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NIGHTSHIFT

Oxford's Music Magazine

Free every
month.
Issue 138
January
2007

Boy! Girl! Revolution! Yeah!

Baby Gravy

Leading Oxford's Class of 2007 - inside



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NEWS

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Hello everyone, and a Happy New Year;

January is traditionally a quiet period for live music before things gear up again for the spring touring season. Even so, a quick glance at this month's gig guide shows there is still plenty going on. This is also a great time to catch some of the best new acts around, with record labels keen to show off their latest signings after the bloated pre-Christmas period where Greatest Hits collections fill the shelves.

As ever we take this opportunity to have a look at some of the best new bands coming out of Oxfordshire. Our cover stars, Baby Gravy, have been one of the most refreshing discoveries of recent months, while there are, as ever, a host of great new acts on the way up. Hopefully, in the absence of many big name acts coming to town this month, you'll try and see a few homegrown talents. Just so you can brag to your friends when they become famous.

Happy gigging.



DIVE DIVE release their second album at the end of January. 'Revenge Of The Mechanical Dog' is the follow-up to 2005's 'Tilting At Windmills' and finds the band on a new record label, Landspeed, after parting company with Diablo. Dive Dive also head off on a UK tour in support of former-Million Dead frontman Frank Turner, who they have been acting as backing band recently. The tour comes to Oxford on Thursday 15th February at the Zodiac. Tickets for the gig are on sale now, priced £6 adv, from www.ticketweb.co.uk or in person from the Zodiac box office.

GOLDRUSH return to action next month with a new album. 'The Heart Is The Place' is released on February 5th on Truck Records and was produced by Manchester's electro artist Pedro, who previously studied at Oxford University.

RICHARD WALTERS has signed to Big Scary Monsters Records and releases a long-awaited EP at the end of February. 'The Pilot Light EP' features four new songs and was produced by

David Kosten and Guy Gigsworth, who has previously worked with Björk and Madonna. In recent times Richard has found a new following in the States where his track 'All At Sea' was featured on CSI: Miami. Richard launches the new EP with a gig at the Zodiac on Friday 23rd February.

THE FUTURE OF LIVE MUSIC at the Wheatsheaf seems ever more secure this month after news that the pub has been bought by Admiral Taverns as of April. Current landlord Al is set to remain at the pub and Admiral have given assurances that music will continue for the foreseeable future, with a full refit due in April, including planned improvements to the live music room upstairs.

STUDIO 45 are organising a charity live music event on Friday 2nd February at the Emperor Ballroom, Romanway in Cowley in aid of ROSY (Respite Nursing For Oxfordshire's Sick Youngsters). The gig features sets from jazz, urban and soul acts, including a promised special guest appearance by a Def Jam artist. Other acts confirmed are Jada Pearl, G Block, Teresa Edwards, Colette, Zuby and Danielle Scott. For more details, visit www.studio45.org.co.uk or www.rosy.org.uk

POLAR BEAR RECORDS on Cowley Road has closed down. The shop closed its doors for the last time on Christmas Eve, leaving East Oxford with no outlet for new releases or local bands' CDs.

NEW OXFORD MUSIC have just started a regular podcast of Oxford artists and are looking



THIS YEAR'S OXFORD PUNT will take place on Wednesday 9th May. The annual showcase event of the best emerging Oxford talent is now in its tenth year. The Punt will feature nineteen local artists across six venues in the city centre over the course of one night. Last year's event featured Xmas Lights, Deguello, Rebecca Mosley (*pictured*) and Witches, amongst others. Previous stars of the Punt include The Young Knives, Fell City Girl, Winnebago Deal and Goldrush.

This year the venues taking place are Borders bookstore, QI Club, the Wheatsheaf, the Music Market, the Purple Turtle and the Cellar.

Bands or solo artists wanting to play at the Punt should send a demo, clearly marked The Punt, to Nightshift at PO Box 312, Kidlington, OX5 1ZU.

As ever, 100 all-venue Punt Passes will be available, from the beginning of February. More details in next month's issue.

for CDs from local acts. www.myspace.com/newoxfordmusic has all the details, or you can send stuff to New Oxford Music Show, C/O 19 Southfield Road, Oxford, OX4 1NX

AS EVER, don't forget to tune into The Download every week. The local music radio show is broadcast every Saturday between 6-7pm and is available to hear all week online at bbc.co.uk/oxford. The show features local releases, demos and interviews as well as a gig and clubbing guide.



KLAXONS (*pictured*) come to Brookes University Union on Tuesday 13th February as part of the annual NME Awards Tour. The new rave rising stars are joined on the bill by Brazil's excellent CSS as well as New Young Pony Club and The Sunshine Underground Band. Tickets are on sale now, priced £9.50, from the Brookes box office (01865 484750). Also coming to Brookes are Get Cape, War Cape, Fly (Sat 27th Jan), Jamie T (Tue 6th Feb) and Idlewild (Sat 17th March).

Meanwhile, Regina Spektor plays at Oxford Town Hall on Tue 13th February (tickets available from wegottickets.com).

The Zodiac is shaping up nicely too. February's highlights include Patrick Wolf (Tue 6th), Thirteen Senses (Sun 11th), And You Will Know Us By The Trail Of Dead (Mon 19th), Duke Special (Thu 22nd), Foals (Sun 25th), Forward, Russia (Tue 27th) and Bat For Lashes (also Tue 27th), while the brilliant Tilly and the Wall return to the Zodiac on Sat 3rd March.

A Quiet Word With

Baby Gravy

NIGHTSHIFT'S CEASELESS trawl around the venues and pubs of Oxford in search of great new music throws up more frustration and disappointment than it does elation. Like, to bastardise the title of an old children's TV programme, Why Don't You Turn Off That Emo And Go And Play Something More Interesting Instead?

Seriously, we sometimes feel like King Canute, trying to hold back the tide of earnest, overly-sensitive young men whose limited musical horizons begin with Funeral For a Friend and end with some other band who *sound exactly like* Funeral For A Friend.

But then, sometimes we get lucky and chance upon a band like Baby Gravy. A band who have an attitude and vision that belies their tender years and go against every grain you've got going. Our first encounter with the disparate collective of three boys and three girls was a soundcheck downstairs at the Zodiac where we found ourselves captivated by an awkward, shambolic and unhinged mess of sound that bizarrely seemed to marry the rudimentary pop-punk of X-Ray Spex with the rambling prog-hippy jazz jamming of Hawkwind or Here And Now. Here was a band who not only didn't fit in with what most of their peers were playing but didn't even seem to fit in with what each other were playing. It was like hearing two completely different bands playing simultaneously. A mess, but a bloody great mess. The sort of mess that everyone should be encouraged to make.

A Nightshift contributor reviewing that night's gig was equally bemused and fascinated by the spectacle but weeks later relented on any criticism he'd levelled at them, having become converted by their lopsided brilliance.

BARELY A YEAR INTO THEIR lifetime Baby Gravy are now marginally less shambolic and chaotic than those initial gigs but they remain a sound engineer's nightmare, part dog's dinner, part



dog's bollocks. Come on, where else do you get to hear what sounds like a collision between The Slits, Hawkwind, Mad Scientist, Le Tigre, The Human League and a punch-up at a zoo? Songs teeter on the verge of collapse or wander off for a cup of squash.

Baby Gravy are the antithesis of the legions of musically competent but soulless emo drones with their rigid, militantly precise tedium. Beyond the fringes of early punk exuberance, prog's more naïve dabbings and the experimentation of 70s synth-pop, Baby Gravy's closest soulmates would probably be Pram, the Birmingham-based lo-fi misfits whose early blend of inspiration and incompetence seems echoed in Baby Gravy's music – part 5th form music lesson experiment, part electro-dub jam session, part wobbly-headed

genius.

As many gig goers will come away hating Baby Gravy as will love them, but then it's always the sign of a great band that you couldn't simply put them on in the corner of a pub for Oasis-loving beer drinkers to nod along to before declaring that, "they're alright". At best they'd simply confuse or amuse people; more likely they'd be bottled off.

BABY GRAVY ARE ZAHRA

Tehrani (*drums*), her brother David (*bass*), Freddy Mason (*keyboards*), Iona Roisin (*vocals*), Cecilia White (*saxophone*) and Adam Whitley (*guitar*). At 18, Zahra is the oldest in the band, Cec, Iona and Fred are all 17, while Adam and David are both just 15. Zahra also plays drums with indie popstrels Where I'm Calling From,

while Freddy is part of electronic soundscapists The Keyboard Choir. Iona sang with promising grunge-punk group Harlette until their recent split.

At the end of last year the band put out their first demo EP, entitled 'Well Done Mary-ellen You're a Dance Teacher Now', a sweet title for a CD whose opening line is "Sometimes I think it would be nice if I ripped out both of your eyes" before moving onto the subject of swallowing some of the more intimate bodily fluids. Iona's almost cheerleader-like chants stand at odds with Cecilia's wandering sax lines and the harsh electronic squeaks of Freddy's synth. It's a good-naturedly brattish affair, with plenty of lyrical bile to complement the musical dizziness.

This month Baby Gravy will be filming a video for the EPs lead track, 'I Hate Your Girlfriend', with Mya Padget who has previously made videos for The White Stripes and The Corrs; it is due to be released as a download single by Quickfix Records.

What brought the band together initially, what different things does each member bring to the table and how have things changed since the early gigs?

Cec: "In the early stages, we were shambolic, mainly due to lack of rehearsals and the conflict between what kind of music to play-we hadn't come to the terms with the fact that we couldn't just play exactly what each person wanted."

Zahra: "I just had this idea of stealing all the young talent from around Oxford. A bit of a Hansel and Gretel moment: my table is made of chocolate and talent."

What sort of reactions do you tend to get from people who see you for the first time, especially from other musicians?

Cec: "Bunch of kids, which is true, but it doesn't mean we can't play our instruments. Also that we're jazzy just because we have a saxophone in. That seems to be the favoured easiest way to write about the inclusion of the

saxophone in a review, but we're not at all jazzy."

Iona: "People seem to label us as a 'potential' band; they half like it, but they don't get it, they seem to see what we could do but aren't doing, where we could go and aren't going. I think the people who do like us are just curious to see what we do next, how we improve, if at all."

Fred: "People make the assumption that we are an electro indie band just because we have two keyboards."

Zahra: "First impressions usually come across as quite positive, and people generally respect us for trying to do something different."

Often it sounds like there are two different band up on stage playing two different songs. Is there a common meeting ground or is there an ongoing battle for musical supremacy?

Cec: "There isn't much common ground between all of us – we all like Björk and Battles, but that's about it. It doesn't really matter any more that we all like different bands; we know what kind of music we play and we stick to it. David likes wrestling, that's some common ground. Sometimes we like to watch matches together and then re-enact them."

Iona: "It tends to come out like that as we have no idea what we're trying to achieve. We all have completely different music tastes, which is why we sound like an amalgam of different genres and sounds. We all put in the kind of sound we want irrespective of what everyone else is doing."

What have been the main inspirations on each of you?

Cec: "Sweep The Leg Johnny have inspired me. Actually, that's just me name-dropping the only band I like with a saxophone in it."

Iona: "Riot Grrl, Billie Holiday, Elliott Smith, Regina Spektor and Amanda Palmer, from Dresden Dolls."

Zahra: "Todd Trainer, Scout Niblett, Project Pat and all the bitches in the dirty south."

Fred: "I would like the Flaming Lips to have more of an influence over our sound but the dominatrix in our band is omnipotent. We do have a vague common interest in what we want Baby Gravy to sound like but we're not sure what it is."

TALKING TO BABY GRAVY

about the band and their music, it's quite refreshing to come across a band who, although enthusiastic about what they're doing, don't

seem to have any great manifesto or clear ambition. Questions provoke terse answers and some bewilderment as to what a band is meant to say in the face of journalistic probing. In this they're at odds with more 'cool' press-friendly bands with eyes more firmly set on a career than simply doing what comes naturally.

Gigs, or at least parts of them, seem to teeter along a knife edge of musical collapse. What are the virtues of chaos?

Cec: "There aren't any really; it's not intentional. It's a hoot, we're endearing."

Zahra: "Chaos makes the world go round."

Lyricality there seems to be a dichotomy of playful silliness and misanthropic spite. Are you happy people or angry at the world?

Cec: "Sometimes happy at people and things, sometimes not."

Iona: "I take the piss and I bitch. There's no more depth there, I'm afraid."

What does music need more and less off these days?

Cec: "Less twee indie bands and more dance and techno music."

Fred: "Less use of glockenspiels as gimmicky easy-to-play instruments."

Iona: "Less NME & Gang Of Four impressions."

Zahra: "More gangster rap and less emo."

Aha, just as we hoped. Are Baby Gravy the band that can finally kill emo?

Cec: "No, I don't think so, unless Fred gets over his arrogance problem."

Fred: "Yes if we get our act together and Cec gets over her drinking problem."

Iona: "Emo hasn't even started, it's just going to get bigger and bigger, radio play will be far more frequent and it will be completely abolished from the 'alt' scene."

Zahra: "Well with Miss Briona Emo in our band – the founder of emotional lyrical content – it is frankly impossible."

SO THERE YOU GO. THAT'S

Baby Gravy. They're not emo. But whichever pigeonhole you try and squeeze them into they won't fit. In fact they'll stick out like a fluorescent sore thumb. If only more young bands were prepared to do the same.

Baby Gravy support The Idiot Rate at the Zodiac on Wednesday 24th January. 'Check out www.myspace.com/babygravy for track downloads and gigs.

FUTURE THRILLS

A whistle-stop guide to some of the best new local acts coming your way in 2007

THE DELTA FREQUENCY

This month's Demo Of The Month – beating the mighty Xmas Lights to the title at that – and a band thoroughly unashamed to ROCK OUT. Not surprising really, containing as they do Phill Honey, ex of The Rock Of Travolta, and Smilex guitarist Tom Sharpe. We described them as goths when we first saw them, and they do seem to harbour desires to be Marilyn Manson, but that sort of theatricality goes a long way.

HAMMER Vs THE SNAKE

Another recent Nightshift Demo Of The Month, Hammer Vs The Snake are a university band locked into the rigid, robotic grooves and uptight new wave rhythms of Devo, Wire and Blur, marrying wobbly funk and military precision, guitars and synths equal players in a surprisingly fresh sound given its obvious influences.

SPACE HEROES OF THE PEOPLE

The band that reunites two thirds of Eeeblee (electronics and samples chap Tim Day and double bassist Jo Edge), taking a more esoteric path, one lined with laptop glitchiness, classical pretensions, primitive computer game bloopers and metronomic drumming that all add up to a krautrocking, synth-popping experience of pure joy.

MONDO CADA

A band who have come into their own much more in recent months, Mondo Cada's straight-down-the-line grunge racket dismisses all those lame post-Nirvana navel-gazers and heads straight for the temple of Mudhoney, just occasionally stopping off to squall nastily round Dinosaur Jr's backyard.

SUSPICION OF AFFRAY

Rising from the ashes of Near Life Experience, Suspicion Of Affray prove Tenacious D's claim that "you can't kill the metal" correct, raging and flailing somewhere twist Judas Priest's old school riffery and Dillinger Escape Plan's maths-crazed hardcore. Meanwhile, Pete Bougourd does the best Uruk-hai impersonation in town. Grrr.

MARY'S GARDEN

Proving that goth needn't be all execrable AFI-aping mallrat crap, Mary's Garden's doomladen Euro-rock is equally pompous and haunting, tom-heavy beats, atmospheric synths and billowing guitars all topped off with Laima's striking voice. Pomp, portent and sweet melody, it's all theirs.

LIND OPTICAL

From cinematic wall-of sound 60s psychedelia to 70s-styled TV theme tunes, Lind Optical can be either magnificently epic, recalling the best of The Verve and Flaming Lips, or frustratingly self-conscious, but we'll take the best of them and hope they build on it.

MARY BENDY TOY

It's a rare trick to be a bit wacky in rock music and not make us want to punch you squarely in the teeth, but industrial horror-pop crazies Mary Bendy Toy carry it off, sticking The B52s through Ministry's grinder, squawking about ringtones and spiders in the bath, like Lena Lovitch starring in a Carry On film scripted by Trent Reznor.

BORDERVILLE

Fronted by former-Sexy Breakfast chap Joe Swarbrick (in fact, featuring most of that old band), Borderville invite some eccentric theatricality and vaudevillian grandiosity to spice up their bombastic space-funk rock, partway between Bowie and Prince and promising to live up to all the potential of their former incarnation.

BRICKWORK LIZARDS

Going back into a time before rock even existed, Brickwork Lizards pick their way through musical history and geography, from The Ink Spots to folk, East Asian lute playing, Dick Dale, Louise Armstrong and more contemporary hip hop influences. Sometimes silly, sometimes inspired, always entertaining.

JONQUIL

Sounding like the musical equivalent of a bleached-out photo from an acid trip from another time, Jonquil (basically multi-instrumentalist Hugo Manuel and assorted chums from the cream of Oxford's post-rock community) eschews samples in favour of exploring the more exotic possibilities of violin, guitar, glockenspiel and melodica. A dreamy melting pot of Eno, Jansch and Reich.

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DIVE DIVE

'The Revenge Of The Mechanical Dog'

(Land Speed)

Popping rather unexpectedly out of the blue, Dive Dive's second album, and their first for new label Land Speed, finds the band attempting to kick-start a career that promised much but faltered on the rocks of record label incompetence two years ago, when Diablo failed to make the most of their debut, 'Tilting At Windmills'.

Having been on the local scene for ten years now – if you include singer-guitarist Jamie Stuart and bassist Tarrant Anderson's initial Dustball incarnation – Dive Dive have themselves inspired a generation of younger local rock bands and become part of the furniture, so it's always good to be reminded exactly why they've survived the test of time

and still retain the freshness and vitality of their teenage selves. In fact musically they've changed only a little in a decade, still preferring short, sharp shock tactics and the simple melodic route, always backed with just enough muscle to keep the boys in the moshpit happy even as the closet pop kids in the crowd lip-sync along with Jamie's deceptively tender songs.

The album races out of the traps with 'Let The Blind Lead the Blind', puppy dog punk baring its small but sharp teeth, Nigel Powell's fervent drumming as ever propelling everything onwards with due haste. From there Dive Dive canter along at a gently giddy pace until they hit 'Take It, It's Yours', seven tracks in, coming down to rest with a faltering ballad that almost drops them into McFly territory. We've never been huge fans of this side of the band to be honest, preferring their more effervescent face (best exemplified here by 'Clarence Bodiker' and the terrier-like 'Perfectly Apathetic'), but it seems with much of 'The Revenge Of The Mechanical Dog' Dive Dive are starting to ditch Fugazi in favour of something lighter, less angled and more accessible. And here is where they'll really need a label behind them that's properly on the case, perhaps one that can finally launch them into the mainstream (although how readily Radio 1 play-list compilers will take to a track called 'Talentless Fucks' is debatable).

Because commercial success is overdue Dive Dive: their uncontrived marriage of pure pop with a trashy punk edge, all executed with a zest that eludes both the emo massive and the current crop of flat-pack boy-punk acts, cries out to be loved.

Sue Foreman

ANTIQUE SEEKING NUNS

'Double Egg with Chips and Beans (and a Tea)'

(TFS)

Antique Seeking Nuns is a side project for local songwriter Joff Winks, of whom we are rather fond (his 'Juniper' track was in our end of year Top Twenty), but as side projects are wont to be, and particularly ones with silly names and even more silly song titles (add to the title track, 'Son Of Cheese', apparently about "the fear of being stranded on a desert island with cheese as your only food"), it's, er, well, a bit crap. Not completely crap, mind, just a bit, but isn't that enough? 'Double Egg' is passable languid jazz lounge pop topped off with Joff's breathless, excitable voice, Matt Baber's Fender Rhodes leading the tune along. It's perhaps a bit

too discreet and tasteful (inasmuch as a song about double eggs, chip and beans and a cup of tea can in any way, shape or form be tasteful) but it just doesn't have the flowery Donovan-meets-Steely Dan sweetness off Joff's other band. The rest of the EP coasts on loungey funk grooves, indulgent guitar solos and inconsequential piano intervals and it all smells like 1970s spirit. Egg, chips and beans is great comfort food, and there are some people who find comfort in easy jazz. Unfortunately it gives us chronic indigestion and a desire to cause immense suffering on the perpetrators.

Dale Kattack

GRANT

'Apolaustic'

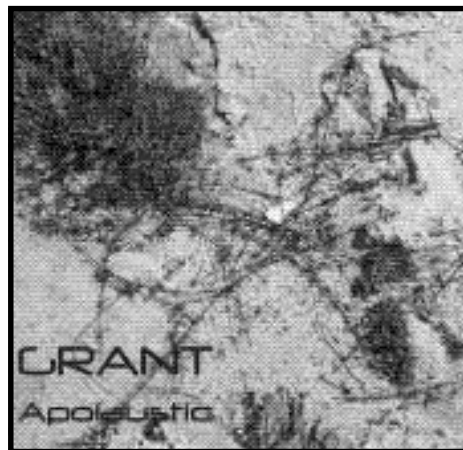
(Big Red Sky)

The album title must be ironic. Apolaustic means devoted to enjoyment, but it doesn't sound like there's too much joy going down here; carefree bubblegum pop this ain't. Instead Grant Baldwin's second solo album is awash with melancholic, almost baroque music that ranges from orchestral pop, through propulsive new wave to sombre semi-acoustic chamber music. 'Apolaustic' is an ambitious, often grandly-recorded project, featuring an assortment of local luminaries, including Loz Colbert and Katherine Hieronymus, as well as former bandmate Martin Newton, who contributes most of the backing music. But it's Grant's voice that is always the centre of attention. Possessed of a domineering baritone, he does a pretty mean impersonation of Ian Curtis at times, notably on the post-punk clamour of 'Patterns' and the more desolate 'Both Side Of The Hill'. A bigger influence would be Scott Walker, and Grant comes close to the disorientating splendour of that man's most recent works on tracks like 'Dust'.

From portentous gothic atmospherics to spooky synthetics, hazy saxophone and almost Gregorian ambience, the album's mood remains sombre but it's only when Grant lets his voice slip that the album hits a downer. 'Belize' promises a lost Bond theme but lacks vocal punch, while 'Overflow' is ponderous. Given that 'Apolaustic' clocks in at a somewhat wearing 80 minutes, when 40 would have given him so much more impact, there seems little reason to include such obvious filler; Grant is a singer with few equals locally and given the right vehicle he is a colossal presence.

So there you have it, you can have fun after all, even when you're feeling miserable.

Dale Kattack



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DR SHOTOVER: 2007 Abominations

Happy New Arse! I don't know about you, but I certainly need one after all the port and fine cheese I consumed over the "festive" season... at this point you are probably saying (in that irritating whiny voice of yours): "Too much information, Dr S! Tell us something amusing about the state of the country/modern music/ Young People... go on, go on, you KNOW you want to!"... Well, I could regale you with some stories of my experiences in the Burma campaign and/or my time spent living in a commune in Notting Hill with Janet Street-Porter when she was the Swingingest Chick in Town, but I think instead it is the moment for me to deliver a tirade about how BLOODY

MARVELOUS some of this Nu-Acid-Folk is. You probably already have the albums by Circulus and Espers and are sitting there in a medieval jester outfit, sadly jingling the bells on your cap and saying (as always in that annoying whiny voice): "Tell us something NEW, Dr S!"... but I shall have to disappoint you, I'm afraid, unless you can promise to whisk up a monumentally successful hangover cure involving Chivas Regal, brown sauce and the yolk of a freshly-laid



Fair Maiden: "Hallo, Dr S! I know a FANTASTIC hangover cure! And I think Acid Folk is REALLY GREAT! Come with me to my centrally-heated CASTLE!"
Dr Shotover [waking up]: "Oh bollocks - it was just a dream...!"

quail's egg... No, didn't think you'd be up to that. Fiddle-dee-dee, fiddle-de-rol, excuse me while I tune up my lute...

Next month: As I a-wassailing did go, upon the Cowley Road.

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GIG GUIDE

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Urgh... I feel like a pig has shat in my head.

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WEDNESDAY 3rd

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MARK CROZER: The Ben Johnson, Weston on the Green

Saturday 20th

EQUITRUCK II:

The Port Mahon

After the success of last year's sold-out mini-festival, Equitruck returns with another full day of local and national underground starlets. The gig is intended to mark the halfway point between Truck Festivals, giving a bit-sized taster of the sort of lo-fi and leftfield acts you would likely catch at the summer's main event. Headlining this year's Equitruck will be Goldrush who have been rather quiet on the release front in recent times but now launch their new album, 'The Heart Is The Place', later this month. They are joined for the day by fellow local country-tinged rockers The Epstein, making out in a Flying Burrito Brothers vein, psychedelic blues-folkies Morrison Steam Fayre (*pictured*), new wave popstrels The Quarter Finals, narcotic drone rockers Brother Francisco, DIY-punkers Ciccone, Piney Gir's 60s-styled bubblegum pop outfit The Schla La La's, local 'dirty pop' supergroup Prohibition Smokers Club, featuring various members of Smilex, Baby Gravy and Suspicions of Affray amongst others, cool folk-pop singer Rebecca Mosley, balladeer Trevor Williams and indie-ska youngsters Tristan and the Troubadours. All in all a pretty natty ten hours of noise. Things kick off at 1pm and with the Port Mahon being on the small size, it's probably worth getting your ticket in advance from wegottickets.com.



JANUARY

THURSDAY 4th

THE NEW MOON + JOE WOOLLEY + LEE DAVIES + KEYSMAN ROB: The X, Cowley – Grinning Spider club night with local acoustic duo The New Moon, plus psychedelic folk singer Joe Woolley, synth-rock and random piano noise from from Keysman Rob.

GENUINE PREACHER + MIKE FINLEY: The Port Mahon

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

JONQUIL + THIS TOWN NEEDS GUNS + STORNOWAY + LITTLE COSMONAUT: The Cellar – Cinematic experimentalism from Jonquil, plus emotive indie rocking from TTNG and gentle, celtic-tinged pop from Stornoway.

CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre – Weekly all-comers club night with singers, musicians, poets and performance artists.

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon

FRIDAY 5th

THE DRESDEN + FLAG BLACK + SICARIOS: The Music Market – Hardcore rock night.

KLUB KAKOFANNEY with STORNOWAY + THE IDEA + COLINS OF PARADISE + MOIETY: The Wheatshaf – Klub Kak returns to the Wheatshaf after a brief sojourn at The X. Tonight's bill features Celtic-tinged tender popsters Stornoway, plus Buzzcocks-influenced punkers The Idea and spaced jazz from Colins of Paradise.

THE SO AND SO'S + SODASTREAM + HANGMAN'S JOE: The X, Cowley – Local bands night.

BANDS & SINGERS NIGHT: The Victoria, Jericho

BACKROOM BOOGIE: The Bullingdon
OXFORD FOLK CLUB: The Port Mahon

SATURDAY 6th

ORKO + BHASKER + TREV WILLIAMS: The X, Cowley – Heavyweight post-grunge rocking from Orko, influenced by Smashing Pumpkins and Biffy Clyro amongst others, plus Radiohead-leaning indie rock from Bhasker and lovelorn balladeering from Trev Williams.

FELIX + PAUL MARSHALL + GUNS OR KNIVES + THEO: The Port Mahon – Mixed bill of leftfield-leaning bands, including local experimentalist Theo.

CHRIS MARTIN + NONSENSE + SLY: The Music Market – Delicious Music local bands night, featuring someone isn't actually the frontman from Coldplay.

BLACK JACK TABAC: The Duke, St Clements – Punk, funk, soul and rock'n'roll session.

RUBBER DUCK + THE SIREN'S CALL + ZOE BICAT: The Jericho Tavern – Freestyle funk from Rubber Duck, plus Oasis-styled indie rock from Sirens Call and folk-pop from Zoë Bicat.

OPAQUE: The Magic Café (1pm)

SUNDAY 7th

ROBYN HITCHCOCK & THE VENUS 3:

The Zodiac – Former Soft Boy and all-round quintessential Englishman Robyn Hitchcock brings his new band, featuring REM's Peter Buck, to town in support of recent album, 'Olé Tarantula', still a master of irreverent, whimsical psychedelic folk-pop.

ELECTRIC OPEN JAM: The Music Market – Weekly plugged-in all-comers session.

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

BLUE STONE: The Black Horse, Kidlington

MONDAY 8th

RESERVOIR CATS: The Bullingdon – The local hard-rocking bluesmen perform their traditional New Year opening ceremony for the Famous Monday Blues club.

WITCHES + GOBWITS: The Port Mahon – Promising mix of glitchy electronics, country-tinged rock and indie noise from Witches.

TUESDAY 9th

JAZZ CLUB with THE TOM GREY

QUINTET: The Bullingdon

THE RUINS + BEAR IN THE AIR + BLACK HATS: The Port Mahon – Local indie bands night, with Ride and Smiths-influenced rockers The Ruins.

SHUSH OPEN MIC NIGHT: The X, Cowley

ART IN THE PUB: The Music Market
DELICIOUS MUSIC JAZZ NIGHT: Bar Milano, Pizza Express – Featuring Jazz Emporium.

OPEN MIC SESSION: Mangos

WEDNESDAY 10th

FOLK SESSION: The X, Cowley

OXOFD IMPROVISERS: The Port Mahon

OPEN MIC SESSION: Marlborough House

THURSDAY 11th

ALBATROSS PROJECT + THE SHAKES + THE SKIES + THE BETTS: The Bullingdon – Four band bill presented by



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unit 8, 95 gloucester green, oxford, ox1 2bu

Awesome Promotions, featuring local new wavers The Albatross Project, plus a supporting cast of out-of-town touring bands, including The Skies, in the process of signing to Sanctuary.

DOGSHOW: The Music Market

A SILENT FILM + COLOUR + POLAR

REMOTE: The Cellar – Prog-tinged rocking from the ever brilliant A Silent Film.

ELECTRIC CIRCUS: The Port Mahon

SABOTAGE: The Zodiac

GOOD COP BAD COP + BEELZEBOZO +

DEGUELLO: The Hobgoblin, Bicester –

Much heaviosity tonight as Beelzebozo's funereal metal goes up against Deguello's excoriating hardcore. The winner is your ears.

CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford

Community Centre

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon

FRIDAY 12th

MARY'S GARDEN + DIATRIBE + SCRIPT

+ HANGMAN'S JOE: The Zodiac –

Atmospheric gothic rocking from Mary's

Garden headlining tonight's local bands night.

Indie rock from Diatribe, doleful guitar pop

from Script, plus grunge and classic rock from

Hangman's Joe.

GAMMY LEG PROMOTIONS with

SHIRLEY + BRENDA + AGENTS OF JANE:

The X, Cowley – Girls' names-themed band

night at this month's GLP. Shirley's feelgood

60s-flavoured Latino punk-pop comes with a

bounce factor of 10, while London's Brenda add

a good dose of loops and samples into their

spacious rock. New local acoustic folkies

Agents Of Jane open proceedings.

QUICKFIX presents THE COURTESY

KILL: The Wheatsheaf – Grungey pop from

former-At Risk crew.

BANDS & SINGERS NIGHT: The Victoria, Jericho

BACKROOM BOOGIE: The Bullingdon

OXFORD FOLK CLUB: The Port Mahon

SATURDAY 13th

JIM DRISCOLL + JONNY RACE +

AMBERSTATE + THE RUINS + THE

EPSTEIN: The X, Cowley – Fundraiser for

Wittstock Festival, featuring country rockers

The Epstein, plus Ride-inspired indie types

The Ruins, jazz-popsters Amberstate and more.

DEADBEAT CAVALIER + CAMINUS: The

Music Market – Delicious Music local bands

night.

ONE NIGHT OF QUEEN: The New Theatre

– Tribute to Freddie and the gang.

RIP THE JOINT: The Port Mahon

RAPHAEL & MARCUS JOHN: The Burton

Taylor Theatre – Oxford/Madrid-based

Flamenco guitarist Raphael plays a one-off

intimate gig after selling out the main Playhouse

venue twice in the past year. Tonight he's joined

by r'n'b / Latin crossover artist Marcus John.

EVOLUTION: Burford Golf Club

SHARRON SUBBARAO: The Magic Café

(1pm) – Jazz violinist and pianist.

SUNDAY 14th

A WILHELM SCREAM: The Zodiac –

Massachusetts rockers pay their first visit to

Oxford in support of new album, 'Ruiner',

mixing up melodic hardcore with old-school

metal riffs.

JOHN OTWAY: The Port Mahon – Return of the self-styled rock and roll clown prince with his trademark madcap performance and lunatic take on pop classics, plus all the usual Otway faves.

ELECTRIC OPEN JAM: The Music Market

OX4: The Bullingdon – Drum&bass club

night.

SLINK: The Black Horse, Kidlington

MONDAY 15th

KING B BLUES BAND: The Bullingdon –

UK roadhouse-style blues-rockers fronted by

singer Claire Johnson, mixing up original

material with covers by Bob Dylan, Dana

Gillespie and more.

MARK CROZER: The Port Mahon – Quality

singer-songwriter stuff from Mark, drawing on

the likes of Radiohead, The Mary Chain, The

Smiths and Edwyn Collins amongst others.

TUESDAY 16th

JAZZ CLUB with THE TOM GREY

QUINTET: The Bullingdon

SHUSH OPEN MIC NIGHT: The X, Cowley

DELICIOUS MUSIC BLUES CLUB: The

Music Market

DELICIOUS MUSIC JAZZ NIGHT: Bar

Milano, Pizza Express – With Latin jazz

guitar duo Los Hombres.

WEDNESDAY 17th

FOLK SESSION: The X, Cowley

OPEN MIC SESSION: Marlborough House

THURSDAY 18th

HUNDRED REASONS: The Zodiac –

Rescheduled date after illness forced the

cancellation of last autumn's UK tour. The

Surrey emo-rockers continue their never-ending

tour, even following the departure of guitarist

Paul Townsend, who left after the band's

Japanese tour in support of third album 'Kill

Your Own'. Big, sweaty post-grunge anthems

are their stock in trade. Once more into the

moshpit then, dear friends. Bring your lighter

with you, they even do slow songs these days.

TRUE RUMOUR: The Port Mahon –

Delicate, 80s-styled pop.

SABOTAGE: The Zodiac

UNDERGROUND RAILROAD + ROSE

KEMP + REBECCA MOSLEY: The Cellar –

Velvet Underground and Cure-influenced dark

rocking from Underground Railroad, with

support from PJ Harvey-inspired songstress

Rose Kemp and local folk-pop favourite

Rebecca Mosley.

CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford

Community Centre

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon

FRIDAY 19th

THE VOYAGERS + MATT SAGE & THE

ORCHESTRA OF LOVE: The Zodiac

(upstairs) – Bassist Daphna Sadeh – formerly

of the East-West Ensemble – leads her new

band through a fusion of Asian, Middle-Eastern

and Mediterranean sounds, featuring vocalists

from Kurdistan, Armenia and Turkey and

drawing on jazz and traditional Jewish music

along the way. Local songsmith Matt Sage

brings his big band along in support, mixing

world sounds into his gentle psychedelic pop

swirl.

GREENACRE + THE FORGIVING +

GEHENNA + REMEMBER THE FLOOD:



Sunday 21st

IMOGEN HEAP:

The New Theatre

After the forced cancellation of her show here back in October when she lost her voice for three days, Imogen Heap returns to Oxford. The Essex singer-songwriter prepares to finally hit the big-time after her biggest UK tour to date, following a summer that saw her playing both Coachella and V Festivals. Classically trained on the cello and clarinet as well as an adept guitarist and drummer, Heap is very much a one-woman band, later discovering electronics and sampling and tending to play live using a laptop. Though probably more successful in the States (where 1998 debut album, 'iMegaphone' has just been re-released after her songs were played on The O.C), Japan and Australia, she's hit the charts here in the past, notably with the band Frou Frou, a collaboration with Guy Gigsworth. With the re-release of 2005's 'Speak For Yourself' album (originally put out on her own Megaphonic label, but later reissued when she signed to BMG after fighting shy of major labels for so long) part Madonna-ish dancefloor-friendly pop, part Laurie Anderson-influenced electronic strangeness, a full break into the mainstream beckons.

The Zodiac (downstairs) – Local bands night with headliners Greenacre doing their melodic screamo thing.

THE RUINS + NUMBERNINE + BLACK

HAT + BETHANY WEIMERS: The X,

Cowley – Grinning Spider club night with

dreamy indie rocking from The Ruins.

BANDS & SINGERS NIGHT: The Victoria,

Jericho

SKYNNY NYRDS: The Music Market –

Tribute to Lynyrd Skynyrd.

BACKROOM BOOGIE: The Bullingdon

REDOX + PETE FRYER + FILM NOIR: The

Magdalen – Funtime funk and swamp-rock

from Redox, plus eccentric rocking from Pete



Saturday 23rd

NORMA JEAN / HE IS LEGEND: The Zodiac

A good night to perhaps cast aside any lingering assumptions about Christian rock as Atlanta, Georgia's Norma Jean crank up the hardcore noise as part of a short UK tour to promote new album, 'Redeemer'. As well as being practising Christians, the moniker Norma Jean (Marilyn Monroe's real name) literally means patterns of God's grace and mercy. But you won't find too many spiritual sing-alongs here (or at least not ones you could sing along to at Greenbelt Festival). Instead chaotic heaviness is the order of the day, discordant breakdowns and jarring time changes mixing it with a new-found melodic intensity on the new album, featuring new vocalist Cory Brandon and produced by Ross Robinson, who has previously recorded At The Drive-In and Sepultura. The intense recording sessions added to a gruelling touring schedule have made for an intense band who manage to tread the line between mainstream accessibility and fringe extremism. Support comes from Century Media labelmates He Is Legend, out of North Carolina. Their new album, 'Suck Out The Poison' arrives this month, mixing up Southern rock, grunge, metal and emo.

Fryer and Smiths-inspired indie noise from Film Noir.

OXFORD FOLK CLUB: The Port Mahon
SATURDAY 20th

EQUITRUCK II: The Port Mahon (1-11pm) – All-day mini-festival to mark the midway point between Truck Festivals. Goldrush headline – *see main preview*



MARTIN FUREY: The Bullingdon – Traditional Irish folk from Martin Furey, part of the legendary folk family.
ARCHITECTS + THE GORGEOUS + CHINESE FINGER TRAP: The Zodiac – Brighton hardcore metallers return to the Zodiac after supporting Sikh late last year.
ASSASSINS OF SILENCE + INACUN + SNAKE EYES: The X, Cowley – Hawkwind tribute from Assassins, plus heavy rock support.
BLIND PILOTS + THE UPSTREAM PROVIDERS: The Music Market – Heavy rock from Blind Pilots, plus 60s-style garage psychedelia from The Upstream Providers at tonight's Delicious Music showcase.
MAEVE BAYTON: The Magic Café (1pm) – Blues and ballads from the local singer.
ANYDAYS + THE COLOURS + CAPTAIN MANDATE: The Jericho Tavern – Retro rocking from The Anydays.

SUNDAY 21st

IMOGEN HEAP: The New Theatre – Electro-popping songstress makes up for last year's cancelled show – *see main preview*
THE PINEY GIR COUNTRY ROADSHOW + STORNOWAY + NOAH & THE WHALE + HUGH J NOBLE: The Port Mahon – Truck's resident synth-pop queen continues along her country side path, with support from gentle-natured popstrels Stornoway and the Biblically inaccurate Noah and the Whale.
LOW Vs DIAMOND: The Zodiac – New LA-based synth-rockers on the rise, recently taken up by Killers' management and over in the UK to promote debut single, 'Life After Love', plying a familiar 80s-styled rock that owes plenty to Talk Talk.
ELECTRIC OPEN JAM: The Music Market
JUXSTAR: The Black Horse, Kidlington
MONDAY 22nd

NOISETTES: The Zodiac – Raw blues-rock and classic r'n'b from London's Noisettes, fresh from supporting Muse on tour and all set for their debut album release, 'What's The Time, Mr Wolf' after a string of well-received singles. Shingai Shoniwa's Billie Holiday-meets-Skin from Skunk Anansie voice is the star of the show.
PETE BOSS & THE BLUEHEARTS: The Bullingdon – Oxford's own Slowhand revives his Clapton-inspired blues-rock.
THE BULLY WEE BAND: Nettlebed Folk Club

TUESDAY 23rd

NORMA JEAN + HE IS LEGEND + MAYLENE & THE SONS OF DISASTER: The Zodiac – Hardcore in the name of God from Norma Jean – *see main preview*
JAZZ CLUB with THE TOM GREY QUINTET: The Bullingdon
THE CARTER MANOEUVRE + KING ALEXANDER + CAUSE OF ACCIDENT: The Port Mahon – Another night of quality underground sounds from the Swiss Concrete crew, tonight featuring Leamington's new wavers Carter Manoeuvre.
SHUSH OPEN MIC NIGHT: The X, Cowley
CHANTELLE PIKE + BARNABUS + MARK CROZER: The Jericho Tavern – CD launch gig for Chantelle Pike, mixing show tune

theatricality with more considered folk-pop songs. Cellist Barnabus supports along with Mary Chain-inspired songwriter Mark Crozer.

DELICIOUS MUSIC JAZZ NIGHT: Bar Milano, Pizza Express – With NPK Jazz Duo.

OPEN MIC SESSION: Mangos

WEDNESDAY 24th

THE IDIOT RATE + BABY GRAVY: The Zodiac – Liverpoolian hardcore newcomers out on their first headlining tour, following support slots with Sikh and Still Remains. Nightshift cover stars Baby Gravy support – *see main interview feature*

FOLK SESSION: The X, Cowley

OPEN MIC SESSION: Marlborough House

THURSDAY 25th

EAGLES OF DEATH METAL: The Zodiac – Josh Homme's garage rock side-project – *see main preview*

SABOTAGE: The Zodiac

Thursday 25th

EAGLES OF DEATH METAL: The Zodiac

Not content with ruling the world of rock with Queens Of the Stone Age and his consistently great 'Desert Sessions' albums, Josh Homme finds time to form a scuzzy garage rock side-project with chum Jesse Hughes. Aside from this duo, the band has had a rotating cast of players, including, at various times, Dave Grohl, Nick Oliveri and Brody Dalle. The name is misleading obviously, apparently the result of a drunken argument in a bar about the band Poison. The intention instead is to play party music for rockers and it seems to work. The band's first outing, 2004's 'Peace, Love, Death Metal' was warmly received and adopted by a multitude of major advertisers, while this year's follow-up, 'Death By Sexy', has found Homme and Hughes supporting The Strokes and Peaches as well as Guns'n'Roses. At least it would have done had they not been thrown off the tour after the first date when Axl Rose described them as The Pigeons of Shit Metal. This from a man with a rampant, delusional ego who hasn't written a decent song in over 15 years. Still, any enemy of his is a friend of Nightshift's and while there's a bit of side-project slackness about Eagles of Death Metal, and the feeling that it's not entirely serious, it is fun, loud and raucous. Things that all rock music should strive to be.



TIM MATHEWS + THE UNKNOWN: The X, Cowley
ELECTRIC CIRCUS: The Port Mahon
RESONATE + KLAY: The Cellar – Big Hair new bands night.
CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre
OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon

FRIDAY 26th

BLOOD BROTHERS: The Zodiac (upstairs) – Welcome return for velocity hardcore terrors, making out like early Beastie Boys on a Black Flag and glue-sniffing rampage.

GAPPY TOOTH INDUSTRIES with TEKNIKOV + HEADCOUNT + RATFACE: The Zodiac (downstairs) – Another mixed bill from the GTI crew, tonight featuring Norwich's clattering art-rockers Teknikov, plus local punk-metal tyrants Headcount, making out like Therapy? sodomising Adam & The Ants. Ratface open the show with their atonal chants and lo-fi ambient noise.

THE POWDERS + KANED CITIZEN + REBECCA MOSLEY: The X, Cowley – Local bands night with melodic rockers Kaned Citizen, plus ethereal folk-pop from Rebecca Mosley.

BANDS & SINGERS NIGHT: The Victoria, Jericho

BACKROOM BOOGIE: The Bullingdon – With guest DJ Aidan Larkin.

OXFORD FOLK CLUB: The Port Mahon

SATURDAY 27th

GET CAPE, WEAR CAPE, FLY: Brookes University Union – Return of special agent Sam Duckworth, champion of the underdog, chronicler par excellence of life's bitter-sweet details and standard-bearer of a new wave of anti-racist pop. All-round chap, then.

HOMESPUN: The Bullingdon – The band formed by Beautiful South guitarist and songwriter Dave Rotheray, treading a similarly personal lyrical path, mixing up country, folk, pop and soul into a simple but sophisticated

blend and fronted by hitmaker Sam Brown, on secondment from Jools Holland's band.
ONE DOLLAR PEEPSHOW + MOOCHER: The Music Market – Sweet, sometimes trippy guitar pop in a Cardigans vein.
THE RACE + MY DEVICE + PAPERLUNG + SEAGULL STRANGE: The Zodiac – Shifty Disco celebrates 10 years of indie rocking with a night featuring its current roster, including Reading's anthemic rockers The Race, NME Breaking Bands winners My Device, Paperlung, the new band fronted by Sice from The Boo Radleys and Bristol's Seagull Strange.
KILL KENADA + RIOTMEN + ANDNOSTAR: The Port Mahon – Menacing, melodic hardcore out of Bognor from Kill Kenada, plus dissonant post-rock from locals AndNoStar.

KING B + CHICO & THE MAN: The X, Cowley – Live blues rock.

MOR KARBAJI: The Abbey, Sutton Courtenay – A night of Latino music, mixing up Flamenco and Jewish traditional sounds, from the Big Village crew.

EVOLUTION: The White Horse, Abingdon
ED STANTON: The Magic Café (1pm)

SUNDAY 28th

PINDROP PERFORMANCE with BRICKWORK LIZARDS + APE HAS KILLED APE + TALLULAH RENDALL: The Port Mahon (5pm) – Discreet music to start the evening again at the monthly Pindrop, tonight featuring world-folk-jazz-hip hop starlets Brickwork Lizards, plus moody electronica and monologues from Ape has Killed Ape, and PJ Harvey-inspired rocking from singer Tallulah Rendall.

McQUEEN: The Zodiac – Strutting grunge-infected metal from Brighton's McQueen, fronted by the bluesy drawl of Leah Duors, making out in a Joan Jett style.

ELECTRIC OPEN JAM: The Music Market
BEARD MUSEUM with THE CEDAR: The Purple Turtle

TRIBUTE TO DIRE STRAITS: The Black Horse, Kidlington

MONDAY 29th

JOHN CALE: The Zodiac – Former Velvet Underground legend makes a rare visit to Oxford – see main preview

SPLIT THE RIFF: The Bullingdon – Nine-piece local blues, swing and boogie collective, featuring a full horn section and the vocal talents of Carol Reese.

TUESDAY 30th

CUTE IS WHAT WE AIM FOR: The Zodiac – Inexplicably popular New York State power-rockers whose debut album was Fueled By Ramen's fastest-selling album ever in the States. But then people over there voted George W Bush into office. Twice.

ASSEMBLY NOW: The Zodiac – New south London indie-punk favourites head out on tour in support of new single, 'Leigh-On-Sea'.

JAZZ CLUB with THE TOM GREY

QUINTET: The Bullingdon

DELICIOUS MUSIC BLUES CLUB: The



Monday 29th

JOHN CALE:

The Zodiac

As a principle player in The Velvet Underground, the arty foil to Lou Reed's rock'n'roller, John Cale's legend is secure, but ever since the release of those two epoch-making albums, 'The Velvet Underground and Nico' and 'White Light, White Heat', Cale has done plenty to prove he was the real innovator in that band. Over the course of 40 years he's released 25 solo albums and 20 soundtracks as well as producing some of the most important albums of recent times (notably Patti Smith's 'Horses' and The Stooges' debut). Describing himself as "a classical composer, dishevelled my personality by dabbling in rock 'n' roll", Cale has always surpassed the boundaries that separate those musical worlds, his classical training and early time spent playing with La Monte Young and John Cage lending him an experimental edge that has stayed with him throughout his career. 'Paris 1919' (released in 1973) remains Cale's solo masterpiece but all along the line he's remained a versatile innovator, alternately dark and threatening – and remarkably confrontational for such an established figure – and playful and romantic, his skill with viola and piano easily matched by his wonderfully rich Welsh singing voice. Tonight's gig, in support of new album, 'Circus Live' is a rare chance to see a genuine legend, one of the single most important figures in musical history.

Music Market

SHUSH OPEN MIC NIGHT: The X, Cowley


DELICIOUS MUSIC JAZZ NIGHT: Bar Milano, Pizza Express – With guests The Kate Garrett Band.




WEDNESDAY 31st

FOLK SESSION: The X, Cowley

OPEN MIC SESSION: Marlborough House

IMSOC BATTLE OF THE BANDS: The Wheatsheaf – First heat of the University independent music society's annual BOTB.



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LIVE

THE MELVINS / BIG BUSINESS / PORN

The Zodiac

The Melvins might have been Kurt Cobain's favourite band but they were never going to make the break into the big time that their biggest fanboy did. They were always too heavy and too hairy to be pin-ups and so a cult act they remain to this day, as well as a by-word in heaviness, as we shall later discover.

But first here is a bloke dressed as Santa and another as Elvis going under the name Porn, doing their best Killdozer impersonation before collapsing into a series of interminable drum solos and wacky private jokes before concluding, several weeks later, with the sort of hardcore grunge jam that any bunch of sixteen year olds could kick out at rehearsal. Yeah, okay it's actually The Melvins in fancy dress, and exactly the sort of deliberately antagonistic stunt they've always tried to pull. Tonight though, it's just not funny.

Anyway, after Santa, here's another large bloke with a huge afro and a voice like thunder. It's Jared Warren from California's Big Business, who, along with drummer Coady Willis has just become a fully-fledged Melvin. Tonight's set is a mix-up of Big Business' own songs followed by a full new-look Melvins set. BB's take on the grunge beast is of the raw, bluesy variety, where Mudhoney meets led Zep, but it only rarely sparkles.

As soon as Buzz Osborne joins the fray, looking like the bastard offspring of Sideshow Bob and The Toecutter from *Mad Max*, everything takes a turn for the heavier. Drummer Dale Crover joins Willis for a synchronised display of duel drumming, beating out a militaristic tattoo, while up front two phenomenal haircuts unite in the pursuit of true metal. Because forget their hardcore and grunge roots, tonight The Melvins are metal to the core. Motorhead, Sabbath and Metallica collide and planets are rocked on their axis. It's unforgiving stuff but strangely buoyant, one track even sounding suspiciously like The Knack's 'My Sharona'. The Melvins are a band steeped in the traditions of slow and



photo: Richard Hounslow

heavy but always willing and able to fly off at obtuse tangents, but tonight they play it pretty straight, building and building until the final, extended number simply rolls over and through you like a storm.

Afterwards we turn on the car stereo to hear Tenacious D's new song, 'You Can't Kill The Metal'. Not with The Melvins around, you can't. God bless The Melvins.

Dale Kattack

ANDY YORKE

The Zodiac

Six years after quitting Unbelievable Truth and seemingly turning his back on music as he pursued a career in Russia, Andy Yorke returns to a venue his old band used to sell out with ease in the late-90s.

Tonight Andy's backed by two of his old bandmates, drummer Nigle Powell, still technically brilliant, effortlessly on the nail, and bassist Jason Moulster, as nonchalantly precise as ever, playing most of the gig with his eyes closed. A new cellist-cum-keyboard player fills out the band but it's quickly evident that with Andy's new songs, less is more: they are simple, stark melodies, as full of dramatic melancholy as before and at their best when it's just Andy with his acoustic guitar and Nigel ditching the kit to play piano, the cello occasionally adding extra gravitas. Tonight's gig was never going to be a barrel of laughs, but

Andy, shyly embarrassed by his warm reception, manages to joke about the lack of festive cheer.

Just occasionally the full band clutters things up too much, or heads off into widdly 70s MOR indulgence, while a couple of times Andy's lyrics verge on 5th form angst. These rare occasions, though, only show up because what surrounds them is so much better. A clutch of old Unbelievable Truth songs stand out, simply due to their familiarity and are enthusiastically greeted. 'Stone' in particular a reminder of what a great band they were, while the encore of 'Landslide' borders on the devotional. The best of the new songs easily stand alongside those favourites and in a time when so many bands have taken Unbelievable Truth's understated epic sound and lifted it to stadium levels, Andy's return couldn't have been better timed.

Sue Foreman

CHRIS WOOD / TELLING THE BEES

Holywell Music Room

Telling the Bees are Andy Letcher, vocals and mandolin, and Josie Weber, cello. Theirs is a taster set of four songs, with stalwarts of the local folk acoustic scene, Colin Fletcher, double bass, and Jane Griffiths, fiddle, joining on the last one. Andy can write songs which are a tad quirky: the best is the praise song to wood and another about not running off to be a gypsy. Promising, though their overall sound didn't totally work. The cello is too low key until the third song; perhaps cello and mandolin aren't the best combination. I wonder what it would have sounded like had it been their musical alter egos there, Andy on his Bretton bagpipes and Josie on her funk-rock electric bass.

Chris Wood plays two sets; the man gives value for money. The opener is an Appalachian Mountain ballad; this challenges my preconceptions, since Chris is known for singing English

traditional folk and increasingly for drawing on the tradition in his own songs of what it means to be English and living in England now. His songs are about modern fatherhood, alienation, Albion, and in his award winning ten-minute ballad of Hugh Lupton's love story in a chip shop, 'One In A Million', the triumph of enduring love over the lure of bright lights, big city consumerism. When he does the traditional 'Our Captain Calls', about a woman questioning why her man is going off to fight other people's wars he makes it a song for modern times. Chris has a dark brown voice, which is not only comforting but can create a sense of danger when he lets it run ahead of the guitar tune, giving the feeling that it is about to fall over the edge onto some abyss. The man knows he has to entertain to get us to listen to his message, and he does.

Colin May

FRANCOIS AND THE ATLAS MOUNTAINS / HOLIDAY IN VIETNAM / SLEEPING STATES / ROXANNE: THE EARLY YEARS

The Port Mahon

The one advantage of the sparse crowd tonight is that Roxanne: The Early Years gets the attention she deserves. There's something about the warmth of her voice and softly-spoken delivery that makes you fall for her music immediately. These sketchy songs may sound brittle, but they're welcoming and enticing in equal measures.

Sleeping States are two guys with electric guitars and their various toys and effects. They make even more brittle songs than Roxanne, despite being double in members. The loveliest thing about the first half of their set is that their singer sounds like Josh Caterer from The Smoking Popes, lush and dreamy with a touch of Morrissey thrown in. Being boys they have a tendency to rely too much on their toys, covering songs with unnecessary noise at times. So it takes the arrival of Rose from the Atlas Mountains on drums to kick them in their twee-pop asses and produce the best songs of their set.

Holiday In Vietnam is Seb from the Evenings' improvising outfit, with a fair

chunk of Baby Gravy in tow. For someone who doesn't go much for improvised stuff I find it works pretty well, mostly on the louder stuff, which Zahra provokes from behind her drums, much to Seb's consternation.

Francois And The Atlas Mountains are an absolute delight. Numbering seven, they bring clarinets, toy instruments and all manner of percussion alongside the more common instruments. Their songs contain a lot of things I love in bands at present; they're gleeful, shambolic and utterly charming. I guess you might position them somewhere between Jens Lekman and I'm From Barcelona; although they're not Swedish in nationality they certainly are in spirit. The rudimentary drums work perfectly with the fragile songs and the constant hopping about between instruments keeps things fresh, while always retaining the band bonhomie. That a band can make you want to take them home and feed them piping hot soup can only be a wonderful thing.

Russell Barker

CATO STREET CONSPIRACY / OUR OWN DEVICES / THE SIEGFRIED SASSOON / RATFACE

The Port Mahon

Sometimes it's not such a bad thing being slightly out of place on a bill. Ratface's amalgam of punk, hip hop, and out of key screeching is noticeably at odds with the angular rock bands also on offer tonight.

Seemingly nervous and, as the set progresses, increasingly amateur in their stage presence, it's as if they've been throw together at a karaoke bar, and despite not knowing any songs, been forced to sing. As a result they end up shouting randomly at anyone who'll listen; or so it seems.

There's actually some very clever word play going on (the rant about Pete Doherty is particularly inspired) and some nice interplay between the DAT backing track, and both vocalists. What initially appears to be a shaky set worms its way into our heads and somehow ends up being the most memorable and enjoyable.

Our Own Devices and The Siegfried Sassoon are in a completely different world to Ratface. Both bands are assured and evidently consummate musicians, but sometimes it takes a blast of total naivety

to grab your attention.

The Siegfried Sassoon's skewed post-rock drifts frequently into jazz territory and is certainly gentler on the ears. Despite the presence of an exceptional drummer and the occasional fizzing riff, they do little to really excite. Our Own Devices' take on 'Red Medicine'-era Fugazi is well executed, and at times they too show flashes of brilliance.

Nevertheless, you often find yourself feeling that you've heard all the stop/starts, loud/quiet bits and clever changes before, and that the band isn't bringing any fresh ideas to the table.

Cato Street Conspiracy eschew such cleverness, and with their heads down and guitars thrashed, make for familiar punk territory. We may well have heard the punk thing before but they do it well, with big choruses and strangely recognizable riffs. For some reason they throw in guitar sections that Iron Maiden would be proud of, which shouldn't work at all, but somehow find their place in the songs without being in the slightest bit ridiculous.

Sam Shepherd

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JOAN AS POLICEWOMAN

The Zodiac

Joan Wasser is Joan as Policewoman. Originally a touring member and backing singer to Antony and the Johnsons she's a native New Yorker and has been on the art/music scene for a while there, working with the likes of Rufus Wainwright, Lou Reed and Sparklehorse, just to name a few. Tonight she's here with her normal touring band: Ben on (a very loud set of) drums and Rainy on bass. Or is it Brian Molko from Placebo? Anyway, even though the drums are quite overbearing at times and generally the playing can be a bit loose on occasion, it really doesn't matter, it's Joan that is centre here. She is core to it all. She is sublime. In fact, the looseness only reflects the characteristics of the band's personalities. In between numbers you can't help but be enamoured by Joan's charms as she chats away to the audience. She tries to come off like a wee space cadet, but it's just a bit of an act. When Joan starts singing we know she's in complete control and knows what she's doing.

So what about the voice? Well, in

these situations one almost hates to make comparisons. It's difficult to pinpoint the style, which is what is so nice about it. You can't ignore the popularity of many recent acts looking to the 30s, 40s and 50s jazz and swing for their inspiration. Amy Winehouse, Madeleine Peyroux and (closer to home) Feist to name a few. Although Joan brings in many of these loungey elements it's still in her own inimitable style. Not to mention mixing it up with forlorn and poetic lyrics: "I'll brush the hair from my eyes / Cause it's in my way / And I wanna see you see me shine". For each song she changes the vocal style depending on what mood the song conveys, but doing it delicately and in no way does it feel contrived. The chill of an almost funereal procession-like beat over a low sexy whisky-tinged Billy Holiday melody quickly transforms to an ethereal boy-like chorister. From Nina Simone to a punky Tori Amos, Joan is Joan and it's breathtaking. Surely her days of 'back up' are long gone.

Katy Jerome

MONDO CADA / DOMES OF SILENCE / SAVAGE HENRY / THE THIRTYTWO

The Music Market

I emerge alive. With seventy percent hearing loss, but alive. Don't let anyone tell you Oxford doesn't do class rock amongst all the indie-schmindie. Four hours strapped to a Downbeat Sounds night should convince you. What's that you say?

The Thirtytwo play like the contents of Ronnie O'Sullivan's head. There's enough melodic crescendo to impress The Rock of Travolta, fixed with a nail gun to everything King Prawn were about, and blessed (or blighted) with a singer who sounds like he's being fed feet first into a wood chipper.

Savage Henry border on being so musically proficient as to render them difficult to fully engage with. Maybe after all the chaos, having a singer who can spank the licks from his plank *a la* Hendrix and Page, and leading his troops to the bar rock high ground by way of Incubus, I was just molecularly numb.

Domes of Silence are bigger in the US and on the Continent than most round here give them credit for. This is primeval rock at its very heaviest, four-chord monolithic riffs that make you want to go out and become a weightlifter, as you stand there stomping the floor like you are about to snatch 800 pounds. 'Mescaline' and 'Hunter Thompson' are music for bouncers to set to work to, and Sean's vocals have never been more heroically heartfelt.

Mondo Cada quickly pick up the fractious, brutal baton and send the homeless drinker we can see out of the window, air guitaring below in Market Street, back into paroxysms of rock ecstasy. Whatever it is in Eynsham's water that produces Winnebago, Gunbunny and these guys, I'll take a crate.

Is that Christmas bells? No, it's my ears ringing.

Paul Carrera

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the port mahon

Live Music in January

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Mon 8th Swiss Concrete presents Witches + Gobwits

Tue 9th The Ruins, Bear in the Air, The Black Hats
Wed 10th Oxford Improvisers

Thu 11th Electric Circus
Fri 12th Oxford Folk Club

Sat 13th Rip the Joint

Sun 14th John Otway

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Thu 18th True Rumor

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WHITE ROSE MOVEMENT

The Zodiac

The Joy Division comparisons are inevitable: the Nazi-era name; the nervy, haunted front man; the edgy and angular bass-heavy repetition.

Luckily, White Rose Movement do offer far more than a mere tribute act, and other influences are evident: New Order and Duran Duran for the synth-guitar blend, early Spandau Ballet, even Nine Inch Nails for the industrial thudding.

There's an undeniable energy and a compelling anger in the room tonight, from bassist Owen Dyke's viciously frugging peroxide fringe to keyboard player Taxxi's ice-cold pouting. Singer Finn Vine is captivating; he yelps histrionically, yet sings rather unintelligibly, so any message in the lyrics will require reference to their debut album 'Kick', produced by man-of-the-moment Paul Epworth (The Rakes, Futureheads, Bloc Party etc).

Finn also breaks the aloof act by chatting to the crowd, saying they're happy to be in Oxford - it's their spiritual home (full of posh and clever people, you see).

'Girls In The Back' and 'Love Is A Number' are barnstorming - mysterious, catchy and hook-laden. However, some songs are melodically dull - often closer to a series of slogans than the traditional verse-chorus formula. Nothing emulates 'Love Is A Number', though they do try, notably on 'Alsatian' and 'London's Mine'.

I really want to like them more than I do: for me, they just don't have enough stand-out songs yet, and I can't help thinking that The Faint currently cover the same electro indie post-punk dance ground more effectively and memorably. They could be so much more - they've got the sound, the looks, the style, the attitude, the backstory (all members but Taxxi grew up together in a commune in Norfolk).

Now all they need is more good material and a distinct sound of their own. They're on their way though, and if they keep it up, they should be brilliant by album number three.

Kirsten Etheridge

WITCHES / THEY DON'T SLEEP / HER NAME IS CALLA

The Cellar

Always billed as the answer to MOR drudgery, tonight's Big Hair evening actually begins with one of the most pedestrian bands to grace the Cellar's stage in say, oh, at least three weeks. If providing your common or garden variety post-rock passes for entertainment up in Leicester, it definitely is not going to cut it here. Well, that said, the *trés* ethereal set is not without its highlights, although they come mainly in the form of their "I am *so* Thom Yorke/Phil from Fell City Girl" vocalist.

Their shortcomings are particularly transparent when held in contrast to They Don't Sleep, who prove that a small audience is no barrier to destroying some of what you know about music. Set opener 'Signature' alone provides the most blisteringly epic moment since Ben Hur won that race or something. This one involves a softly, softly piano concerto of one. And screaming. Honestly, I felt like one of the Nazis at the end of *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* for crying out loud, the scene where

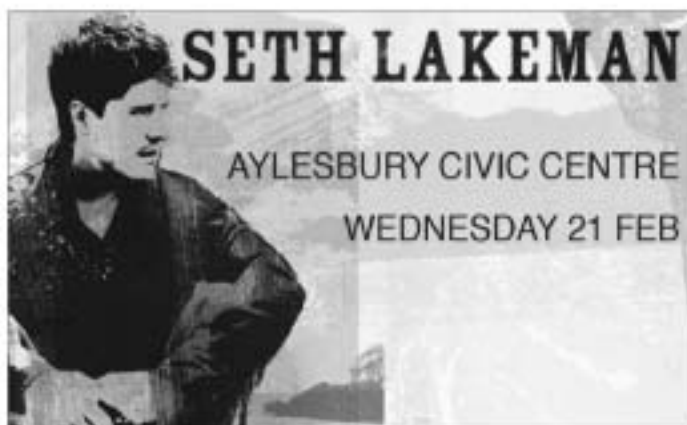
they flip the lid off the ark and it's all like 'FOOF- no skin!', it was that face-meltingly good. The only downer is that there is not a decent enough crowd to witness this disturbingly talented band, who are ones to watch, in every sense of the word.

Similarly Witches continue their eternal quest for pure pop perfection. I sense they are not quite there yet, but tonight's breezy set glistens like that *verboten* sugared doughnut you know you shouldn't indulge in, the guilty pop pleasure when all that shouting and angst gets too much. Barely-there anti-riffs provide an apt background for Dave's tongue-in-cheek lyrical delivery and it helps that they have expanded not only in sound, but in number too. Undoubtedly more comfortable in their skin now, while still searching for their place in the world, here is a band that seem to enjoy the journey as much as the goal. And for that, we salute them.

Matt Bayliss

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VASHTI BUNYAN / GOLDRUSH / THE EPSTEIN / KTB

The Zodiac

How's this for a story: your first single flops in 1965, so you leave London to travel up to a hippie commune in the Isle of Skye to meet Donovan. In a horse and cart. After all, "horses don't need petrol". This travelling inspired Vashti Bunyan's 1970 album 'Just Another Diamond Day', featuring Nick Drake arranger Robert Kirby, but alas: "it just edged its way out, blushed and shuffled off into oblivion. I abandoned it, and music, forever" according to Vashti herself. However, Vashti typed her name in Google in 1997 and found her 'JADD' LP selling on eBay at ridiculous prices. So through the 'JADD' album reissued in 2000, she accumulated a considerable following, collaborating with Devendra Banhart and Animal Collective and releasing the album 'Lookaftering' last year, featuring Joanna Newsom and Adem.

Tonight's gig is a 40 year homecoming for Vashti, a rather subdued Zodiac upstairs, with chairs, tables and candles - a gig you could easily take your mum to. The wonderful singer-songwriter KTB plays an enthralling set, with a voice so soothing and contemplative. She is joined by Piney Gir and Joe Bennett from Goldrush to end with 'Bluebird', a heartbreaking song with a moving melody line and spellbinding harmonies. The Epstein are fantastic but a slight shock to the senses after KTB's heart-warming set. This is how old country should sound in today's terms: updated, fresh and exciting.

A surprise then, while expecting Goldrush, Vashti approaches the stage tentatively, much earlier than expected. The sound is an absolute joke: a terrible buzzing plagues the first song, 'Hidden', yet the pastoral lyrics and rich strings seep through and prevail over the shoddy set-up. A hushed crowd then welcomes 'Diamond Day', which works extraordinarily well with the violinist and cellist. 'Here Before', a song which Vashti "wrote before going to bed one night. It just came from somewhere else... This is for my children" is beautiful and moving. Sadly, Vashti's set is cut short, replaced by Goldrush pouncing around the stage, overriding the mood set by Vashti and tainting her performance.



photo: Richard Hounslow

Thankfully, Vashti joins the stage again with two old friends, Jennifer Lewis and Angela Strange, who formed Oxford trio 'The Three of Us' in the 60s. The magnificent KTB plucks the cello for a beautiful three-part harmony on The Everly Brothers' 'Dream'. A triumphant encore finishes a warm, low-key and long-awaited return.

Pascal Ansell

MINUS THE BEAR

The Zodiac

Ah, Seattle. Long associated with one type of music and one type only: grunge. So when a band comes out of that isolated outpost making disco indie (and by 'indie' I mean 'independent', not 'Kaiser Chiefs'), then it is something of a revelation.

Minus The Bear, assembled with care by highly respected producer Matt Bayles, are packed to the gunnels with hardcore talent (members of Botch and Kill Sadie fill their ranks). Surprising perhaps that the music is anything but thrashy and by-the-numbers. Quite the opposite. Sure, there are moments of jaw dropping riffage, but any outpourings of macho posturing are forfeited for delicate, intricate melodies that spill forth as effortlessly as punching the air in sheer delight.

From the subversive, runaway electronica and finger-tapping mania to the way Jake Snider poetically splits his stanzas; from the wacky song titles (try yelling 'Get Me Naked 2: Electric Boogaloo' out at a gig...) to the drummer revolving through

bizarre time signatures like a bulldozer in a china shop; it's not so much performance as a master class in musicianship. This being the first night of their tour, the gang do appear visibly tired at times. But the majority of the set is bashed out like Bloc Party on Valium, with the more recent additions to their cannon ('Drilling', 'The Fix') so relentlessly upbeat that it sounds like the music sunshine would make. And God knows how we need a large dollop of gleeful optimism every once in a while, right?

Reassuringly, I suppose, the music is just that right side of unconventional to ensure they are destined to remain under the radar, or whatever term you'd use to describe such genre-benders. But to me MTB, by all accounts, create the perfect soundtrack for taking a road trip into the warm sunny countryside, a place with a surfeit of beautiful vistas, good conversation the odd thrill ride. Listen. You'll see.

Matt Bayliss

THE DELAYS

The Zodiac

I'm often left wondering what combined forces of marketing power, plugging or divine intervention conspire to throw up each 'next big thing' beaming beatifically at us from the pages of the music press. Having given up the idea a long time ago that a combination of killer tunes, stunning live shows and your own particularly dextrous manner of skinning the songwriting cat are a guaranteed route to success, I'm still child-in-first-snowfall amazed by how bland the bands surrounded by the greatest hype frequently are.

Take The Delays: sure, there's the odd sparkle of promise and one or two nuggets of shimmering summery pop point to better things, but for the most part they're no better than a band randomly plucked from any midweek slot at <insert your favoured toilet circuit venue here>, plonked on The Zodiac stage and cranked up really loud.

Although the musicianship is crisp and the delivery sharp, they turn out a kind of diaphanous,

ambition-free epic content to plough the well-worn middle ground without ever attempting anything new. In fact, their major point of difference is apparently to replace the usual pedestrian second guitar parts with some equally pedestrian keyboard plonking. They touch on the requisite reference points with businesslike efficiency (viz. The Las, assorted 60s Californian pop), but it never feels committed enough to leave an impression.

Ultimately, it's pleasant but utterly unremarkable music (think The Thrills with a slight kick up the arse) to suit today's busy modern professional who buys a lot of music but never really listens to any of it. Perhaps it really is random chance that propels bands onto the big stage, but it's those who take that opportunity once they've got there to leave their own unique stamp on the world who climb out of the morass of forgotten Marions, Sleepers, Kingmakers - and maybe Delays.

Stuart Fowkes

KITCHEN MOTORS

The Zodiac

Oxford Contemporary Music are on a roll at the moment. Only weeks after the fascinating Photonic Experiment show, they are back at the Zodiac hosting another ambitious multimedia programme. This time it's a collective from Reykjavik which promises to showcase the best in contemporary music from Iceland. Essentially tonight's concert centres around two separate musical groups, with some additional solo performances and collaborations.

Hildur Guthnadottir leads in with some atmospheric music for solo cello, which makes much use of drones, heavily treated and looped to create a rich and expressive sonic texture. She is then joined onstage by other musicians forming the group of Skuli Sverisson, who is the principal composer and also bass player. Other musicians play percussion, guitar, viola, and also a colourful instrument called a charango which you could describe (with probably much injustice) as a distant South American cousin of the ukulele. Like all the music tonight, Sverisson's compositions have a slow-burning kind of appeal. The musical colouring is often simple and direct but just when you think you've pinned down the experience, the contours subtly shift, opening up unexpected emotional depths.

Kira Kira is the strangest and most uncompromising experience of the evening. A composer, performer and film-maker on the Icelandic scene for some ten years, she appears on stage in traditional Icelandic costume, grins sweetly at the audience and then proceeds to serve up a music that is unnervingly evocative and disturbing. With the assistance of a guitarist and a large

array of electronic effects, she plays a tiny xylophone, a thumb piano and, most bizarrely, a series of little music box mechanisms which she uses to send out fragments of melodies that are looped and absorbed into the surreal electronic swirl. It's a kind of nursery soundscape, approached through some very dark dreams.

The final group is led by composer Johann Johannsson, one of Kitchen Motors' founding fathers. This is a large ensemble including a full string quartet, percussion and electronics, with Johannsson playing keyboards and controlling the sound. At first this seems a more conventional music – repetitive organ chords and string writing evoke pieces by Steve Reich and similar composers, and harmonically there doesn't seem to be anything too adventurous on offer. But as with Skuli Sverisson's group you gradually get drawn into the experience and discover surprising riches. After a while the sonorities open up and hint at middle eastern music (along with the richer soundworlds of Tavener and Gorecki) and then there are sections of playing that are flooded with waves of white noise, which really brings a more abrasive edge to the sound. There is a tangible post-apocalyptic quality to the darker and more atmospheric pieces, but mercifully without the clichés that this might suggest. On CD Johannsson's music can seem a little saccharine but tonight it is vitally recreated and interpreted – the string players in particular are outstanding. When it is over you feel that not only the audience but also the players have been genuinely stunned by the experience.

Steve Thompson

DAMO SUZUKI

The Wheatsheaf

For the uninitiated, Damo Suzuki was a singer in Can, an extraordinary German band of the late 60s and 70s who combined meandering prog aesthetics with irresistible funky leanings years before anyone thought of marrying the two. After leaving the group he shunned music for eleven years, becoming a Jehovah's Witness, developing then beating cancer and working in a hotel.

He's now back on a never-ending international tour, which involves improvised gigs with local musicians from wherever he lands up, with little or no rehearsal. After January's triumphant Cellar show tonight's affair struggles to find its feet, despite some excellent pedigree including drummer James Pampflion, the shining star of Fell City Girl. It can't be easy backing someone who's idea of a song is to chant a few phrases over and over until they lose their

meaning, letting those behind him get on with whatever they want. His description is "instant composing" and he's now completely eschewed conventional song-writing, only releasing live albums. The band try their hardest, but you can tell from the furrowed brows that it's an uphill task. January's gig saw James Sedwards in his element, always happy to push musical boundaries as far as they'll go. Tonight's musicians, including Jimmy Hetherington from Suitable Case, just can't seem to let themselves go to the same extent. You can't help but admire Suzuki; he doesn't care how much he gets paid; he mans the merchandise stall on his own for the whole time he's not on stage; he really is doing it all for the sheer love of the music, and he doesn't even know what music is coming. We need more like him.

Art Lagun

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NIGHTSHIFT

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DEMOS

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DEMO OF THE MONTH

THE DELTA FREQUENCY

Featuring as they do Rock of Travolta founder Phill Honey and Smiley guitarist Tom Sharpe, it shouldn't come as any surprise that The Delta Frequency have an OTT sense of rock and roll theatricality. From the ugly, squelching drum machine beat and raptor-like circling piano intro, through to the demo's closing mantra, "Truss me up, cos you're fucking with the man machine", they layer on the intensity and occasional preposterousness in a manner that would eat this month's more lo-fi offerings as mere pre-breakfast snacks. 'Eyes Wide' seems in two minds whether to tear up the whole street but settles for overturning a couple of cars as it stops and starts and finally bursts into fuzzy life, the vocalist doing his best Bowie impersonation, but they really open up as they go on, 'High Five' trying to find a meeting point between Underworld and The Birthday Party but not afraid to add a hefty dash of Motley Crue to the mix. Best of the lot though is 'Charge Me Up', a squall of grunged-up guitars and synths, a deadringer for early Marilyn Manson. Bombastic and fun, we'd pay good money to see The Delta Frequency stalking the stage at the Cellar in a pair of pneumatic stilts.

XMAS LIGHTS

There is a moment of silence and then the ceiling collapses in on you. The water tank has burst and the gibbering sprite who lives in the roof felting is loose. A fleet of lorries packed with cutlery and plutonium tumble over each other in a frenzied attempt to be the first to explode. Then in come the chanting monks and the militaristic marching beat. Hang on in there, dear reader, we're almost halfway through the first song. That's what's so great about Xmas Lights – the sheer volume of stuff they can cram into a few moments of utter bleeding' chaos. Second song in and there's swarming spazz-jazz metal, bellowing and shouting. Lots of shouting. And screaming. Lots of screaming. And more monks. It's like Gregorian hardcore central round here. And then it all comes to a head with a full-on shouting match between frontman Marco and himself over some wildly discordant shards of guitar. Demo Of The Month has become almost a right as far as Xmas Lights go over the last year or so and they're only missing out this month because they tend to get a bit

ponderous on a couple of tracks, and because The Delta Frequency are even more over the top than they are. Otherwise, superior in almost every way to anything else you'll hear purporting to be heavy metal this month. Or the next. Or the one after that.

SHE CRIES

There's something so heroic about unreconstructed old rockers: the screams, the big riffs, the feeling that it's still only 1975 or 1981, and that's the feeling we get when this demo first kicks in. Led Zep trade blows with Iron Maiden and we rummage in the wardrobe for that old denim jacket so that we may fully join in the fun. But then, two minutes and nineteen seconds in, She Cries suddenly stop, like a cartoon character smacked in the head by a falling anvil, and turn into self-pitying indie chuggers. WHY? They were doing so well. But then it all becomes clear – they're really an emo band and thereafter it's all a very much more up-to-date though not necessarily more enjoyable affair, the band going at it full-pelt, an ogre rapping out a duel with a chihuahua like a heavy metal version of The Automatic. They're an occasionally untidy melting pot of old school heavy rock, grunge, hardcore and emo but equally they've got a melodic edge and inventive side that possibly comes from having no bassist, that just about holds it all together.

LES CLOCHARDS

In these bleak, grey, rain-sodden days, it's a welcome relief to be transported to the sunny West Bank of the Seine, to daydream wistfully along to a cheerily-squeezed accordion whilst sipping a fine claret. Such is the Gallic-flavoured musical world of Les Clochards, a band featuring former-Borgnine chap Ian Nixon and one-time Anyways luminary Karen Cleave. As such there's something of an 80s indie jangle about them, even when they're ruminating in doleful French style, like the closing monologue of a sombre French existential arthouse movie. It's got a sparkle to it that is a rare commodity elsewhere in this month's demo pile and gets even better as Ian switches from being Serge Gainsbourg, first into Johnny Cash mode and then into a very fine Elvis impersonation. 'Sour Old Swine' is less Parisian swagger, more Mid-West canter, replete with pedal steel and an understated hand-dog humour that recalls The Handsome Family. 'Pride Prevents' is lighter on its pins, comes with that Elvis impersonation and marks Les Clochards out as one of Oxford's more exotic acts, in nature as well as name.

THE GULLIVERS

Something of a sideways lurch for The Gullivers from their previously straightforward indie-punk racket-making. Here they head into reggae and funk territory with all the guile and style of a punch-drunk bantam-weight fighter still up for a bit more action. Too scrawny to win the fight, that doesn't stop them wandering off into the night looking for bigger blokes to kick in the shins. 'Black And White' leans awkwardly on a stumbling funk groove, aiming punches at The Maccabees and Larrikin Love, while 'Needless To Say' strips everything down to a strangled squeak and bare bones bass and drums. Scrappy but generally charming little battlers, The Gullivers' strength or weakness rests on whether they're taken as worthy contemporaries of those bands, or merely latecomers desperately hanging onto the here and now's coat-tails.

THE PISTACHIOS

Despite being a duo, The Pistachios' My Space site claims they come from Oxford, Redditch and Sheffield. If only they could stretch their music so wide. Instead, and despite, incredibly, claiming a likeness to My Bloody Valentine and Nirvana, they're a pretty standard acoustic act, trapped by the self-constructed walls of that genre and without either the sublime vocal ability or genius songwriting skills to make a significant escape attempt. Not that they're so bad, more polite to the point of being innocuous. Richard Kavanagh and Sarah Morrey both have decent voices and trade off each other well but more often than not they sound like they're simply strumming and hoping, the 30-second Flamenco break in the middle of 'The Colouring Book' all the more tokenistic for being so incongruous. Still, pleasant and able enough to be heading in the right direction of they can stamp a bit more personality on their songs. But for now, the kids won't be going nuts for The Pistachios. Yes, we know. Sorry.

SHALL WE SET BEN ON FIRE

Is that what youngsters do these days to amuse themselves? Set other kids on fire? Perhaps in some post-industrial wasteland next to a polluted canal? Obviously some do; others prefer to stay in their bedrooms, grow their fringes and study the Sonic Youth songbook. Which is an admirable pastime in itself but so many of them are doing it these days it's all getting a bit wearing. We get about 28 demos exactly like this every day. It's like it is no longer necessary to even try and write melodies as long as you can mimic Thurston Moore's ponderously abrasive guitar sound and do all them rhythmically awkward bits that mean no-one except people who should be on intensive

medication can possibly dance to. Actually, this sounds a lot like we imagine Mike Oldfield would if he was tuning up whilst thinking about what to cook for dinner later.

JONNY RACE

Poor Jonny Race. Someone killed his pet puppy dog. And then stole his girlfriend. And then glued his eyelids to the toilet seat. And then replaced his vocal chords with two enormous balls of cotton wool. And now he's sad. So here's some songs about it all. Getting it off his chest and all that. He lives in a street where no-one smiles and no-one talks and the bus never comes but when it does he sits there reading Shelley while the bloke next to him shouts into his mobile. "I wish there was more to life than this", he opines. And we want to reach out and cuddle him, to stroke his pain away. Oh alright, it isn't as dreadful as we're making it out to be, but there's only so much angst singer-songwriter stuff we can take before we feel like we're staring into the deepest, darkest void wherein all the evil of the world is contained. Actually, 'Golden Boy' is quite pleasant in a summery West Coast hippy dreaming sort of way. Elsewhere Jonny's wordy in a Bob Dylan kind of way, though musically he's perhaps closer to Paul Simon. Just lay off the apocalyptic dramatics, eh. It's a brand new year. Soon be spring. The world will be awash with new-born lambs and kittens and fluffy ducklings.

THE DEMO DUMPER

THE ALBATROS PROJECT

Quickly bypassing the fact that this lot can't even spell Albatross properly, we initially warm to them since they appear to be so in thrall to The Violent Femmes that they not only sound a lot like them but they've even nicked the riff to 'Blister In The Sun' wholesale for their first song, a sweet folksy jaunt with sparingly-used twinkling electronics, only hampered by the singer's lack of lyrical substance. Interesting bits over they revert to dirge mode, the vocalist now sounding like he's completely fed up with the whole thing, songs moping off into corners to be by themselves. An attempt to inject some spooky gothic sparseness into proceedings boils down to someone heavy breathing over a randomly-strummed acoustic guitar and then whining about people dying for a bit. Twenty minutes later and they're still wandering the corridors aimlessly, searching for the light switch and muttering to themselves over an incoherent ambient ramble which we can confidently state is exactly what Buggles would sound like if they went senile.

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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