT & THREE QUARTERS OF BLUES AIN'T DRUNK: The X, Cowley** – A night of blues in aid of Wittstock Festival with Blues Brothers types Green Onions headlining along with good time blues-rockers Reservoir Cats.

**JULIANA MYERS + PAUL SMALL + FULL METAL WAISTCOAT + CATALYST + SLEEPLESS: The Music Market** – Local acoustic songstress Julianna Myers launches her debut album at tonight's Delicious Music bands night. Folk rockers Full Metal Waistcoat support in a Richard Thompson / Fairport vein.

**SIMPLE: The Bullingdon** – Funky house with Touché and General Midi, plus resident DJs.

**BRENT FLOOD: The Temple Bar THE INFLATABLES: The Black Horse, Kidlington**

### **SUNDAY 15<sup>th</sup>**

**MARK MORRIS: The Zodiac** – The Bluetones singer plays a solo show at the Zodiac, a venue the Tones seem to come round to like a dose of flu every few months. This time it seems even his band couldn't be bothered to make it once more round the block.

**DELICIOUS MUSIC ELECTRIC OPEN JAM: The Music Market**

**ELECTRIC JAM: The X, Cowley**

### **MONDAY 16<sup>th</sup>**

**36 CRAZYFISTS + TWELVE TRIBES: The Zodiac (upstairs)** – Number-related heavy rocking action. Somewhere in between these two surely are 24 Hour Party People?

**65 DAYSOFFSTATIC + YOUTHMOVIES + CATS & CATS & CATS: The Zodiac (downstairs)** – More numbers at the Zodiac, Sheffield's 65DOS having numerical superiority on their side and, against all odds, the upper hand in sheer volume, pumping out an astonishingly intense, complex fusion of post-rock, techno and drum&bass that makes no concessions on any front. The continual rise and rise of 65DOS is as surprising as it is refreshing, a band who make out like the soundtrack to some inevitable nuclear holocaust. Feel the power of their rock.

**THE DAVID RAPHAEL BAND: The Bullingdon** – Rocking blues and r'n'b from the singer and harpist.

**JOHN RENBOURN & ROBIN WILLIAMSON: Nettlebed Folk Club** – Pentangle guitarist Renbourn teams up with Incredible String Band singer Williamson.

### **TUESDAY 17<sup>th</sup>**

**LUKE TOM: The Zodiac** – Self-consciously eccentric jazz-pop dandy from Cornwall, via London, replete with cravats and handlebar moustache for that Great Gatsby look and recent support to both The Feeling and Mika, which would earn our eternal sympathy if it didn't give such a good pointer to what his music sounds like. He says, Queen, Bowie and Elton John; we say, sounds a bit like Toploader.

**MOLLOY + COLLIDING LEMONS + LITTLE COSMONAUT + MINUTES: The Port Mahon** – Dirty, angular synth-pop, punk and new wave noises from Molloy, with a nod to The B52s, plus support from Bristol's ragged grunge-pop lasses Colliding Lemons and lo-fi electronic twee-pop from Little Cosmonauts.

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

**DELICIOUS MUSIC BLUES CLUB with GREEN ONIONS: The Music Market** – Blues Brothers tribute.

**SHUSH OPEN MIC SESSION: The X, Cowley Road**

### **WEDNESDAY 18<sup>th</sup>**

**THE DAVE PRISEMAN QUARTET: The X, Cowley** – Acclaimed jazz quartet.

**ABORT, RETRY, FAIL? With FOALS: The Cellar** – A low-key return to Oxford gig for the fast-rising local electro-disco post-funk rockers, headlining the electro club night.

**ZELEGA: The Port Mahon** – Gently elegant oceanic rock inspired by Mogwai and Explosions in the Sky.

**OPEN MIC SESSION: Marlborough House OPEN MIC SESSION: Temple Bar**

### **THURSDAY 19<sup>th</sup>**

**CAMERA OBSCURA: The Zodiac** – Divine Scottish janglers make their Oxford debut – see main preview

**SMASH DISCO: The Zodiac** – Tonight the electro and indie club night goes head to head with house club Slide.

**ANTON BARBEAU + HUGH JOHN NOBLE: QI Club** – Another dose of 60s psych-pop from Anton with partner Su Jordan.

**HANGMAN'S JOE: The Music Market** – Classic rock action.

**STORNOWAY + FOXES! + ONIONS FOR EYES: The Cellar** – Alternately sweet celtic-



*Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup>*

## **THEE MORE SHALLOWS:**

### **The Port Mahon**

San Franciscan ephemeral pop dreamers Thee More Shallows return to town for this Vacuous Pop night, their delicate and haunting low-key style of prairie pop owing as much to the grace and style of Mercury Rev and The Dirty Three as it does more glitchy alt.rock peers like Godspeed and Tortoise. Based around singer Dee Kester, whose fragile vocal tremors add huge depth and emotion to understated 'psychedelicate' songs full of sweeping strings, big horn arrangements and toy piano. They're equally grandiose and introverted and best appreciated in intimate surroundings such as these. New album, 'Book Of Bad Breaks', released on Anticon, is the follow-up to 2004's sublime 'More Deep Cuts'. Oh yes, it's all loneliness and mass graves round here: the soundtrack to the end of the world as experienced in a backwoods shack. Party on! Support comes from Liverpoolian newcomer Eugene McGuinness, displaying a decidedly OTT vocals style on his downbeat acoustic pop.

tinged pop and bug-eyed guitar rocking from rising local stars Stornoway, with support from ace indie janglers Foxes!.

**THE MIGHTY PORKER + BETIKA + THE REPEATS: The Jericho Tavern**

**ELECTRIC CIRCUS: The Port Mahon**

**CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre**

**OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon**

### **FRIDAY 20<sup>th</sup>**

**SQUARE ONE: The Zodiac** – Hardcore dance with DJs Dougal, Hixxy and Andy Whitby, plus MCs Static and Reload.

**YOURCODENAMEIS:MILO: The Zodiac** – Completely and utterly ace melodic hardcore noisemongers return, promoting new album, 'They Came From The Sun', squalling guitars and tightly-strung melodies somewhere between Fugazi and Radiohead.

**EASY TIGER + EMERALD SKY + SANTA DOG: The X, Cowley** – 70s-styled southern-fried rock from Easy Tiger with support from Cambridge heavy rockers Emerald Sky, in a Led Zep style.

**WHISTLER + WHERE WE FALL: The Wheatsheaf** – Local funk-rock newcomers.  
**OXFORD FOLK CLUB: The Port Mahon**  
**FRESH OUT OF THE BOX: The Cellar**  
**BACKROOM BOOGIE: The Bullingdon**  
**SATURDAY 21<sup>st</sup>**

**UNITED BIBLE STUDIES + TARA JANE O'NEIL + SHARRON KRAUS + ROB SHARPLES + SHOW WITHOUT PUNCH: The X, Cowley** – Superb night of alt.folk sounds at tonight's Terrastock Tea Party. Dublin's experimental, improvised collective United Bible Studies describe their sound as "Expiring infant suns weeping for worlds they will never warm", which sounds great, though less celestially they mix up traditional sounds of artists like Shirley Collins and Vashti Bunyan with shadowy electronic acts like Coil and Current 93. Oregon's Tara Jane O'Neil plays wonderfully haunted Scottish Islands folk, while local lass Sharron Kraus explores the darker side of early English and Appalachian folk. There's also intricate, intimate acoustic pop from Bath's Rob Sharples

*Thursday 26<sup>th</sup>*

## SKATALITES:

### The Zodiac

Skylarkin' continues to attract the very cream of Jamaican music to its monthly club night, topping even February's Alton Ellis gig with tonight's show – the first ever local appearance by ska legends The Skatalites. Formed in the early-60s the band were in large part responsible for the popularisation of ska with hits such as 'Guns Of Navarone' and trombonist Don Drummond's 'Man In The Street', as well as the genre's transformation into reggae. In their prime, between 1964 and 1965, the band recorded and played with the best Jamaican musicians and producers, including Prince Buster, Desmond Dekker and Lee Perry, recording their first two albums, 'Ska Authentic' volumes 1 and 2, at Studio 1. The beginning of the end came with the jailing of Drummond for murder and the band split in 1967. A reformed Skatalites returned in 1983, minus Drummond, who had died in prison, and have since relocated to the States and made their first forays into Europe and around the world. These days the core of the original band consists of Lloyd Knibb, Doreen Shaffer and Lester Sterling, with Tommy McCook and Jackie Mittoo amongst the casualties over the years. They remain, however a potent live band and one of the most important acts ever to come out of Jamaica. And short of forcing Prince Buster himself out of retirement, we wonder how Skylarkin' can top this.



and a guest performance from London's piano-based Show Without Punch, giving the night a wild edge with their Tom Waits and Shane McGowan-influenced blues.

**JENIFEREVER + THE EVENINGS + PAUL MARSHALL + ROCKET FALLS: The Wheatsheaf** – Sweeping, somnambulant, shoe-gazing, cloud-drifting rock from Sweden's dreamlike Jeniferever.  
**NONSENSE + CHRIS MARTIN + SLY + RETROFIRE: The Music Market** – Hip hop and urban night with local rappers and hip hop acts.  
**OX4: The Bullingdon – Drum&bass club night.**  
**THE GREEN: The Port Mahon**  
**MELTING POT with NINE-STONE COWBOY + THE CARTER MANOEUVRE + CONFUZIN' JACK + VEDA PARK: The Jericho Tavern** – Mark Cope's NSC band return with a new-look line-up, mixing up anthemic indie rock with alternately dryly humorous and romantic lyricism and a theatrical sense of showmanship. Support from mellow jazz-rockers Veda Park amongst others.  
**FALLING IDOLS: The Temple Bar**  
**HQ: The Cellar** – Hip hop and drum&bass club night.

## SUNDAY 22<sup>nd</sup>

**HATEBREED + ACACIA STRAIN: The Zodiac (upstairs)** – It's Breed-themed month at the Zodiac (Breed 77 are playing on the 30<sup>th</sup>) with the welcome return of Connecticut's Hatebreed, currently celebrating their 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary as well as new album, 'Supremacy'. Metal done hard, fast and brutal, as you'd expect from a band who've supported everyone from Slipknot to Slayer along the way.  
**JACK PENATE + LATE OF THE PIER + ADELE: The Zodiac (downstairs)** – South London rockabilly jangler and recent tour support to Maccabees, coming on somewhere between Jamie T, Billy Bragg and The Farmers Boys.  
**DELICIOUS MUSIC ELECTRIC OPEN JAM: The Music Market**  
**SOFT PANDA + THUMPER MONKEYS: The Port Mahon**  
**KEYBOARD CHOIR: Phoenix Picturehouse Bar** – Launch gig for this month's cover stars' debut album. Live electronica from Keyboard Choir plus DJs playing electro, world and early music.

## MONDAY 23<sup>rd</sup>

**PONTY BONE & THE SQUEEZETONES with WES MCGHEE: The Bullingdon** – The Texas accordion king and his band of the last twenty years, The Squeezetones, make their first visit to Oxford with their rootsy mix of blues, country, Cajun and soul, Bone himself having played with the likes of The Clash, Tom Petty and Ronnie Lane over the years.  
**THE EARLIES + ALBERTA CROSS: The Zodiac (upstairs)** – Prog-country electronica from The Earlies, probably the only band on the planet whose ten-strong membership is divided equally between Texas and Burnley. An eclectic bunch they are too, veering between Beck, Flaming Lips and Green On Red.  
**FIELDS: The Zodiac (downstairs)** – Gorgeous, cloud-gazing guitar pop that makes the connection between My Bloody Valentine and Death Cab For Cutie on the one hand and the new wave of folk on the other.  
**FIGHT FIRE WITH WATER + THE YOUNGS PLAN: The X, Cowley**

**JOE ALLEN & ANGHARAD JENKINS: The Port Mahon** – Highly promising local singer-songwriter in the vein of Elliot Smith and Damien Rice, accompanied by electric violinist Angharad.  
**FAIRPORT CONVENTION: Nettlebed Folk Club** – Low-key gig for the English folk-rock legends.

## TUESDAY 24<sup>th</sup>

**THEE MORE SHALLOWS + EUGENE MCGUINNESS: The Port Mahon** – Delicately psychedelic electro-pop at tonight's Vacuous Pop night – *see main preview*  
**MONEEN + BAYSIDE + ATTACK IN BLACK: The Zodiac** – Canadian emo-rockers on tour, mixing up the lovelorn sweetness with melodic punk-pop noise; Victory Records signings Bayside support.  
**JAZZ CLUB with THE SEE YOU NEXT**  
**SUNDAY JAZZ ORCHESTRA: The Bullingdon**  
**DELICIOUS MUSIC BLUES CLUB with BLUE MAMA + KINKY RING FINGER: The Music Market**  
**SHUSH OPEN MIC SESSION: The X, Cowley Road**  
**OPEN MIC SESSION: Mangos**

## WEDNESDAY 25<sup>th</sup>

**MINDLESS SELF-INDULGENCE: The Zodiac** – Decidedly non-PC techno-punks out of New York and fronted by the charmingly-named Little Jimmy Urine, mixing up digital hardcore with synth-pop and punk.  
**OPEN MIC SESSION: Marlborough House**  
**OPEN MIC SESSION: Temple Bar**

## THURSDAY 26<sup>th</sup>

**CRADLE OF FILTH + KITTIE: Brookes University Union** – Cuddly doom-metal icons crank up the ungodly noise – *see main preview*  
**SKATALITES + NINE-TON PEANUT SMUGGLERS + DJ DEREK: The Zodiac** – 60s Jamaican ska legends make their Oxford debut – *see main preview*  
**SABOTAGE: The Zodiac**  
**SELECTASOUND presents THE SIRENS CALL + SHAKER HEIGHTS + DIATRIBE + HANGMAN CHARLIE: The X, Cowley** – Mixed bag of local rock from Selectasound tonight featuring grungey Britpoppers The Sirens Call; melodic guitar pop from Shaker Heights, and scuzzy new wave noise from Diatribe.  
**OXFORD JAZZ SOCIETY SESSION: The Music Market**  
**CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre**  
**OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon**

## FRIDAY 27<sup>th</sup>

**MUMM-RA: The Zodiac** – Ebullient mix of lightweight synth-rock and jangle-pop from Bexhill's Mumm-ra, fresh from supporting The Automatic and The Horrors on the NME Awards tour and sporting some fluffy Cure and Killers influences.  
**PURESENCE: The Zodiac** – Surprising but more than welcome return for Manchester's forgotten sons of gorgeously melodramatic indie rock. A band who preceded the global success of acts like Snow Patrol but never achieved the level of commercial success they deserved. Dark of mood but graceful and expansive of sound and fronted by the gloriously soaring vocals of James Mudriczki. A new album, on their own label, is due out later this spring.  
**HIT & RUN: The Zodiac** – Drum&bass and hip hop club night.

**GAPPY TOOTH INDUSTRIES with SPACE HEROES OF THE PEOPLE + COLOUR + NON-STOP TANGO:** The Wheatsheaf – GTI make their move from the Zodiac to the Wheatsheaf, still putting on a goodly mixed bill of sounds every month. This time around it's electro-pop experimenters SHOTP heading the bill with support from abstract, improvised experimenters Non-Stop Tango and funky, melodic math-rockers Colour.

**UNITING THE ELEMENTS + TOBY + JUXSTAR: The X, Cowley** – Return of the ever-touring German power-rockers, finding a meeting ground between Hanoi Rocks and No Doubt.

**SANDCREEK MASSACRE + SMALLTEASERS + ENVY + OTHER SINS:** The Jericho Tavern – Epic indie rock melancholy from Reading's Sandcreek Massacre, plus cheesy 80s-style guitar pop from Smallteasers.

**OXFORD FOLK CLUB: The Port Mahon BASSMENTALITY Vs BLUNTED: The Cellar** – Hip hop, soul and funk club night soundclash.

**BACKROOM BOOGIE: The Bullingdon** – With guest Aidan Larkin from Skylarkin'.

### **SATURDAY 28<sup>th</sup>**

**BOBBY COOK: The Cellar** – Very much the name to drop in music industry circles at the moment and recently signed to BMG Publishing, south London singer-songwriter Booby Cook arrives out of the same scene that spawned Larrikin Love and Vincent Vincent and the Villains, although his lush, uplifting brand of pop melancholy owes more to the likes of Arcade Fire, Ed Harcourt and Ryan Adams. Limited-edition debut single, 'Gone So Far', is already a collector's item and next time round Bobby will be headlining bigger venues than this.

**DOOLITTLE + OFFICIAL SECRETS ACT + KING FURNACE: The Port Mahon** – Former Eat and We Know Where You Live frontman Ange Doolittle returns with his new band, reprising favourite songs from his cult rock career.

**THE WILDHEARTS: The Zodiac** – Enduringly entertaining pop-metal heavyweights reform and return yet again, their long history a catalogue of

chart hits and personnel splits. Main man Ginger remains at the helm, now back with most of the band's original line-up, various alcohol and drug problems seemingly resolved and destined to remain a cult act until the next split, reformation and beyond.

**TRUE RUMOUR + LOTS OF DEAD GOLDFISH + TIM MATTHEWS: The Music Market** – Delicious Music local bands night.  
**SKA NIGHT with HOPE & GLORY: The Bullingdon** – Madness tribute act H&G headline a night of classic ska.

**THE TYMES: The Temple Bar**  
**SUNDAY 29<sup>th</sup>**

**PINDROP PERFORMANCE with DAVEY GRAHAM + MASPINDZELI + TARIK BESHIR + BEN ULPH + SPIRIDON SPRIDONOVITCH SHISHIGAN: Jacqueline Du Pre Building** – Pretty astonishing bill of diverse talents here with godfather of contemporary folk Davey Graham headlining a special Pindrop Performance with support from 20-piece Georgian folk choir Maspindzeli, Arabian instrumentals from Brickwork Lizards frontman Tarik, a musical tribute to Davey Graham from Thumb Quintet's Ben Ulph, plus Russian Jewish harp player Spiridon playing his first gig outside of his homeland.

**ACOUSTIC LADYLAND: The Zodiac** – Avoiding the usual jazz-rock fusion pitfalls by actually being good, former Young Jazz Musicians of the Year, saxophonist Pete Wareham and keyboard player Tom Cawley fuse some of the more extreme elements of rock and jazz into an inventive whole that rarely dilutes either genre, coming on like a cross between John Zorn and The Stooges.

**BEARD MUSEUM with THE KATE GARRETT BAND + ROGER TARRY + SAM BEER + DANNY WHITEHOUSE: The Purple Turtle** – Mellow pop fun at the monthly Beard Museum club; tonight's headliners are local singer Kate Garrett's band with a sweet, jazz-inflected brand of pop.

**CHANTELLE PIKE + KREG VIESELMAN: The Jericho Tavern** – Jazz-inflected acoustic rock from local singer Chantelle  
**DELICIOUS MUSIC ELECTRIC OPEN JAM: The Music Market**

**ELECTRIC JAM: The X, Cowley**  
**MONDAY 30<sup>th</sup>**

**MACCABEES: Brookes University Union** – Brighton's indie funksters return after their sell-out gig at the Zodiac back in February and the venues just keep on getting bigger, the band trying to live up to the 'Best new band in Britain' hype and looking ever more likely to hit the big time with a live-wire show that leans towards XTC and Bloc Party.

**BREED 77 + FOREVER NEVER + LUNAR MILE: The Zodiac** – Post-grunge thrash metallers originally from Gibraltar but long-since relocated to London, still riding high on the acclaim accredited last year's 'In My Blood' album and chart hit 'The River', adding a Latin edge and some middle-eastern atmospherics to their heavy-duty riffage and drawing comparisons to Alice In Chains and System Of A Down. A new single, 'Look At Me Now' is out now while the band release a Spanish-language album, 'Un Encuentro' later this month.



*Thursday 26<sup>th</sup>*

## **CRADLE OF FILTH: Brookes University**


Rock and roll. The Devil's music. Grrrr! And so here are the UK's premier protagonists of Satan's own brand of noise: Cradle of Filth (pretend you've got a throat full of gravel before you speak their name). Long reviled by all but the most extreme metal press and embarrassingly revealed on the BBC's *Living With The Enemy* as - gasp! - nice blokes, The Filth have nevertheless earned themselves a sizeable cult following across the globe. You can mock all you like, but the fact remains there are few things more entertaining than a satanic metal band in full flow, and Cradle of Filth wipe the floor with just about every lame-assed metal band around. You want blitzkrieg industrial riffs soundtracking the swarming of vast waves of helicopter gunships over Death Valley? You got them times two. You want Wagnerian operatics and the 'Ride of the Valkeries' on the back of a black Harley Davidson careering headlong into several mountains? Oh yeah, that's here too. You want Lucifer's own servant on earth, clad in black and spouting larva-gargling invective and rasping like the dying breaths of a thousand trench warfare victims? Well there's Dani Filth himself, a lizardine goblin, part gothic pantomime villain, part cycle slut junkie from Hell. And great song titles? Try 'Of Dark Blood And Fucking' and 'Sodomy and Lust' on for size. Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven, as Dani would doubtless say.


**BIG GILSON: The Bullingdon** – Brazilian guitarist, best known over here for his work with UK blues singer The Wolf, playing the blues Chicago style.


**MURRAY TORKILDSEN + SIR BALD DIDDLEY & LISA LARRY + DAVID**

**FULLBROOK: The Port Mahon** – Former-Sweeney frontman Murray builds up for May morning with support from local retro rocker Baldie and chums.

**ALY BAIN & PHIL CUNNINGHAM: Nettlebed Folk Club** – Award-winning Scottish fiddle and accordion duo.







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# LIVE

## BRIGHT EYES

### Brookes University Union

As the front man of Bright Eyes, Conor Oberst is generally accorded so much more attention than any of the band's other permanent members that you could be forgiven for assuming the name to be his personal pseudonym. Not just the political charge of several of the songs on 'I'm Wide Awake, It's Morning', but also his skill as a songwriter have led to comparisons with Bob Dylan. He's also a great lyricist, articulate and reflective, with lines like, "Leave the novelist in his daydream's tune / Leave the scientist in his Rubik's cube" affirming the Dylan comparisons and elevating him to the rare class of writers whose lyrics convey as much read as they do across music.

Such mythologizing of their vocalist, however, tends to leave the rest of the band thrust into the shadows. Tonight's show at Oxford Brookes, one of only two UK tour dates, allows them their proper prominence. Playing a set composed largely of the newer material, a sizeable chunk of which is drawn from their recent 'Four Winds' EP and forthcoming album 'Cassadaga', Bright Eyes demonstrate a more ambitious musical reach. Though the melancholy country influence of bands like Palace Brothers is still in place, complicated guitar solos and elegiac violin parts create a sound larger and showier than that of their earlier songs. Indeed, it's matured so much that at times it's in danger of wandering off into Radio 2 territory. Conor's lyrical occupations



photo: Richard Hounslow

also seem to have come of age, showing a greater sophistication and a broader social register.

This is not to say that maturity has brought contentment, however. The narratives remain bleak, the delivery impassioned, the voice wracked with quavering emotion. If this raw desolation paints Conor as being at odds with the world then it also places him at odds with the band. It feels unfair to quote one of the weaker lines of a lyricist of no mean talent, but the self-referential metaphor of 'Tourist Trap' - "a progression of chords / How I want this to resolve" - sums up the difference. Whilst Jake Bellows' guitar is often bombastic and the

keyboard launches into anthemic jaunts on songs such as 'Soul Singer in a Session Band', nothing Conor does affords any kind of catharsis. He leaves chords hanging, denying the neat satisfaction of closure, and for all the broadening of scope, his world is unremittingly bleak; a tunnel without even an oncoming train to provide illumination. Whilst the band go for epic release, he subjects the audience to the pleasurable torture of endlessly deferred fulfilment. By the time they have resolved the last song's final chord and waved goodbye to the audience, he has already left the stage.

*Emily Gray*

## EL TANBURA

### The Zodiac

Egyptian Folk Music, traditional instruments, not a Stratocaster in sight, and musicians who were youths in the 1956 Suez Crisis. If this sounds like a recipe for an 'interesting', cerebral and worthy but rather restrained gig you couldn't be more wrong.

El Tanbura are all about joy emerging from reverie, and dance emerging from trance, music that gets your body moving and isn't just for your head. From Port Said and formed in 1989, the band are ten-strong, ages range over three generations, and they come on stage wearing a mix of traditional and western clothes, symbolic perhaps of their desire for music to break down barriers. Their songs honour Sufi divine love as well as very earthy love, exile, saucy sailors, and with 'Canal Song', about the British and French Suez invasion, Egyptian Nationalism and the pride and resistance of local communities. Some songs start slowly,

meditatively, but with a change up in rhythm and volume become very different songs, with a strong almost frantic beat set up with four or six percussionists and as many vocalists chanting or doing call and response.

Underneath the rhythm and the tumult, is the sound of the *simsimiyya*, the Egyptian lyre that dates back to the Pharaohs. Folklore says it is female and seduces both player and audience. Tonight it does its magic as El Tanbura communicate and get the crowd on their wavelength.

Ecstatic acclaim greets the end of El Tanbura's two sets. I'd have liked a really, really long Sufi song and an unaccompanied song in the set list, but I get the unaccompanied one with the band singing a popular Egyptian song along with Egyptian locals on the street outside the Zodiac. What fun. Another inspired victory for promoters Big Village

*Colin May*

## CHARLOTTE HATHERLEY

### The Zodiac

Bear with me here... I'm finding it difficult to concentrate on writing this review for more than three minutes at a time, such is the deleterious affect on the attention span of erstwhile Ash guitarist Charlotte Hatherley's spun-sugar ADD pop-gobs.

In small doses, it's actually rather pleasant (but then so is Babycham), and debut single 'Kim Wilde', for instance, stands strong alongside the best of Ash's output, but even Avril Lavigne tunes have more edge than most of Hatherley's set. The closest reference point, aside from the oft-cited Pixies nod, might actually be Veruca Salt's maligned, Bob Rock-produced second album, which applied so much polish to the songs you could practically see your face in them but did for any soul they might have once possessed.

It's difficult to fathom exactly the circumstances under which you'd listen to an entire Hatherley album when you could just pick

'Doolittle' off your shelf, but it is almost a perfect exercise in music for the iPod generation. Each track is a perfect, hermetically-sealed burst of clean, polished guitar pop tailor-made to pass three minutes on a bus journey in the company of other amorphous indie standards.

Even in the live arena, where Hatherley might cut loose and rock some of the edges off her songs, you can practically hear her producer whacking up the 'Sunny Pop' dial on the mixing desk (they all have one - it's just by that rack of glowing compressors that look impressive but do nothing). And that's the problem. These are perfectly complaisant, hum-along ditties that pass the time for a few minutes, but they don't stick in the head past the final chord - it's the sort of music you imagine the cast of *Friends* might listen to. During Season 10 rather than the edgy first series, naturally.

*Stuart Fowkes*

## THE HOURS

### The Zodiac

If I were some pathetic journalist who got a kick out of using bands' names to take cheap shots at their performance I'd say things like "Yes, the Hours. How many more left of tonight must I endure?" etc. etc. insert witty comment re. waste of time/life etc etc. But I'm not like that. And The Hours aren't a *bad* band. Surely Ant Genn (formerly of Elastica and Pulp) and Martin Slattery (formerly with Joe Strummer and the Mescaleros) will be leaving us all here with something to cherish forever and ever. But two songs in and I'm not so sure.

Right. It could be that I have issues with any band who love themselves so much that it's actually hard to breathe with the amount of suffocating ego which surrounds them. But that aside, it's much more to do with their absolute blasé-ness. 'Love You More' starts off with a Vangelis opener and leads into lukewarm power pop with Ant listing all the things that he loves less than the woman in question. "I love you more than my football team" etc. etc. 'Back When You Were Good' is a big stadium power ballad, with huge stabbing piano and guitar chords and super harmonies. 'I Miss You' is cringeworthy, whereas the Interpol-like 'Dive In' works through its sheer simplicity.

There is some really good stuff happening in many of the songs: the impeccable harmonies; the simple and catchy piano riffs. Everything well rehearsed. A little bit of the Jam, Keane, Coldplay, XTC and Clearlake: it's all in there. But what you come away feeling is that you want to hear more of The Hours. Just who are they and what's their own sound? At the moment it's mostly non-descript. If the Hours are to climb up from the bottom rungs of a very crowded ladder they'll need to become great in their own right.

Katy Jerome

## A SILENT FILM

### The Wheatsheaf

It's no insult to the Wheatsheaf when we declare that A Silent Film are made for bigger stages than this. They're a stadium band in waiting and frontman and keyboard player Rob Stevenson has a voice that should have Elton John looking over his shoulder as he plays the parts of rock god and lounge lothario with equal ease.

A Silent Film's music is ambitious, occasionally to the point of bombast, with songs that sometimes have as many different parts as Radiohead's 'Paranoid Android' or Muse's 'Knights Of Cydonia', but equally with much of the pop *nous* of Robbie Williams, you feel they'll not settle for much less than complete world domination.

Of course when you fly so close to the sun your wings can get burned; it's a precarious path they tread and you feel their musical ambitions could destroy them as well as make them, with record companies hovering already and hopefully not plotting to mould them into some easily-marketable pigeonhole. They need to be given the free creative reign they currently enjoy. Ballads that might seem overwrought pumping from a pub PA will soar in more expansive arenas and even when they have you thinking of Ultravox or Aha! on occasions you can imagine their name being lit large on hoardings across the land.

Still the chief weapon in their powerful armoury is set closer 'Chromatic Eyes' an oddly proggy, tripped-out multi-drum rock tattoo that might just possibly be the meeting point between Queen and The Beta Band. These are giddy stratospheres A Silent Film are aiming for; how high they get is really up to them. For now just watching them fly is quite something.

Dale Kattack

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## DIATRIBE

### The Cellar

Diatribes are all decked out in matching stencilled t-shirts bearing the band's name. All except the singer whose garish creation simply reads Cunt. As they open their set with a loose-limbed blast of noise possessed of a singular determination to kick everything out of its path, you get to thinking, this is probably what punk rock really sounded like first time round. In particular the early ragged thrash of Warsaw-era Joy Division. It's a cracking start to any gig.

For once a somewhat unforgiving sound actually helps rather than hinders the band, the vocals, drowned under a welter of guitars take on an air of mystery, while pockets of distortion outnumber melodies. So much so you have to strain to realise they're covering Pixies' 'Gouge Away' at one point. On and on they scurry, with an unstoppable propulsion and a bag full of feedback, some distance away from the punchy but polished indie rock of their recent demo.

If Diatribe have a fault it's their inability to see a nut without trying to crack it open with a sledgehammer and then drive over it with a steamroller. The wall of noise can be thrilling but sometimes it needs reigning in. It's hard to know how much tonight is an aberration from their normal sound, but on the strength of this, they could go on to break some heads.

Dale Kattack



## CATO STREET CONSPIRACY / THE COURTESY KILL

### **The Wheatsheaf**

Featuring various members of such bands as Dekt, All You Miss, and At Risk; The Courtesy Kill can't really be described as a supergroup but it would be fair to suggest that in this case the sum of their parts add up to something pretty special. For a band that include the likes of Smashing Pumpkins and AFI as influences, The Courtesy Kill are surprisingly lightweight, their songs are more likely to be sprayed with glitter and shiny little stars than drenched in the sweat of rock gods.

The addition of All You Miss's Suzie has added a new dimension to the band and the dual harmonies between her and vocalist Cat add a pop sweetness that is as far away from saccharine as it's possible to get. At times it all seems too polite, but when they find a more aggressive stride on newer songs like 'Give Me Collision' they prove they can hit some fairly impressive heights.

Cato Street Conspiracy have come a long way in the last few months. They've tightened up considerably; their songs now finding the kind of focus you need to pummel people into submission. Oozing confidence, their intelligent riffing and surprising ear for a pop melody combine perfectly to create a somewhat bizarre hybrid of classic metal, Fugazi-style punk, and Fall Out Boy-like poppiness.

They'd probably quibble over the last comparison, but it's most definitely there, and it's what sets them apart from so many other bands who thrash wildly without producing anything you'd ever want to hear again. Admittedly the screaming twin guitar solos are still in place and at times they seem a bit superfluous, but with a set this strong you can forgive a little self indulgence here and there.

*Sam Shepherd*

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**Mon 2<sup>nd</sup>** Nick Breakspear / Numbertine / John Hollingsworth Goes To Leeds 8.30pm **FREE**

**Thu 5<sup>th</sup>** Grinning Spider presents Neimo / Pop Klub Arsenal / Harriet Glover 8.30pm **£4**

**Fri 6<sup>th</sup>** Borderville / The Swamis / Birds of Wales 8.30pm **£4**

**Sat 7<sup>th</sup>** eXposure presents GRAIN / THE FALZONES / MIKE FINLEY 8.30pm **£4**

**Thu 12<sup>th</sup>** Hello Bruno / Sefton / more TBC 8.30pm **£4**

**Fri 13<sup>th</sup>** Gammy Leg presents Headcount / Toupe / Blue Junk 8.30pm **£4**

**Sat 14<sup>th</sup>** Wittstock Fund Raiser Green Onions / Reservoir Cats / A Pint & 3/4 of A Pint of Blues Ain't Drunk 8.30pm **£4**

**Sun 15<sup>th</sup>** Electric Jam 8pm **FREE**

**Wed 18<sup>th</sup>** XXJAZZ presents Dave Priseman Quartet (Dave Priseman – trumpet; Martin Picket – piano; Ben Twyford – drums; Paul Jefferies – double bass) 8.30pm Tickets **£5** - dinner available - must be booked.

**Thu 19<sup>th</sup>** Amnesty International Fund Raiser. Acts TBC 8.30pm **£4**

**Fri 20<sup>th</sup>** Grinning Spider presents Easy Tiger / Emerald Sky / Santa Dog / Anton Barbeau (TBC) 8.30pm **£4**

**Sat 21<sup>st</sup>** Terrascope Tea Party with United Bible Studies / Jane O'Neil / Sharron Kraus / Rob Sharples / Show Without Punch 7pm **£8 (£7 adv)**

**Mon 23<sup>rd</sup>** Fight Fire With Water / The Youngs Plan / more TBC 8pm **£3**

**Thu 26<sup>th</sup>** SelectaSound presents The Sirens Call / Shaker Heights / Diatribe / Hangman Charlie 8.30pm **£4**

**Fri 27<sup>th</sup>** Uniting The Elements / Toby / Juxstar 8.30pm **£4**

**Sat 28<sup>th</sup>** Confidential Collective + all their friends! 8.30pm **£4**

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## *the port mahon*

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9<sup>th</sup> Sybarites

10<sup>th</sup> Simon Davies + Barnabas

+ Frei Zinger

11<sup>th</sup> Oxford Improvisers

12<sup>th</sup> Dirty Boys present:

Vesibule + Genuine

Freashow + Focal Point

13<sup>th</sup> Oxford Folk Club

14<sup>th</sup> Morrison Steam Fayre +

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19<sup>th</sup> Electric Circus

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# PRINZHORN DANCE SCHOOL/ ME & THE NECK/ THE CHELTENHAM AVERAGE/ LOUISE HANSON/ SIAN ROBINS-GRACE/ SUB FUNC

## The Cellar

Sub Func? Sub- fucking something. Standard? Musical? Human? Our mission to rehabilitate funk as a respectable genre crumbles in the face of this stolid, flabby and gutless stillborn jam session. And this is just the first of seven acts! Jesus, don't you people have to go to work tomorrow morning? After a feeble stand up, whose name the organisers don't even tell us (embarrassment, we surmise), Sian Robins-Grace provides blessed relief with some abrasive poetry, centred on repressed rugger boys and menstrual liberation: strident and amusing, she's a one woman Hammer & Tongue.

DJ Louise Hanson has hit on the novel idea of playing records continuously and makes sure we have 40 minutes to marvel at her audacity. The Cheltenham Average live up to the latter part of their name, with some clumpy foursquare indie that only comes close to working when it approaches a Strokes shuffle, and we begin to despair. Deeply. The bar doesn't serve arsenic so we settle down to endure Me & The Neck, who revel in their slipshod inadequacy. In fairness, it's *occasionally* charming, but if ever there were a cover

version to make you go home and melt your hallowed copy of "The Queen Is Dead", these amateurs can supply it.

Frankly, by this time anything would sound revelatory, and the fact that Prinzhorn Dance School are one of the best bands we've seen in years means we almost explode. They have more authority in one brutal snare crack than other bands will manage in their lives. PDS have taken bluesy punk and pared it to the bone. Then they've sharpened the bone. Then they've driven it with a ruthless efficiency into your defenceless ears. Seriously, this trio is sparse and commanding enough to make The Archie Bronson Outfit look like Emerson, Lake & Palmer. There's a deft economy in the lyrics too, one tale of a "nine piece soul band" in a leisure centre recalling McClusky at their most mordantly humorous; the last song, with it's repeated yelps of "Crackerjack docker" reminds us of 'Dagnet'-era Fall, which is high praise indeed. Relentless, mysterious and individual, Prinzhorn are painfully good. Whereas most of the night was just painful.

*David Murphy*

# TOWERS OF LONDON / NANCY'S BOYS / SMILEX

## The Zodiac

I erroneously arrive at The Zodiac too late to catch Smilex tonight, but the word on the street is that they, to use modern youth parlance, *owned* the venue. I've always held Smilex in high regard, and they seem to be getting better and better each time I've seen them. Their deranged take on dirty punk rock seems to be increasingly more confident and brash. Note to self: make more effort to get to their next show.

Nancy's Boy are a bunch of scruffy Camden Dickensian dandies with a brick shithouse of a Liverpoolian for a lead singer. Like a weird combination of The Clash, Dexy's Midnight Runners and Oasis, they're all 'come aaaahn' aggro confidence over a messy noise of skanking, melodic punk. They certainly seem to enjoy themselves, but unfortunately it all rings a little hollow – all style (of sorts), no substance. Desperately trying to whip up the surprisingly lively audience into a riot of fists and stomping, they give it their all and strut the stage like they've been doing this for years, but fail to connect.

It seems everybody is just waiting for Towers Of London to shamble onto the stage like the feather-cutted attention-

seekers that they are. You can keep your 'controversial' (© Channel Four) Donny Tourette walkouts from *Big Brother*, and your orchestrated naughty boy Bravo TV show behaviour. That's all immaterial if the band can't cut it live... although on the basis of tonight, it would seem *it's not*. How have this many people been taken in so much by such a cynical exercise in fake anarchy? Musically, Towers Of London are nothing more than a lame, low-par take on the far superior output of Guns 'n' Roses, Motley Crue and The Sex Pistols. I'd give them more credit for some kind of 'here's three chords – now start a band' reality if the band seemed to do anything more than strike a repetitive selection of clichéd poses, if they seemed to have any modicum of true belief in ideas and originality. But it seems I'm one of the few thinking this way, as The Zodiac goes mental for them. I say, take Towers Of London and stick 'em in a small room with Sylvain Sylvain, Nikki Sixx and John Lydon for a week. They'll come out as either a good band, or a destroyed mess incapable of picking up their instruments. Either way – result.

*Simon Minter*

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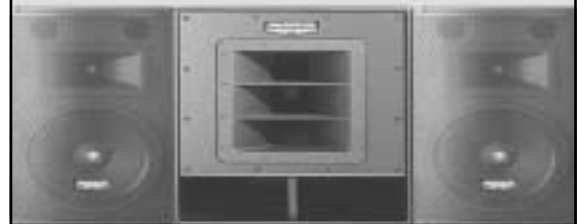
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## **TILLY & THE WALL**

### **The Zodiac**

I loathe forced jollity, so why do I love Tilly & The Wall so much? When they play everyone feels happy, none more so than the band themselves and in particular tap-dancing rhythm fairy Jamie Pressnall, a woman you feel could end world wars with a single smile and a click of her heels.

Tilly & The Wall's trick is simply to enjoy themselves making the brightest, sunniest pop on planet earth and hope everyone else joins in. They inevitably do. That they start with a song called 'Rainbow In The Dark' says everything about them - a breathless rush of good feelings and aural sunshine, a riot of handclaps, foot taps and summer harmonies, flamenco cheerleader punk, Spector-ish girl pop and the odd Velvet Underground-style guitar drone adding up an effusive cocktail of unbridled joy. The mood is so buoyant that when they do slip into lachrymose mode for one number, guitarist Derek Pressnall taking over lead duties from Neely Jenkins and the heavily-tattooed Kianna Alarid for a lovelorn slowie, the incongruity is quite startling.

Tilly & The Wall can be incredibly cheesy it's true - notably the country gospel numbers when they sound like a strange combination of The Bangles and Dixie Chicks - but even here you have to love them because the happiness pours out of them. Nowhere more so than tonight's highlight, 'Bad Education' from last year's 'Bottoms Of Barrels' album. Equally their sound engineer is doing them few favour tonight but they rise above such inconveniences, their whole show feels like a party, with all its attendant chaos, that it's simply our pleasure and privilege to be invited to. The band's last visit to the Zodiac, last September, was easily the most fun gig of the year and it seems that everyone who was there is back again tonight and has brought all their friends. Never mind MySpace, Tilly & The Wall are becoming huge simply on word of mouth recommendations. They're utterly irresistible. By the end there can't be a single person here who isn't in love with Jamie and not a living soul who isn't smiling from ear to ear.

**Dale Kattack**

## **RICHARD JAMES / LITTLE EIFFEL** **/ LITTLE COSMONAUT**

### **The Wheatsheaf**

The first two acts at tonight's Vacuous Pop club night have more than just half a name in common. Glockenspiels and egg-shaped shakers abound, giving a feeling of amateur hour. Songs are mere sketches and the bands shrug and shuffle about as if they're unsure they should even be onstage. Both bands sound delightful in their recorded form, but live they seem to lack any stage presence or performance qualities.

Little Cosmonaut seem the most real of the two bands, in that they're feeling their way along and growing into a band in public. With Little Eiffel it seems a bit more affected. I've seen them before and know they're more talented than tonight's performance would indicate. That they've replaced their drummer (minimal kit, rudimentary playing, absolutely great) with a glockenspiel player seems to suggest they're deliberately regressing to try and win some cute charm competition. Richard James, ex-of Gorky's

Zygotic Myncci, is the real deal though. It doesn't appear so from the first couple of songs, but after an audience member asks the seated crowd very politely not to talk during the songs (to which he receives no abuse, merely compliance), the real beauty of his songs come through. Richard has brought with him a man with a laptop and Cate Le Bon on backing vocals. While the laptop man merely provides the odd train or birdsong sample, Cate's input is much more telling. Her beautiful voice weaves into Richard's to great effect, giving his bucolic songs that extra edge. His set works better when taken as a single entity rather than separate moments but the times he does veer from his chosen path (picking up the banjo, letting Cate take lead vocals) are the moments that stand out. Tonight is a wonderful performance, and you can only imagine there's even better to come if he experiments more.

**Russell Barker**

## **FOALS / THE ROCK OF TRAVOLTA** **/ DELTA FREQUENCY**

### **The Zodiac**

Delta Frequencies are a painful experience: ostentatious and totally non-descript rock that really pangs the irritation threshold. Never, under any circumstances watch this band; the guitarists even wear fake sport arm casts and shameful 'arena rock' stage moves and gurning. Never mind they're the 'talent', the 'cream of the crop' Oxford supergroup. Supergroup's just another word for "stick to your own band". Terrible stuff. Terrible.

The Rock of Travolta still insist with the pretence and onstage pomposity of playing Wembley Arena, yet these histrionics underpin actual substance. They present a mightily tight take on symphonic-rock, possibly what Beethoven would listen to had he been born 20 years ago. Cello lines weave in and out of powerful instrumentation between two guitarists, providing a refreshing counterpart to the usual epic post-rock drivel which ends up supporting genuinely good bands.

I'm usually the one with the arms folded, vacant expression, the Gap Model Pout. I rarely dance at gigs. Thankfully, Foals change that, salvage my relationship with God and help me give up the smack. They are that good. Foals tonight is much like watching Battles in the same room last year: stifling atmosphere, pounding drums, groove-laden riffs, and lots of hot as hell dancing. You heard. Hot as hell.

It's a kind of homecoming gig for Foals, having toured England with their brand of pretty individual indie-disco. What can stop them being absolutely flipping huge? Being naturally prejudiced against the Top 40 anyway, would it not be thoroughly refreshing for Foals to exploit such hackneyed and manufactured territory? Po-faced they can be, but here's to Foals invading little Jimmy Emo's CD collection and giving him up to dancing like a fool. Foals. Say it. The future of pop music.

**Pascal Ansell**



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## BAT FOR LASHES

### The Zodiac

Originally hailing from Pakistan, her hair black as electric space and adorned with a jewelled band, Natasha Khan looks every inch a mythical Persian princess. As Bat For Lashes, the music she makes is no less exotic.

The solemn, studied artiness of her introduction, a string of bells jangling amid rapt silence from the crowd, suggests this might all be a little too pretentious but as rumbling bass and scraped violin heralds 'Trophy' from last year's astonishing 'Fur & Gold' album, tonight's gig is a magical trip. Backed by a versatile band with an extraordinary breadth of talent who create elegantly austere baroque pop from strings, electronics and electric guitar and bass, Khan is a mesmerising presence, even while she spends much of the set hidden behind her piano, breaking hearts with gorgeous, stripped-down ballads like 'Sad Eyes'. Elsewhere Bat For Lashes are ominously powerful; if 'Trophy' were made flesh it would have talons and drink the blood of virgins, while, 'Sarah', is a monumental slice of gothic portent.

Comparisons to Bjork are unavoidable, particularly when Natasha is whooping and shrieking like a heartbroken banshee in a storm but she's a stunning talent in her own right, the towering, mystical splendour of 'Horse and I', with its swirling harpsichord, closer to the majesty of Dead Can Dance. A stunning cover of Springsteen's 'I'm On Fire', meanwhile, manages the seemingly impossible task of equalling the original.

There is room for humour here too, Khan is some way off the self-obsessed diva her music might suggest while avoiding the knowing kookiness of singers like Imogen Heap, and she does a pretty mean wolf impersonation before realising how daft she sounds. She finishes tonight with new single, 'Priscilla', a typically out-there piece of bucolic, almost mediaeval pop and then the princess is off. Hopefully to live happily ever after.

**Dale Kattack**

## DR SHOTOVER:

### Education, Education, Edukayshun

"Hurrah for the Easter hols!" I hear you say, as you prepare for one last Cowley Road pub-crawl in your amusing Guinness novelty hat while talking in a loud voice about how "brilliantly hung-over" you were after "Paddy's Night". Go back to Farnham and stay there, you oversized student cretin! Hmmm, now, where was I? Ah yes, my scheme to integrate the East Indies club with the local academic community... Don't laugh, Knebworth, it's your turn to get the drinks in. It all started at our AGM, when, fuelled by nasty 70s drugs, we had a brainstorming session on "raising the club's profile". Last time this was discussed you may remember that we called in a team of management consultants - and shot them. Anyway, this time I had a final handful of Mandies (found in the pocket of a greatcoat I hadn't worn since that Groundhogs gig in 1972) and came up with a plan of unparalleled genius. We would put on a series of lectures on musical topics! We would open the club's doors to the local music scene and/or the denizens of Oxford's higher education establishments (preferably the



*Dr Shotover: "Damn it - left me Mandrax in me other waistcoat!"*

prettier, more female end of the spectrum...). We would "score" a grant from the government! Far out! Nice one! Anyway, the first speaker in this "Rock School"-style series will of course be Yours Truly... Working title: "What the F\*\*\* is an iPod?" Catchy, no? Oh, have it your own way. Mine's a large Polish vodka.

**Next month: Golfing with the MCS.**

## AIM / SUNNYVALE NOISE SUB

### ELEMENT

### The Zodiac

What is it with some support bands and the 'modest' dynamics soundmen dole out to them? I'm talking about volume here: specifically the actual physical movement one receives from thumpingly loud speakers. This showery Sunday's gig sees Sunnyvale Noise Sub Element stare up indignantly at the skies from the bottom of this barrel of unfair crescendoing towards the headline act. Their set is a rather underwhelming mix of generic guitar and laptop electronics; it's not that bad but it's not that great either. Like pubs with TVs scattered about, I find myself being engrossed in the German 'Peeping Tom' flick projected in the background rather than involving myself in Sunnyvale's technical clamour. They should count themselves lucky Emmerdale isn't playing.

AIM do that po-faced Ninja Tune jazz-hop fusion 'thang' in a way that proverbially pisses all over the aforementioned label's chillout tripe. Whilst readily expecting the esteemed UK producer Andy

Turner and his 10 piece band, I'm rudely greeted by a lone introductory and heavily dreadlocked MC. And some r'n'b. *For two hours!* Tell a lie, it possibly lasts more like eight minutes, but you have to understand the relief I feel when the colossal band took to the stage and their sundry instruments. What follows is really rather remarkable. You couldn't wish to see a better 'End-of-the-weekend-my-dear-god-this-hangover-will-be-the-death-of-me' aural massage. AIM are seemingly fronted by a gang of formidable Sarf Laandan hard men, yet produce the smoothest, most exotic and innocuous beats and grooves. I'm giggling like a schoolgirl off her face on 'I Love AIM' love-hearts. To emphasize the point, there's what looks like a Zodiac bouncer playing the jazz flute. I leave the Zodiac asking for the autograph of the wrong dark-jacketed man, quickly realising my mistake and swiftly leave, scorning myself for being the fool that I am.

**Pascal Ansell**

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## IDLEWILD

### Brookes University Union

The lukewarm reception afforded Idlewild's new album, 'Make Another World' is surprising given that on repeated listens it reveals itself as an album of enormous musical richness and emotional depth and features two of the best songs you'll hear in 2007: its glorious title track and 'Once In Your Life', this year's definitive heartbreak song. Maybe after ten years Idlewild are simply taken for granted, which is a travesty since, like the band they take such inspiration from, REM, they have never lost their freshness and continue to write better and better new songs. After the somewhat reserved 'Warnings / Promises' 'Make Another World' is a return to the style and standard of the superb '100 Broken Windows'.

Tonight is Idlewild's first Oxford gig since 1999 and the increasingly hirsute Roddy Woomble even reminisces about a show down at the Point, a decade of stage mania apparently – and endearingly – failing to instil any greater self-confidence in him. But when a single hook from one of your songs can cause 800 hearts to skip a beat, you hardly need the gift of the gab. And it's difficult to overstate just what a superb band Idlewild are. From the cartwheeling 'No Emotion' to the stuttering 'I Am A Message', they infuse every song with so much carefree, careering melodic punch that you wonder whether this band is actually capable of writing anything less than brilliant. At the centre of it all is the gorgeous, windswept 'You Held The World In Your Arms', a song that could punch a hole in the sky yet remains as intimate as a lover's caress.

An early review of Idlewild described their sound as "a flight of stairs falling down a flight of stairs" and that headlong rush of exuberance and crushing noise still invades all but the most introspective of their songs, but such is the taut balancing acts between punk rock noise and glorious melody, they're more akin to an out of control battle tank speeding through a meadow of wild flowers. Whatever metaphors you try to pin on them, all that matters is that Idlewild are simply one of the greatest rock bands on the planet right now.

**Victoria Waterfield**

## MEPHISTO GRANDE

### The Zodiac

To quote them "... and eventually *Suitable Case For Treatment* broke..... the earth shook, the valley walls rumbled and split, and out spewed *Mephisto Grande*" is almost an understatement, as the teaming of ex-SC4T singer/guitarist Liam Ings-Reeves with ex-Ivy's Itch and *Suitable Case* drummer Peter Ward really is a kinder-core car crash vision of Jurassic proportions.

Peter, drumming like a washing machine full of gumboots on its spin-cycle, while finding time to play junior keyboards and accordion, matches supremely Liam's southern-fried crazed preacher / love-child of Gollum and Shane MacGowan, on the point of self-combustion, his nose leaking streams of real blood and his temple veins throbbing like lug worms on a wet beach, from the very first song. They career along like a bunch of Cossacks joyriding a Trabant after necking a bad batch of hallucinatory vodka, sporadically skidding to an abrupt halt, in utter silence, when all you can hear is the buzz of the

amps, the drip of the blood onto the stage, and the underpants of the young Download audience filling up as they hang white knuckled onto the stage barriers.

I keep wanting to shout out "Reverend" at such points, like the old hobo at the town hall meetings in the film *Blazing Saddles*, but the folk-gothic twin accordions, or the garage guitar and drums would suddenly gallop off again into the swamp, bellowing its fear and loathing, and what could have been atonal warnings of dire retribution. By the last song Liam's head had had enough, and he collapses with a seizure, behind what was intended to be a 'choir' of friends, brought on stage to provide backing handclaps, with the main audience thinking it was all part of the show, while those in the know give him medical attention. Whether their next review will be in the obituary column of the Oxford Times or not, they'll never be imitated or ever forgotten.

**Paul Carrera**

## DUKE SPECIAL

### The Zodiac

I've seen some cracking gigs in Oxford this year, and tonight proves to be right up there with the best of them. Duke Special, aka Peter Wilson, first came to attention on The Divine Comedy tour at Brookes last year, but his songs really come into their own tonight in this smaller venue. The expanded live line up, now with added guitars and clarinet, gives the songs a fuller, more rounded sound.

The majority of the set is made up of songs from his excellent album of last year, 'Songs From The Deep Forest'. There's no easing himself in, from the opening song he's standing on the banister, stage front, making the song soar out to the back of the room. But then he's reining things back, letting his clarinet player lead them through the jazzy 'Brixton Leaves'. Although his sound can get perilously close to the middle of the road at times (one song even sounds like Mungo Jerry!), there's enough substance to his songwriting to pull him back. And

then there's the voice, a lilting Irish brogue that can melt hearts at a thousand paces. It's that which makes the sashay through 'Slip Of A Girl' and the grandstanding 'Wake Up Scarlett' sound so special.

As often happens, the highlights arrive with the singles, but also with one entirely unexpected moment. Firstly though, 'Last Night I Nearly Died' soars and threatens to raise the roof during the crescendo of the title line, before he drops in the following punchline where he "woke up just in time". 'Freewheel' is gloriously bright and life affirming, seizing the moment and grasping it tightly. And then the moment. With their set apparently over, they make for the centre of the dancefloor and perform 'John Lennon Love' unamplified for an impressively attentive crowd. And with the short attention span of most audiences nowadays, that's some feat indeed.

**Russell Barker**



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## JOHN CALE

### The Zodiac

A few years ago the Observer put together a Top 100 British Albums of All Time. While usually fatuous exercises, this list was actually quite perceptive and included many challenging and radical classics. But for me the near criminal omission was John Cale – no ‘Paris 1919’, ‘Fear’ or ‘Music for a New Society’ – masterpieces or near masterpieces all. It’s a sad fact that while Lou Reed has been a sheer embarrassment for most of living memory, his former bandmate from the Velvet Underground has put together a rich body of work still far too neglected and under-rated.

What a rare pleasure, then, to have Cale playing Oxford for the first time in decades. Tonight’s gig is rescheduled from January and the Zodiac – smoke free at the artist’s request – is jam-packed. Now well into his sixties Cale’s voice is still something wonderful – the deep Welsh accent as emotive and expressive now as it was back in 1968 when he sang on the second Velvets album. Ostensibly touring to promote the recent live CD/DVD package, ‘Circus’, Cale’s group seem already to be moving on from it – the playing of the four piece band is if anything even more focussed and raw, and the make-overs of some of the material even more extreme. ‘Heartbreak Hotel’, one of Cale’s touchstone tracks live has become a mess of mutant funk deconstructed almost out of recognition. ‘Buffalo Ballet’ survives an unfortunate new arrangement but is still recognisable as one of the songs for all time. The stuff from the last two albums is rather pedestrian compared to the older songs, though new track ‘A Day In The Life of the Common Cold’ has some real sardonic bite to it, and ‘Chorale’ is a rousing climax. But the best of the performances tonight are a revelation – ‘Chinese Envoy’ has a deep melancholy hardly captured on the recorded versions while the two composite pieces, ‘Leaving It Up To You’/‘Strange Times in Casablanca’ and ‘Pablo Picasso’/‘Mary Lou’ display a brutal power – the latter corrosive enough to strip paint. And when the band come back onstage to play a version of ‘Venus in Furs’ that does every bit of justice to the hallowed original, you know this has been a special concert.

John Cale’s career has covered some uneven territory and gone up a few blind alleys but he’s survived as a magnetic performer and challenging, resourceful composer. It’s great to catch a little bit of the legend late on in the journey.

*Steve Thompson*



## CORVIDS / FECK / ALLY CRAIG

### The X

Ally Craig is a musical genius. Plain and simple. Both technically and lyrically he is quite beyond compare, leaving a lot of his ilk for dust in the wake of his Santana’n’Yorke *tour de force*. Seriously, just as To Kill A Mocking Bird is required reading, Ally Craig should be required listening for everyone. I find myself mesmerised by his left hand alone, whizzing up and down the guitar neck, as if sharpening a knife in a hurry. And that voice! It’s a stream of bittersweet melancholy, perfectly shattered by moments of impeccably-timed falsetto. A beacon of hope in the singer-songwriter cosmos.

If precedent is anything to go by, left-handed guitarists feature high on the super-talented ratio. Well, one of tonight’s axemen is the exception that proves the rule. Feck are (here it comes) feckin’ shite. Their unbelievably derivative and middling take on metal is such a master class of mediocrity and so terribly mind-numbing, I’m running

out of negative adjectives as we speak. Maiden, Slayer, Metallica: it’s almost like these guys have set out to mock their idols, Spinal Tap style. They certainly couldn’t have done better if they’d tried. It’s comparable to flicking through a book of diseased sexual organs – you want to look away, but.... (sigh).

So, by way of an aural q-tip, Corvids spark up and begin the cleansing. Starting with an inspired ten-minute Krautrock epic. The music continues to bounce around the stage, even if the musicians don’t. Their stripped-down proto-rock is as delicious as a full English, and in a moment of meta irony the three-piece actually play a song called ‘Death to False Metal’. Apparently Corvids haven’t performed live in over 15 months. On the tightness of tonight’s set, I recommend they play a lot more often. Feck should never play ever again, and of course Ally Craig should just play all the time.

*Matt Bayliss*

## PIGEON DETECTIVES

### The Zodiac

Pigeon Detectives know a bit about showmanship. Amid a blizzard of lights and a chorus of audience screams and Roy Orbison’s ‘I Drove All Night’ they make their grand entrance.

From the off frontman Matt Bowman is leaping about the stage, swinging his microphone and trying, for all the world, to be Roger Daltrey (even down to his untidy mop of curly hair). And that’s what tonight’s gig is all about: the show.

Pigeon Detectives have been around on the Leeds music scene since 2002 but in the past year, thanks to supports with Kaiser Chiefs and Dirty Pretty Things, as well as the ubiquitous MySpace, which has levelled the pop playing field so much, their rise has been spectacular. So much so that tonight’s gig is long since sold out and, like Arctic Monkey, before they’ve even released an album half the audience know all the words.

Which makes this such an event:

the band are cocksure and casually efficient, even as they aim for some kind of chaos; the crowd are simply up for it from the off. The set bounds along like a ferociously enthusiastic pony reared on a diet of The Clash and the Ruts, and it’s hard not to be caught up in the spirit of the occasion, even as they’re barking about domestic violence on ‘Can’t Control Myself’. Pretty soon Bowman’s cartwheeling into the crowd who politely manhandle him before delivering him back to the security guards. And here perhaps is the crux of the matter – for all the reports of wild behaviour and gig chaos, it’s oddly devoid of genuine excitement or danger.

Ten minutes after it’s all over you can’t remember single song, and no choreographed rock’roll circus can disguise that. How long it’ll all last is anyone’s guess. Pigeon Detectives’ candle is burning fast, but they’re making the most of it while it shines on them.

*Sue Foreman*

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# DEMOS

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## DEMO OF THE MONTH

### FOXES!

We quite like the fact that Foxes! have an exclamation mark in their name, even if it does confuse our automatic spellchecker. It kind of conveys the giddy excitement of their music, like small children spying their first proper piece of wildlife. "Look mummy, foxes!". Better still, Foxes! remind us more than a little of Talulah Gosh and other similarly twee-minded cutie bands from the late 80s, bands who spent as much time writing fanzine articles about baking the perfect chocolate picnic cake as they did learning how to play their recorders properly. Foxes! have a tendency to trip over themselves sometimes in their hurry to sing happy pop choruses with singer Kayla Bell sounding rather pleasingly like Ooberman's Sophia Churney on songs like 'Welcome To The Jivin', managing to sound alternately bored and seductive. husband Adam Bell provides a more doleful vocal foil as they cover such unexpected lyrical matter as the Jacobite rebellion, Spanish galleons and graveyards, all set to a twinkling jangle-pop soundtrack. And since some of Foxes!' slow-of-thinking fans took exception to our last, positive, review of the band, we'd better just stress that all of the above are good things. They can wear their Pastels badges with pride.

### HELIANTHUS EVENING STAR

Now here's a chap who's unlikely to be caught wiggling his butt to jolly indie guitar pop, let alone wearing anything so crass as a badge. Helianthus Evening Star is the work of a bloke called Mike Lowe whose hobby is slowing old Cure tracks down to a disconcerting degree, adding some nasty subterranean sounds and sticking a Billie Holiday vocal track over the top. Which might sound a bit naff but works a treat on tracks like 'The One Thing I Got' and 'Strange Fruit', creating a shadowy dirge that upstanding daytime radio listeners would consider unlistenable but possess hypnotic powers. Certainly the trick has worn a little thin by the time you've got through five songs, the mood only slightly lifted by the spectral jazz of 'Night And Day', and he treads the fine line between clumsy and inspired, but the eerie,

dislocated mood of it all is a dark treat at its best.

### TIP TOE

Another solo project, at least we guess as much, from someone called Marijam, who freely professes a love for Don Caballero and even goes as far as to nick that band's way with a daft song title, notably with 'I Don't Want To Be A Crab Stuck In A Space Shuttle', as well as the jerky, spindly, staccato guitar flutter that you'll also hear echoed in bands like Foals. A disembodied female voice swirls amid the incessant guitar clatter and the whole thing sounds like the musical equivalent of a small child in a fairy costume with a bad case of attention deficit disorder. It's pretty and giddy, decidedly lo-fi in its aim and execution but fun in a scattershot way.

### MONKEY ROPE

Previously Demo Of The Monthers back in 2003 under their old name of The Others; presumably they changed their name as there were already 769 bands in the UK alone called The Others and only 423 called Monkey Rope. This is solid enough indie rock, chugging along in a heavyweight 60-styled fashion, chirpy to a degree and plenty of harmonies thrown in to keep the mood buoyant. An Arctic Monkeys-like snap makes an almost obligatory appearance but the vocalist sounds more like a cross between Noel Gallagher and David Bowie. It serves its purpose but needs more of its own identity, although saying that, only the over-egged, ballad really grates, sounding like it could suffer an attack of the vapours at any moment.

### PIEXO

This lot, who live on a boat on the canal, have even gone as far as to spell their band name out in big, black tape on their accompanying letter, which must have taken all of three minutes – about as much time as it takes each of their nominally experimental pieces of music to take shape. Get passed the chaotic first track, 'A Brief Moment Of Clarity', which eventually reaches a plateau of clamouring guitar noise and clattering drums, and you find plenty of invention going on. The glitchy 'The O Word', with its cello lead over a wall of electronic clutter is pretty neat, while 'Finger and Thumbs' comes with what sounds like a harp made of empty milk bottles and reminds us of Japan's 'Tin Drum' phase and is oddly soothing. Which is merely a lull before the piercing attack of 'Status' wherein they up the treble levels

to a painful degree in a reversal of Hawkwind's 'brown note' bass assaults and make everything sound like the CD player is skipping. Now that wasn't very nice, was it?

## BABELHORN

This starts off with a lumbering, ambient funk amble, but it's a Trojan horse, lulling us into a false sense of security before the dirty, swampy punk-rap barbarians jump out and shout revolutionary slogans at us, sounding like a cross between Crass and John Cooper Clarke, only with cockney accents and songs about the Elm Tree (God rest its soul). Thereon in it's a scrappy disco-synth-punk skank with a freeform rap lead that makes you feel you're being talked into submission by an over-enthusiastic nutter in the park. 'Lead Me Bacchus' is the best track here, a Toytown punk rap about drinking booze, while the more considered 'Debt', replete with flute, is closer to The Streets.

## BLACK SOUL

"We are a highly original hard rock / ska band from West Oxfordshire," boast Black Soul, before they lurch into a wildly jumbled mix of Iron Maiden wailing, Beefheart blues madness, freeform jazz, spindly garage punk and tenth-rate pub rock. All in the first number. Which is impressive in some respects. There's something to commend Black Soul's throw-it-at-the-wall-and-see-what-sticks approach and their own comparisons to Suitable Case For Treatment aren't a million miles wide of the mark when the singer is babbling like a loon. 'Archetypes Are A Projection Of Humankind's Worst Fears And Emotions (Tastes Like Grandma)' is this month's best song title and you can sometime catch a glimpse of what they're aiming for with their madcap musical mayhem but at other times, like the Chili Peppers-gone-Barber's shop quartet funk of 'The Fire In Our Kitchen' you just have to conclude that a mess is a mess. Much like Tracy Emin's Unmade bed exhibition – how far can you push it and still call it art?

## LONELY JOE PARKER & THE MEGA HAIRY MEN

You could come to the same conclusion with this lot, whose full name we really cannot be arsed to type out again. They start off okay, 'B Stings' being a fuzzy thrash with a summery pop heart, a modicum of silliness and some great pots and pans drumming, something like a rudimentary Violent Femmes or a harder

They Might Be Giants, that tumbles over itself in a determined but befuddled rush to get to the end as quickly as possible. They get all sensible and sensitive on us with '9' before finishing with '2', which is nothing more than a thrown together acoustic strum with someone laughing uproariously and annoyingly over the top. No, it's not art, it's just arse.

## MIKE FINLEY

Nothing against Mike really. He's not got a bad voice, truth be told, and his songs, such as they are, are simple, slender affairs, but how many more bleeding heart miseries do we have to endure? Here, on 'That's Me', he lays out in no uncertain terms just how crap he is to the object of his affections. Jeez, man, why not just ask her to stamp on your worthless face until brain matter oozes out? Anyway, it ain't such a bad song once you get past the inherent misery, the trotting snare beat and warm accordion swing threatening to inject a bit of sunshine into affairs. Elsewhere sensitive introspection rules the roost but at least Mike has a voice that lends itself to such things, partway between Billy Bragg and Elliot Smith, while lyrically he steers clear of morbid self pity. But come on chap - faint heart never won fair maiden. Enough with the balladry - just buy the lady a nice pint of cider.

## THE DEMO DUMPER

## ARMSTRONG

Last time we saw Armstrong live we stumbled across the end of their set supporting Pigeon Detectives and they were making a right old mess of The Automatic's 'Monster' and all wearing matching suits. A visit to their website reveals a band who have got all the trappings of the modern corporate rock experience sussed, including ringtone downloads and a number to text for up-to-the-minute news on the band. Which is great but really the sort of stuff you should be sorting out *after* you've written some tunes worth downloading onto your phone (anyway, what kind of a philistine listens to music through a crappy old phone speaker anyway? You might as well listen to someone banging a biro on the side of a tin can for five minutes). Where were we? Oh yes, songs. Armstrong play enthusiastic emo-tinged fluff that's a bit like a bad-tempered McFly with stadium metal pretensions, including a strangulated semi-ballad with an epic guitar wig-out climax, all yelping, gurning, synchronised pomp, utterly devoid of any originality or soul.

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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