

email: nightshift@oxfordmusic.net

website: nightshift.oxfordmusic.net

NIGHTSHIFT

Oxford's Music Magazine

Free every
month.
Issue 162
January
2009



zyxwvutsrqponmlkjihgfedcba

Alphabet Backwards

zyxwvutsrqponmlkjihgfedcba

GET HAPPY!

with Oxford's new pop joybringers

interview inside

photo: Emma Sainsbury

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NEWS

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THE OXFORD PUNT 2009 takes place on Wednesday 13th May. The annual showcase of unsigned Oxford bands is now in its 13th year and local acts can apply now to be part of this year's event. This year's Punt will feature some 17 acts playing across five venues in Oxford city centre. The venues involved are Borders, the Purple Turtle, Thirst Lodge, the Wheatsheaf and the Cellar.

Bands or solo artists wanting play at the Punt should email a Myspace (or similar) link, clearly marked Punt, to nightshift@oxfordmusic.net, or send a CD, again clearly marked Punt, to Nightshift at PO Box 312, Kidlington, OX5 1ZU. Please include a daytime phone number and email contact

The only rule for bands that they must be unsigned and from Oxfordshire. The deadline for demos is the 15th March.

XMAS LIGHTS have split up. The local avant-metal heroes who graced the front cover of Nightshift in October last year and released their debut album the same month, posted a message on their noticeboard that read, "It is with great sadness we announce today that Xmas Lights are having to call it a day. Much as it would be nice to say we have had massive fallings out and punch-ups for the sake of the drama, the truth is far more dull. For many members of our band the financial and time commitments became too much and, for want of a better term, life got in the way. We are very proud of what we have achieved over the last few years, touring the country, playing with great bands and great friends and releasing an album that we honestly could not be more proud of. With all that in mind I guess we could not be more gutted than we are right now. We intend to see all this out in style however, and whilst we are unable to honour our touring commitments (for which we are hugely sorry) we will play one final gig in Oxford that we are organising at the moment. Look out soon for a new band from Umair and a new project from James and Dave in the new year, and in closing, thanks so much to everyone that made being in this band such an amazing part of our

lives for so long. We will miss it." A farewell gig is planned from one of the most stunning local live bands. In the meantime Xmas Lights electronics wizard Umair Chaudhry plays his debut show with his Monday Morning Sun project at the Wheatsheaf on Friday 16th January, alongside Witches and Governors (Of California).

WAKESTOCK FESTIVAL will not be happening this summer, it has been confirmed. The three-day music and wakeboarding festival took place for the first time last July in the grounds of Blenheim Palace in Woodstock, and despite a number of organisational problems and poor ticket sales, it was hoped it would return again this year.

Meanwhile, **Cornbury Festival** will take place over the weekend of the 11th and 12th July at Cornbury Country Park, near Charlbury. Last year's event was headlined by Paul Simon and Crowded House.

THE CELLAR hosts the regional heats of the 2009 Red Stripe Music Awards on Saturday 7th February. The winners of various heats will eventually play at the final at the Kentish Town Forum in May with a major festival slot and a record deal part of the prize. To enter, bands must be over 18. Sign up or check out details at www.redstripe.net.

Banbury rockers **The Keyz**, meanwhile, have won £15,000 to spend on recording and releasing an album via the website www.slicethepie.com. On the site over 10,000 unsigned bands have posted songs anonymously, which are then scouted and reviewed by fans, with the bands attracting the best reviews winning the prize money. Listen to The Keyz at www.myspace.com/thekeyz

BORDERS in Oxford city centre are looking for bands to play instore shows in the coming months. Due to the nature of the bookstore, acts need to be on the mellower side of things and they are particularly looking for classical, jazz and acoustic groups as well as brass bands, pianists and mellow or chilled-out bands. Anyone interested should email Georgia Waite at gwaite@borders.co.uk.



MAGAZINE will play a special warm-up show at the O2 Academy on Tuesday 10th February. The new wave legends are reforming after 27 years for a handful of dates in London, Manchester and Glasgow. The original line-up of the seminal band, Howard Devoto, Barry Adamson, Dave Formular and John Doyle are joined by Devoto's former-Luxuria bandmate Noko on guitar, who stands in for John McGeoch, who died in 2004. Magazine were a major inspiration for the likes of The Smiths and Radiohead, releasing four studio albums between 1978 and 1981. Tickets for what will be a legendary night are on sale now from the Academy box office. Here at Nightshift we can barely start to describe how excited we are.

THIRST LODGE are looking for bands and promoters to play regular or occasional nights at the city centre venue. Anyone interested should contact Rob on 01865 242 044 or at rob@thirstbar.com.

THE RESPONSE COLLECTIVE host a series of monthly electronic showcase gigs starting this month. The band are inviting local electronic bands and artists to take part in their shows at the Jericho Tavern. Response Collective will play at each show as well as DJs.

The first gig is on Saturday 17th January. Acts interested should contact them via www.responsecollective.co.uk

DON'T FORGET TO TUNE into BBC Oxford Introducing every Saturday evening between 6-7pm on 95.2fm. The dedicated local music show plays the best Oxford releases as well as featuring interviews with local and touring acts, a demo review and a gig and clubbing guide. The show is available to listen to online all week at bbc.co.uk/oxford.

Dr Shotover: They're a Crazy Mob

Yes, it was a RIOT, I can tell you - sports goths, greboes, flower punks, glam skinheads and psychedelic tweedies partying like it was 1899... and that was just the ladies! Actually (ahem) I spent much of the evening IN the Ladies, now you mention it... I was after all dressed as Hattie Jacques in "Carry On Orthodontist". What's all this about? Try and keep up, shortarse - why, the East Indies Club Xmas Knees-Up, of course. So... what DID Figgy Sturgess put in that punch? All his strength, that's what. Under these Raybans I am still sporting a shiner that would get me instant admission to the panda enclosure at Beijing State Zoo. Apparently he mistook me for his mother the late Duchess, and panicked. Never mind, eh... least said, soonest mended and all that. I am not one to hold a grudge... especially now that I have emptied half an industrial-sized tube of tyre glue into the miscreant's Brylcreem dispenser. What did I do with the rest? Why sniffed it, obviously. Can't remember a thing about Boxing Day. Oops, talking of Boxing Day, here comes Figgy Sturgess the amateur pugilist himself. Modelling, it must be said, quite an INTERESTING new hairstyle. Quick, Bedingfield, make mine the swiftest Loch Peatie you've ever served, and then lock me in the pantry before the surreally-coiffed bullyboy spots me... If all else fails, slip this tin of Brasso into his drink. Yes - ALL of it. Toodle pip!

Next Month: What A Bunch of Sweeties



Boxing Day - Dr Shotover squares up to Figgy Sturgess

A quiet word with

Alphabet Backwards

EVEN MISERABLE CAREER

curmudgeons like Nightshift get happy sometimes. Once in a while we even like to dance, and if it's not a pretty sight, it proves we can still have fun. Recently we've been spotted jiggling merrily at Alphabet Backwards gigs. Here is a band that could make Mr Grumpy himself happy.

ALPHABET BACKWARDS ARE

simply a happy band. They play happy songs and you watch them up on stage making their own fun and you can feel that happiness exuding from the stage. Their fun is infectious. Not like some fake forced fun wackiness, just the warm glow of wellbeing and a clutch of sweet-natured pop songs full of swirling Toytown synths, sunshiney female backing vocals and frontman James Hitchman's effervescent *joy de vivre*, blokish (but never laddish) charm and effusive lyrical whimsy.

Take your pick from the cartwheeling, carefree '80s Pop Video', the simplistic space-age jog of 'My Friend Annie', or, best of the lot, the rousing acoustic thrash-cum-synth pop bubble of 'Polar Bear', a song that has become something of an anthem for local fans who've started turning up in increasing numbers to the band's shows since the start of last year. What melancholy there is to be had is fleeting and swiftly washed away in the buoyant swell of good vibes.

ALPHABET BACKWARDS ARE

unsigned and have yet to release any kind of CD, but you feel, as they emerge into a bright, shiny new year, that it's only a matter of time before people coming knocking. They've already impressed Radio 1's Huw Stephens and 6Music's Steve Lamacq enough with their early demos to get some airplay. In 2008 Alphabet Backwards played at both the Oxford Punt and Truck Festival, attracting some of the biggest crowds of any band at both events. They regularly pack out local venues like The Wheatheaf, gig goers attracted to their irresistibly hook-laden form of pop, that sounds like no-one else really but might sit comfortably alongside the likes of Get Cape, Wear Cape, Fly, Ben Folds, Ooberman or Noah & The Whale.



photo: Emma Sainsbury

SINGER AND SONGWRITER

James formed Alphabet Backwards after he left his previous band, Cats Kill Children and started to write and record songs at home.

JAMES: "I'd been in a couple of bands before I started Alphabet Backwards, most recently Cats Kill Children. I was in them with Josh, our bass player. It was great fun but, I always wanted to do something different, so I got a lift with my friend to PC World about three years ago and got a computer and some music software. Then I started writing songs and sending out demos to anyone that wanted them. The response I got was pretty positive, including an interview with Steve Lamacq on his BBC 6 show. When the producer rang me I thought it was a friend winding me up and stuff, I had to double check with her."

From this early success James decided to get a full band together

for playing live. He recruited Cats Kill Children bandmate Josh Ward on bass and long-time friend Paul Townsend on drums. This pair respectively knew singer Steph Ward (Josh's sister) and keyboard player Bob Thomas, and so the band convened for the first time in an Oxfordshire pub in the middle of nowhere, initially just as something social to do in the evenings, before the band realised a lot of people really loved what they were doing.

TALKING TO ALPHABET

Backwards, you get the same feeling of easy just-in-it-for-the-crack lack of attitude as you do from their fizzing, frothing, unfettered live shows.

There's a feeling of genuine warmth and happiness coming from the band when they play; is that something they nurture, or is it a natural joy of performing? What other bands do they feel share that approach?

STEPH: "We genuinely really enjoy playing, whether as a band on stage or just having a jam together. We're all such good mates, and I think that always helps make a nice atmosphere on stage. If you're having a giggle then chances are other people will too."

PAUL: "I think it's something that comes naturally when we're playing; it's a 'moment' kind of thing: you just get lifted up and carried away by it. I think it helps make the live show special, and when the crowd pick up on it and get involved then it sets a great atmosphere, you can see everyone's having a good time."

JAMES: "I see it as a trust issue. I know exactly what everyone else is going to do, so I can just relax and enjoy it a lot more. I know Paul will always hit the same fill and Josh will always hit the same riff. Being in a band is not about individuals; it's about how everyone works together for the good of the song. I think one reason we work so well together is because we all appreciate this. I imagine all the best bands and the ones that will be around the longest share this love of performing, due to the enjoyment of the song. In Oxfordshire I guess Jonquil and Youthmovies have that ethic too."

You've quite quickly got yourselves a decent local following and there's an inclusive feeling about your shows; do some bands alienate their audience or give out too much attitude?

JOSH: "I think each band has its own thing, and that's only a positive. I think that our music lends itself more to just kidding around. The clubs in Oxford attract familiar faces every time, and so I definitely think that we get to know them all like they get to know us – we all pretty much know what to expect from the night, and it's always a good laugh."

STEPH: "We don't pretend to be anything we're not, and I think that helps. It's nice to just be yourself up on stage, and I think it's quite often acknowledged and gets a good response from people."

BOB: "50 Cent has a bit of an attitude problem, I think. He can't really be bullet-proof can he?"

THE JOY OF ALPHABET

Backwards isn't just in the upbeat

feel of the music and the onstage ebullience. Lyrically there's a charming whimsy in James' songs, with little references to anything from clone towns to pick'n'mix – little observations and throwaway asides that fill each songs with personality and underplayed humour.

JAMES: "I like to write with a sort of childlike playfulness, while trying to focus on more adult themes, if that makes sense. The more you wrap something up in a big box and bow the easier it is to have a darker meaning.

"I'm not entirely sure what kind of lyricist I am. I guess I try to tell stories. Writing lyrics should, in my opinion, be quite a fast process. If they do not come in pretty much one sitting then I find it gets harder and harder to get right.

"Polar Bears' has a bit of a theme of throwing ice cubes in the sea to cause the temperature of the sea to fall thus stopping the polar ice caps from melting and therefore saving the polar bears – whose numbers are apparently increasing. However, the song itself is all about people's perceptions of global warming being wrong and just doing their bit to look fashionable. I am not 100% sure everyone that bought one of those special carrier bags that said 'I am not a carrier bag' or something like that on it really cares about the environment. I try and do my bit but I am also a little bit rubbish when it comes to recycling and that lot. Everyone is a bit hypocritical, you know. Then there are other songs about just getting drunk and having nervous sex but hey, we are all human, right? I sometimes like to see how much I can get away with as well before causing offence. Just about having a bit of cheeky fun, really."

James still performs solo Alphabet Backwards gigs; does he feel a separation between these and the band gigs?

JAMES: "They are two very different things. I mean I only do it if the full band aren't all free. It can be nice though, as it offers me a chance to play other songs that would not necessarily fit into a live band vibe. Given a choice though, I would always rather have the full band live."

JOSH: "I love the solo gigs, because I get to be an audience member – that's another thing about the social aspect, is that we all turn out for a chance to see each other."

It's also the quality of the songs that has earned Alphabet Backwards their airplay so far. How did that come about and how do they feel hearing themselves on the radio?

JAMES: "We always send demos out with sweets. We gave the guys from Truck Festival a big pack of glacier mints when we handed over our CD. Luckily from there people like Huw Stephens and Tom Robinson have given us plays on the radio. Which, even though there are more and more places to access music these days, is still one of the best places to get heard."

JOSH: "It's really odd – Radio Oxford was an interview that I couldn't make, but listening to it back was still seriously weird. Actually, interviews in general feel strange, and when people take lots of photos it's still difficult to know how to react... the interview just after our Truck set just set the tone for things to come, I think. We all toppled off a hay bale all at once!"

JAMES: "That bale of hay could have been the end of us."

THIS BEING THE START OF A new year, and Alphabet Backwards being the freshest new band in town, what can we look forward to from them in 2009? A full release of some kind would surely cement their growing reputation. Ady Foley from local label Vacuum Pop is an avowed fan.

JAMES: "Ady is an awesome guy and very important to the local scene. Without people like him, Alan Day, Autumn from Coo Coo and Joal at the Wheatsheaf, to name but a few, doing what they do, the scene we are very lucky to be part of would not happen.

"It's the start of a new year, so hopefully we can continue with the momentum we have got and keep moving further and further a field. We have been discussing the possibility of a release in the Spring with a London based label called Kittiwake Records. We're hoping to play a few festivals this year; playing Truck last year was so amazing. I hope we get the chance to do it again this year but, who knows. I guess Glastonbury would be great and Bestival. We shall have to see. When you write a song or paint a picture you can never just do what you want with it. You always have to rely on other people and what they think. We love writing the songs that we write as a band and hopefully we will continue to enjoy what we do. I suppose any success will be down to how hard we work and how we are perceived and if people like the way we sound."

Alphabet Backwards play at the Jericho Tavern on Wednesday 14th January. Visit www.myspace.com/alphabetbackwards for tracks and gig dates.



January

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NATUREBOY

'Under Your Window'

(Natureboy)

The work of musician and songwriter Dave Nobel, Natureboy finds a great balance between DIY homeliness and musical ambition. 'Under Your Window', Dave's third album, was recorded in his garden shed but involves a host of guest musicians (including jazz singer Alice Russell and local folk hero Jon Fletcher), myriad instruments, and a keen sense of arrangement that belies its humble origins.

Natureboy describe themselves as "nu-jazz", really they're more in the tradition of 60s acoustic pop and folkly psychedelia, the album decidedly laidback and almost unstintingly carefree until its final quarter when the casually summery mood turns to more autumnal reflection. Tracks like album opener 'A Beautiful Thing' and especially 'Up The Hill' are full of Beatles-y flourishes, the latter steeped in Paul



McCartney's orchestral, harmony-heavy style of pop, while 'If You Need Someone To Love' swoons and coasts closer to Mungo Jerry. With deft use of everything from fiddle, to trombone or electric piano, Natureboy take in elements of traditional country and jazz; the sweet, piano-led 'Butterflies Appear' is a particular highlight.

Things dip a bit on tracks like 'Use Me As A Pillow', wafting aimlessly through a supposedly dream-like trance, while 'All Of The Reasons' is too self-consciously whimsical. But as 'Under Your Window' reaches its title track near the end and you start to feel the crunch of fallen leaves under your feet, you're charmed by the Simon & Garfunkel-styled wistfulness of it all. And as the album floats through the Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young-like psychedelic rootsiness of 'Love Is All We Have Today' it's easy to get captured in its easy, attitude-free reverie. 'Under Your Window' is locked very much in the middle of the road scheme of things and its whimsical nature can be off-putting at times, but it's also a very complete album from a local musician with the vision to create something ambitious on a bedroom budget, and you feel that with the right break into Radio 2's playlist, a wider, appreciative audience is his to grab with both hands.

Ian Chesterton

THE GULLIVERS

'Ambulance'

(Own Label)

It's always interesting to hear local bands changing and developing over time; in The Gullivers' case the Bicester three-piece are now a completely different band to the scrappy indie-punks that played the Oxford Punt back in 2007. For a start, they've expanded to a four-piece, recruiting a keyboard player. And long gone are the spirited nods to The Libertines et al, which made for a fun but limited experience and in comes a new moody sense of contemplation and a darker sense of purpose. Where once they thrashed with

spindly abandon, the guitars now spangle and shimmer, softly circling around the singer's plaintive yelp that sounds like a boyish Robert Smith. The three tracks on this new EP are all similarly-minded and paced and by the end you kind of wish they'd shift up a gear, but 'Ambulance' carries a similarly distracted whimsy to Life Without Buildings and its dreamy ambience can be gently hypnotic.

Ian Chesterton

THE WOULD-BE-GOODS

'Eventyr'

(Matinée)

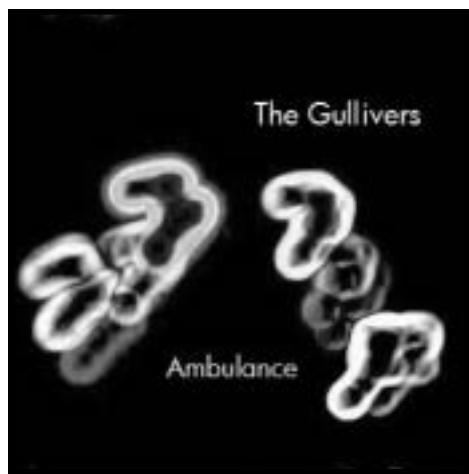
Guitarist Pete Momtchiloff is, without a shadow of a doubt, a local music legend. As part of Here Comes Everybody, Talulah Gosh and Heavenly, he is one of the local scene's godfathers. These days he plays with local francophile popstrels Les Clochards and in Jessica Griffin's long-running Would-Be-Goods, where he's joined by former-Monochrome Set drummer Andy Warren and Thee Headcoatees bassist Deborah Green. It's an indie underground pedigree that never disappoints in the twee jangle-pop stakes, Pete often revisiting his mid-80s heyday on tracks like 'Temporary Best Friend', or providing an elegant surf

shimmer on 'The Ghost Of Mr Minton'.

Still, twenty years on from their debut single, The Would-Be-Goods is still very much the Jessica Griffin Show. These days the playful whimsy is replaced with a more reflective, stoical melancholy, the musical equivalent of a lovelorn European heiress gazing through net curtains, sighing at the rest of the world outside having fun. These are love songs and lost love songs, but sung from a distinctly world-weary point of view. Occasionally, it feels like being lectured to about heartache by a well-meaning aunt, and the band dips too long into a languid comfort zone towards the middle of the album, but when it works, it's completely charming, Jessica's clipped, received English pronunciation a rare joy in contemporary pop, and on 'Sad Stories' in particular she can sound like a lighter, more chipper Nico (if such a thing were possible). There is still some playfulness to be had, although the ennui of 'Baby Romaine' – with its none-too-subtle steal from Blondie's 'In The Flesh' – is the highlight here.

As the 80s indie kids grow up, so their lives and stories change. Whether or not many of the class of 1987 are still listening to obscure jangle bands is anyone's guess; more likely most of them are too up to their ears in mortgages and nappies to find the time. But for those romantic nostalgists left behind The Would-Be-Goods offer succour and sweet home comfort.

Dale Kattack



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GIG GUIDE

Every Monday

THE FAMOUS MONDAY BLUES:

The Bullingdon

The quietest month of the year for gigs is a good time to reflect on some of those heroic underdogs of the local scene who put on a steady stream of live music that falls under many people's radar as they flock to the latest cool new thing. The Famous Monday Blues celebrates its 25th anniversary later this year and continues to attract some of the best touring acts from around the UK, the States and Europe. January's line-up is something of an Oxford special with the first three Mondays of the month featuring local blues-inclined bands. On the 5th there's 60s and 70s-styled rockers **Easy Tiger** taking in elements of southern rock, blues, honky tonk and full-on stadium-rock blowouts. They're fronted by local veteran Ady Davey along with something of a local supergroup, including drummer Tim Turan. Tim of course used to drum with **The Mighty Redox**, who play the Monday Blues on the 12th, proffering a blend of swampy blues rock, 60s folk-rock, psychedelic strangeness and plenty of hoe-down mayhem that refuses to bend to any current trends – but what else would you expect from a band featuring Klub Kakofanney stalwarts Phil Freizinger and Sue Smith? The Monday Blues' resident soundman Tony Jezzard leads his own good-time electric blues-rock combo, **Reservoir Cats** on the 19th, proving even Oxford's most sardonic man knows how to conjure a good time, while the final session of the month, on the 26th, sees the return of Tex-Mex blues giant **Memo Gonzalez** (pictured) with his lively blend of swing and r'n'b.



JANUARY

THURSDAY 1st

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon

FRIDAY 2nd

KLUB KAKOFANNEY with **THE TALIBAND + SUPERLOOSE + MOON LEOPARD + FREI ZINGER & CHRIS HILLS**: The Wheatsheaf – Klub Kak into the New Year with old-fashioned metal noise from The Taliband plus a supporting cast including two bands that, in typical KK style, are impossible to find any info at all on. Aw heck, just go along. Klub Kakofanney is great. **BACKROOM BOOGIE**: The Bullingdon **DUGOUT Vs SKYLARKIN**: The Cellar – Soul, rare groove and funk with Count Skylarkin and Indecision.

GET DOWN: The Brickworks

SATURDAY 3rd

TRANSFORMATION / TRASHY / ROOM 101: The Academy – Weekly three-clubs-in one extravaganza with contemporary and classic indie and alternative sounds at Transformation, 80s pop and trash at Trashy, plus metal, hardcore and punk at Room 101.

MELTING POT with **THE BLACK HATS + THE SWAMIS**: The Bullingdon – Mixed bag of bands as ever at tonight's Melting Pot with taut, super-sharp noise-pop headliners The Black Hats, falling midway between The Jam and Young Knives. Support comes from Buckinghamshire's bluesy acoustic rockers The Swamis.

REGGAE REGGAE SUNDAY: The Cellar

SUNDAY 4th

SIMON & MICHAEL DAVIES' ACOUSTIC SESSION: The Temple – New weekly acoustic night with the Law Abiding Citizens duo.

MONDAY 5th

EASY TIGER: The Bullingdon – First Famous Monday Blues gig of the new year with local 60s and 70s-styled rockers Easy Tiger taking in elements of southern rock, blues, honky tonk and full-on stadium-rock blowouts.

TUESDAY 6th

JAZZ CLUB: The Bullingdon – Free weekly live jazz club with The Howard Peacock Quintet playing lively, funky keyboard-led jazz.

WEDNESDAY 7th

ETHIOPIAN REGGAE NIGHT: The Bullingdon

THURSDAY 8th

CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre – The long-running all-comers club night continues to host all manner of singers, musicians, poets, storytellers and performance artists.

SKYLARKIN: The Academy – Weekly soul, reggae and ska extravaganza with Count Skylarkin' and live bands.

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon

FRIDAY 9th

FREAKISHLY LONG MIRRORS + EUREKA MACHINES + MOLOTOV SEXBOMB + SECRET RIVALS: The Wheatsheaf – Quickfix Presents night with Witney's downbeat indie rockers Freakishly Long Mirrors, plus Black Hats side project Molotov Sexbomb, Leeds' power poppers Eureka Machines and local indie punkers Secret Rivals.

THE MIGHTY REDOX + PETE FRYER BAND + FILM NOIR: The Magdalen – Monthly residency from the swamp-blues crazies and chums.

BACKROOM BOOGIE: The Bullingdon – Classic funk, soul and r'n'b club night.

CHANTELLE PIKE: Isis Farmhouse, Iffley Lock – Dark-hearted acoustic pop and show-tune extravaganza from local songstress Chantelle.

GET DOWN: The Brickworks – Soul, funk and Latin session.

TEMPLARS + I AM THIEVES + CAV OK + THE SHAKELLERS: The Jericho Tavern – Stornoway-style folkly pop from Templars, with support from full-on Led Zep-inspired rockers I Am Thieves, Essex pomp-rockers Cav OK and local grungey popstrels The Shakellers. **BOSSAPHONIK**: The Cellar – Live jazz dance with 10-piece London funk outfit Maracatu do Norte, plus DJs.

SATURDAY 10th

WE ARE THE OCEAN: The Academy – London's post-hardcore shouters head off on their first national headline tour in support of their forthcoming debut album.

TRANSFORMATION / TRASHY / ROOM 101: The Academy

COO COO CLUB with **THE MEDICINE + MOUNTAIN PARADE + DUOTONE**: The Jericho Tavern – Local folk stalwarts Matt Sage and Colin Fletcher come together as The Medicine, with support from delicate, sweet-natured old-world folkies The Mountain Parade, plus cellist Barney Morse-Brown's solo project Duotone.

BALKAN BASEMENT: The Brickworks – Balkan beat, gypsy dance and drum&bass.
LIVE BANDS NIGHT: The Temple

SUNDAY 11th

SIMON & MICHAEL DAVIES' ACOUSTIC SESSION: The Temple

MONDAY 12th

THE MIGHTY REDOX: The Bullingdon – Swampy blues rock, 60s folk-rock, psychedelic strangeness and plenty of hoe-down mayhem from The Mighty Redox at tonight's Famous Monday Blues session.

TUESDAY 13th

JAZZ CLUB: The Bullingdon – With The Howard Peacock Quintet.

THE VOLUNTARY BUTLER SCHEME: The Academy – Stourbridge's one-man and his machines troubadour Rob Jones brings his idiosyncratic electro-folk sound to town, mixing Jim Noir-style eccentric storytelling with Noah & The Whale's whimsical summer pop bounce.
INTRUSION: The Cellar – Goth, industrial and darkwave club night.

WEDNESDAY 14th

DUKE SPECIAL: The Academy – Dreadlocked DIY balladeer Peter Wilson continues his bid for unlikely Radio 2-endorsed pop glory with a warm, witty blend of downbeat crooning and lush, orchestral pop, not a million miles removed from one-time mentor The Divine Comedy.

ALPHABET BACKWARDS + THE COLOURS + BABY GRAVY: The Jericho Tavern – Heartwarming electro-jangle pop from this month's Nightshift cover stars, with support from Reading's epic stadium-pop hopefuls The Colours and brattish electro-punk scrappers Baby Gravy.

PHAT SESSIONS: The Cellar – Live funk jam.

THURSDAY 15th

50ft PANDA + PHANTOM THEORY + DESERT STORM: The Cellar – A night of big beats and bigger riffs and two of Oxford's

best two-piece noise-rock bands go head to head. Sadly Nightshift favourites 50ft Panda are bowing out, tonight being their final gig, so let the sound of their alternately angular hardcore and classic 70s rock racket ring long and loud in your ears. Their mantle will doubtless be taken up by newcomers Phantom Theory whose bludgeoning hardcore and spacious melodic rock promises much for the new year.

MOSHKA presents THE HALCYONS + COGWHEEL DOGS + PETE THE TEMP:

The Bullingdon – Ballsy organ-led torch songs and squelchy electro-dance-rock from Halcyons headlining tonight's Moshka club. Off-kilter folk-pop from Cogwheel Dogs in support.

CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre

SKYLARKIN: The Academy

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon

FRIDAY 16th

SWISS CONCRETE with MONDAY MORNING SUN + WITCHES + GOVERNORS OF. (CALIFORNIA): The Wheatsheaf – Doomladen electro-industrial ambience from Monday Morning Sun, featuring former-Xmas Lights chaps Umair Chaudhry and Marco Ruggerio. Excellent dark-hearted pop from Witches, plus hyperactive melodic hardcore in a Blood Brothers vein from Birmingham's Governors.

FRESH OUT THE BOX: The Cellar – House and breaks club night.

FIRST EDITION: The Jericho Tavern
BACKROOM BOOGIE: The Bullingdon
GET DOWN: The Brickworks

SATURDAY 17th

THE GULLIVERS + WE AERONAUTS + THE DACOITS: The Wheatsheaf – Dark-hearted goth-pop spangle from The Gullivers, launching their new EP tonight. Support comes from Oxford-Brighton orchestral folk-pop collective We Aeronauts and Faringdon's glitzy garage-rockers The Dacoits.

RESPONSE COLLECTIVE: The Jericho Tavern – New monthly night of electronic music, with live bands, DJs and visuals. Tonight local electro-funk soundscapists The Response Collective mix up hip hop beats, synth ambience and cinematic samples.

TRANSFORMATION / TRASHY / ROOM 101: The Academy
ATTACK! ATTACK!: The Cellar – Leftfield rock and electro sounds from Vacuous Pop and Abort, Retry, Fail? DJs.

LIVE BANDS NIGHT: The Temple

SUNDAY 18th

FRANK TURNER: The Academy – The emo screamer-turned folk firebrand continues to spread the word of truth – *see main preview*
KATE GARRETT, BARNEY MORSE-BROWN & FRIENDS: Isis Farmhouse, Iffley Lock – Lovely, sweet-natured folk-pop purity from local singer Kate, along with cellist Barney.

SIMON & MICHAEL DAVIES' ACOUSTIC SESSION: The Temple



Sunday 18th

FRANK TURNER: The Academy

Somehow Frank Turner has become something of an honorary citizen of Oxford. It might, in part, be due to his regular visits to our venues, including appearances at Truck Festival, but also due to his backing band being mostly made up of local punk-pop heroes Dive Dive. Whatever, he's very welcome. The Bahrain-born, Eton-educated Turner has made the unusual but not unprecedented journey from hardcore punk screamer to folk singer over the past decade, from his days in Million Dead to his more mild-mannered, but no less politicised modern day incarnation. His solo acoustic career was well underway before Million Dead split, Turner finding many of his songs working better stripped of their noise, and his debut solo release, 'Campfire Punk Rock', was as much a perfect description of his music as it was a title. Since then he's managed to mix love songs and social commentary on his two albums, 'Sleep Is For The Weak' and 'Love, Ire & Song', in much the same way as his most obvious antecedent, Billy Bragg. Along the way he's toured with the likes of Biffy Clyro, The Holloways and most recently The Levellers, reaching out to an expanding new folk audience while retaining his old hardcore following, no mean feat. Tonight is Turner's biggest Oxford headline show yet, but already it looks like the venue will be packed, and his reception will be as rapturous as for any home-grown heroes.

MONDAY 19th

RESERVOIR CATS: The Bullingdon – Good-time, hard-rocking electric blues from local guitar vet Tony Jezzard and crew at the Famous Monday Blues.

JOHN TAMS & BARRY COOPE: Nettlebed Folk Club – Traditional English acoustic folk from six-times BBC Folk Award winner Tams and musical partner Coope

TUESDAY 20th

MINDLESS SELF INDULGENCE + BRING ME THE HORIZON + BLACK TIDE + IN CASE OF FIRE: The Academy – Kerrang package tour with Little Jimmy Urine leading headliners Mindless Self Indulgence in their ritualistic electro-hip-hop-punk carnage, indulging in his usual genial pastimes of drinking his own piss, setting fire to his pubic hair or



EVOLUTION TATTOO
23A BANBURY ROAD
KIDLINGTON
OX5 1AQ
01865 375085
WWW.EVOLUTIONTATTOO.CO.UK
EMAIL: INFO@EVOLUTIONTATTOO.CO.UK



Tuesday 27th

BUZZCOCKS:

The Academy

Peerless proponents of pop-riddled punk since 1976, Buzzcocks have been no strangers to Oxford venues since their reformation in the late-80s, but tonight's gig is a bit special even by their high standards. Following on from countless other rock greats, the Manchester legends are performing their first two classic albums in their entirety. The band's debut, 'Another Music In A Different Kitchen', set the punk-pop benchmark almost beyond reach from the very start when it was released in 1978, featuring sublime Buzzcocks cuts like 'Fast Cars', 'Sixteen' and 'I Don't Mind', as well as more ambitious new wave tracks like 'Moving Away From The Pulsebeat'. Its follow-up, 'Love Bites', released the same year, was less abrasive but featured the band's signature tune, 'Ever Fall In Love', as well as classic tracks like 'Sixteen Again' and 'Love Is Lies'. Buzzcocks might well be considered as one of the great singles bands of all time – up there with The Jam and Blondie in that respect – but those early albums are as good as anything from punk's original revolution, and with Pete Shelley and Steve Diggle showing no signs of mellowing with age, it's another spectacular step back into history for rock nostalgists everywhere.

simply inviting members of the audience to punch him. Still, he's learned his trade supporting Rammstein, Iggy Pop and Marilyn Manson so he knows all about evil rock and roll showmanship. There's screaming hardcore noise from Sheffield's Bring Me The Horizon in support, plus Florida thrash-metallers Black Tide and rising pomp rockers In Case Of Fire.
JAZZ CLUB: The Bullingdon – Live jazz with The Hugh Turner Band.
KAPOW: The Cellar – Indie and electro club night.

WEDNESDAY 21st

ETHIOPIAN REGGAE NIGHT: The Bullingdon

THURSDAY 22nd

ESCAPE THE FATE: The Academy – Las Vegas pretty boy post-hardcore rockers, discovered and mentored by My Chemical Romance out on tour in support of new John Feldmann-produced album, 'This War Is Ours', and having a bit of an edge on their metalcore peers by dint of having a former singer, Ronnie Radke, currently banged up for assisting a murder. Sadly, not the murder of Boys Like Girls.

KING & THE OLIVE FIELDS + BEACONS + SAL'S PARADISE: The Purple Turtle – First night of the new Team Games live music club, with London-based folk singer and banjo player Philip Serfaty's King & The Olive Fields, plus delicate, thoughtful acoustic folk from Beacons and psychedelic folk from Teeside's Sal's Paradise.

SKYLARKIN: The Academy

LES CLOCHARDS + AZUT: Baby Simple – Great homely but exotic Gallic folk-pop from Les Clochards.

ECLECTRICITY: The Cellar – Electro, bassline and fidget house club night.

CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford

Community Centre

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon

FRIDAY 23rd

THE WINCHELL RIOTS + BROADCAST 2000 + THE VOLT + ANY COLOUR

BLACK: The Academy – The local new wave-inspired pop heroes play as part of this year's Academy Live Tour, bearing their epically-proportioned, but intimately arranged souls in the style of Sigur Ros, Muse and Echo and the Bunnymen. Joining them are London's twinkling acoustic rockers Broadcast 2000, Bath's angular indie, folk and ska rockers The Volt and Glasgow's electro-grunge duo Any Color Black.

STORNOWAY: Isis Farmhouse, Iffley Lock – A suitably far-from-the-madding-crowd outing for Oxford's premier proponents of idiosyncratic celtic-flavoured pop, with a great, exotic mix of unusual instrumentation and epic sense of literate songwriting.

BORDERVILLE: The Cellar – Reliably vaudevillian glam-goth rocking from Borderville, launching their new EP.

PETE FRYER BAND + THE MIGHTY REDOX + HEADINGTON HILLBILLIES: Ampleforth Arms

SEVASA + AUDIO POLLUTION + HEARD OF COWS + NOBLE ROGUES: The Jericho Tavern – "No-nonsense" Oasis-alike rockers Sevasa headline a night of, well, no-nonsense, no-frills, Oasis-alike rocking. Knock yourself out.

BACKROOM BOOGIE: The Bullingdon
GET DOWN: The Brickworks

SATURDAY 24th

WHOLE LOTTA LED: The Academy – Led Zeppelin tribute night.

IVY'S ITCH + ASTROHENGE +

NIKOWSKI: The Wheatsheaf – Great virulent angular grunge-goth-hardcore noise from Ivy's Itch, plus spaced-out psychedelic drone noise from Astrohenage and Steve Reich-inspired fidget rock from Nitkowski.

TRANSFORMATION / TRASHY / ROOM 101: The Academy

LIVE BANDS NIGHT: The Temple

SUNDAY 25th

MTV SKINS TOUR with PAPER HEROES + JOSH & FRAN: The Bullingdon – All-ages tour with scrappy indie-punks Paper Heroes,

plus winsome acoustic'n'beats flamenco duo Josh & Fran.

ACOUSTIC OPEN MIC SESSION:

The Red Lion, Kidlington

SIMON & MICHAEL DAVIES'

ACOUSTIC SESSION: The Temple

MONDAY 26th

MEMO GONZALEZ & THE BLUESCASTERS: The Bullingdon – Return of the 300lb Tex-Mex singer, bringing his lively brand of Texan roadhouse blues, swing and r'n'b to the Famous Monday Blues - see main preview

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TUESDAY 27th

BUZZCOCKS: The Academy – The punk legends play their classic first two albums in their entirety – *see main preview*

JAZZ CLUB: The Bullingdon – With The Howard Peacock Quintet.

MIS-SHAPES: The Cellar – Indie club night.

WEDNESDAY 28th

SKYLARKIN + PULLED APART BY

HORSES: The Bullingdon – Now this could get confusing. Not the regular Thursday ska and reggae club night with Count Skylarkin and chums but Leeds' fast-rising garage-pop fireflies, newly signed to Wichita and kicking it out sparkly and spiky. Pulled Apart By Horses

Thursday 29th

ARCHITECTS:

The Academy

And so Architects' mission to tour the world without stopping continues ahead of the release of their third album, 'Hollow Crown', later this month. The Brighton-based metalcore cult heroes haven't let up on the live side of things since their inception five years ago. This month-long UK tour follows on from extensive trips across Europe and the States (where they toured with Suicide Silence) and is their biggest headline tour to date. Previously they've supported Sikth and Bring Me The Horizon. The Architects' way with things is an unrelenting, full-pelt mix of crushing riffage, urgent fury and an epic sense of melody that just about manages to defy the music's inherent brutality. Certainly since Sam Carter replaced original vocalist Matt Johnson, the anger levels have gone up a couple of notches. High-grade support comes from two rising metal bands, highly-textured US-Canadian tech-core outfit Misery Signals, whose ambient leanings mix well with their more ferocious side, and Vancouver's A Textbook Tragedy, who release new album 'Intimidator' in the UK this month.



return to town with their tightly-angled Fugazi and Unwound-inspired post-hardcore noise.

PHAT SESSIONS: The Cellar

THURSDAY 29th

ARCHITECTS + MISERY SIGNALS + A TEXTBOOK TRAGEDY + REMEMBER

THE CHAOS: The Academy – Virulent metalcore attack from Brighton's ever-touring rising stars – *see main preview*

SKYLARKIN: The Academy

MOSHKA presents THE MARMADUKES + LES CLOCHARDS: The Bullingdon – Downbeat alt.country rocking from The Marmadukes at tonight's Moshka, plus a bit of Gallic pop flourish from Les Clochars.

NITKOWSKI + SHIELD YOUR EYES + HREDA: The Cellar – Math and post-rock leftfield sounds.

CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford

Community Centre

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon

FRIDAY 30th

BOYS LIKE GIRLS + THE METRO

STATION: The Academy – Or Boys Who Sound Like Big Girls' Blouses. Somewhere in Wrongland this Boston band were labelled punk-pop. If this is punk then Jimmy Eatworld are Discharge and Sum 41 are The Exploited. Really, the only thing being exploited here are 12-year-old girls' purses.

BRICKWORK LIZARDS: The Wheatsheaf – Whisky-sodden late-night gutter jazz in the vein of Tom Waits from Brickwork Lizards.

THE OUTCAST BAND + JESSE GAMAGE + FRANCIE JONES + ELENA DANA: The Jericho Tavern – Billowing folk-rock from the headliners.

BACKROOM BOOGIE: The Bullingdon

GET DOWN: The Brickworks

HQ: The Cellar – Drum&bass session.

SATURDAY 31st

EMMY THE GREAT: The Academy – Sweet-natured anti-folk and acoustic pop from Hong Kong-born, London-based songstress Emmy, all set to release her debut album, 'First Love' following on from tour supports to Get Cape, Wear Cape, Fly, Martha Wainwright and Mystery Jets as well as making her name on the boutique festival circuit, including last year's Truck.

GAPPY TOOTH INDUSTRIES with LOST TRANSMISSION + GLOCKENSPIEL + ROPETRICK: The Wheatsheaf – Reliably eclectic fare at tonight's GTI show with epic indie rockers Lost Transmission injecting exotic eastern influences into their soaring guitar anthems. Dreamy folk-rock support from Ropetrack and lo-fi tapes'n'effects experimentation from Aylesbury's Glockenspiel.

SPIRAL 25 + CAT MATADOR: The Cellar – Doomladen narcotic psych-rock from Spiral 25, in thrall to the drones and dirges of Spacemen 3 and Loop. Similarly dark-hearted rocking from



Saturday 31st

EQUITRUCK:

The Jericho Tavern

Arranged to fall equi-distant in the calendar between Truck Festivals, Equitruck reaches its third outing, again showcasing a selection of the local and unsigned acts you might expect to find playing the various smaller stages at Truck each summer. This year's headliners need little introduction, since **Little Fish** are the hottest band in Oxford – and beyond – at the moment, having signed to Linda Perry's Custard Records – a subsidiary of Universal – last year and have just completed recording their debut album with her in LA. With singer Julia Heslop set to be the new Patti Smith, they look unstoppable. A solid supporting cast includes excellent up and coming local new wave trio **The Black Hats**, partway between The Jam and Young Knives; theatrical electro-goth thrash-pop merchants **The Delta Frequency**; former-Morrison Steam Fayre chap **Reid Morrison**; Leeds' Who-inspired power-poppers **Eureka Machines**; punky female-fronted guitar pop outfit **The Last Army**; indie rockers **Vultures**; angular post-hardcore manglers **I Am Thieves** and riffs'n'beats heavyweights **Phantom Theory**. With a couple more acts still to be added. A good selection of new music, and all in aid of Truck-favoured charities.

Cat Matador.

EQUITRUCK: The Jericho Tavern – Marking the mid-point between main Truck Festivals, the annual mini-fest showcases a selection of local and underground acts – *see main preview*

TRANSFORMATION / TRASHY / ROOM 101: The Academy

LIVE BANDS NIGHT: The Temple

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LIVE

FOALS / YOUTHMOVIES / JONQUIL

The Academy

Tonight we really are watching the crème de la crème of the Oxford music scene. The Academy, long-since sold out, is raving with teenagers and ten year-olds accompanied by lost parents stuck helplessly in a dark corner, filled with uncontrolled testosterone and dyed 80s-styled hair, checked shirts and mini skirts with leopard leggings. This could be a review about fashion, attitude and all the paraphernalia that comes with a set where Foals is involved but I will refrain – I am sure you get the picture.

Jonquil, like Youthmovies, long-time friend of Foals and justly rewarded with such a prestigious support slot are young, vibrant and fun. Their members are sound multi-instrumentalists, challengers in the technical spectrum of things and a real pleasure to watch. It pays off being on tour for so long in countries like Germany and Spain. Their repertoire and skills are precise, tight and bouncy despite the band's tendency to static pose. Their music is jolly and eager, the sort you would listen to merrily in a summer festival tent or while downing a few pints at the pub, but with a fresh, youthful twist. And it shows – the audience warms up, sings along, claps and springs in full delight.

We'll give Youthmovies the benefit of the doubt for tonight's performance, mainly because we've have seen them a few times before and know what they are capable of achieving. Sharing a brass player with Jonquil and fronted by original Foals singer Andrew Mears Youthmovies have released a string of records of genuinely high-quality progressive rock. This is, however, no ordinary definition of 'progressive'. This is refined mind-splitting maverick music with awkward pop shapes, difficult to grasp if you don't listen carefully or press rewind-play again. Sadly we don't get what we hope for tonight. With the bassist missing – stranded 100 miles away – and the PA working against them, the band have to make do, turning to experimental noise and growling ambience.



Foals photo by rphimages

We sense the audience is not particularly keen but Youthmovies are saved by frontman Andrew's guitar flying straight into the public, with a subsequent mass sense of euphoria.

Tonight is Foals' last gig of the world-wide tour and it is a proper homecoming event. With the gig sold out, they were forced to play an additional show the previous night. But this is no Camden Crawl or pre-'Hummer' Cellar shindig anymore. They have come a long way and it is obvious. Their sound is supremely controlled, upbeat, quick-paced and so much tighter they really could not perform any better mathletics. You're struck by

their unstoppable contagious energy, guitar swings, hard beating pedals, and quirky moves galore, especially considering they must have played the same songs for so long. Yet this gig is as much their doing as the public's - their music and attitude allows for the audience to be freely both viewer and participant (although there are no stage invasions nowadays). Fans jump, cry, push, bounce, shout in ecstasy and blend in like a sea of dismembered bodies and are, gracefully, left satisfied with a full-rounded repertoire of real tripping sweaty sound waves.

Liane Escorça

THE SAW DOCTORS

The Academy

It's this time of year when everyone begins to dread the office Christmas party. For some reason the notion of spending an evening with colleagues in a setting outside the ordinary seems to breed insecurity and that exact same vibe can be felt upon entering the Academy for The Saw Doctors tonight.

An eclectic audience stand, trying to ignore the possibility that at some point they may have to make eye contact with the equivalent of the office junior or the senior manager, by ensuring their mouth remains occupied with the consumption of

fluids. In fact, it's only after the support band have finished that the crowd seem to lose some of their inhibition, surging towards the stage. Like any party it's somewhat slow to start, the band spanning back over 20 years, beginning with a couple of lesser known songs. Yet three songs in everything changes. It's almost as if someone has invited Slade along for the night, slowly people start singing along to songs with lyrics that are annoyingly catchy.

A quick glance around shows the youngsters buoyantly singing and

dancing, whilst fuelling themselves with alcohol, as if someone has decided there's a free bar. Meanwhile, the more sophisticated audience members are also beginning to let go, with behaviour only otherwise observed at football games, including off-key singing, dodgy dancing, lustful looks from the ladies and at times what look like tears of joy in the eyes of the most macho of men (though no doubt they will assure you that was simply due to the lack of air conditioning).

In an unfathomable set, the band reel out hit after hit, not only producing some of their best-loved

classics but also intermingling covers of Radiohead's 'Creep' and the Sugababes' 'About You Now'. This combines with a quick shift at the end, which sees singers Leo Moran and Davy Carton swap their microphones and guitars with drummer Eimhim Craddock and keyboardist Kevin Duffy respectively and an extended edition of 'Hay Wrap' makes it a cracker of a concert. Leaving me only to surmise that as with any good Christmas party, anyone who attended will have plenty of stories to tell about this gig.

Lisa Ward

THE DELTA FREQUENCY / PHANTOM THEORY

The Cellar

Two-piece bands are nothing new or unusual in Oxford but it's always pleasing to hear just how much noise such basic line-ups can produce. Following a similarly riffs'n'beats-led path to 50ft Panda, Phantom Theory also prove that a little imagination can go a long way, crunching through a trashy, shouty opening thrash before opening themselves up a bit, exploring Queens Of The Stone Age's condensed melodic noise before hurtling into nasty, raw grunge with a no-prisoners hammer-and-tongs approach, the drummer propelling everything along apace without ever really seeming to move very fast. But then, as soon as you've got them pinned down as Mudhoney-infatuated hardcore purists, they're getting all spaced out with a gigantic stadium rock guitar sound, while always teetering on the point of chaos. Easily one of the most promising new bands around town.

After something of a hiatus The Delta Frequency offer a none-too gentle reminder of what made us love them first time round. There just aren't enough bands prepared to

ditch all sense of irony and be so over the top. No band ever likes being called goths but, for all their appearance might deny it, the music possesses all the camp, frenzied theatricality of Marilyn Manson at his mid-90s best. That The Delta Frequency features guitarists with histories in The Rock Of Travolta and Smiley explains much of their showmanship but it's as much down to singer Matt's Pete Murphy-like vocal performance. Amid clouds of stage smoke that turns the band into little more than silhouettes, guitars fizz and spit, sequencers pulse magnificently and the whole thing powers along with a doomy pomp and circumstance that could shame Spinal Tap if it weren't so seriously good. Set closer 'Charge Me Up' sums up everything that's great about them, a monstrously robotic thrash with a distorted android voice chanting "You're fucking with the man machine" as industrial metal noise and smoke billows around the venue. Rock and roll is meant to be theatre. Good to know some bands haven't forgotten as much.

Dale Kattack

JOLIE HOLLAND / SAM AMIDON

The Academy

Sam Amidon, a Texan folk songwriter based in New York, should stick to just playing music with other bands and forget about narrating soliloquies while harassing Irish fiddle tunes. Mind you, his story telling is cracking funny and extravagant at the same time, but he doesn't seem to handle multi-tasking well and the victimized, out of tune, out of synch strumming of guitar and banjo in-between is agonising. Never mind his five solo albums and the raving reviews in every music magazine, tonight is not his night and even if Jolie Holland 'helps' with the fiddle, I would like to force him to write his narrative like this: "... and so in outer space we have these amazing toys and the toys are mini dinosaurs and the dinosaurs are the first toys in space and you turn them on by clapping so you go like, clap! and they start going like crazy, going like whooaaarrrr, and then you want to turn them off because they are all going weird and you realize there is no stop button and like the only way to turn them off is by strangling them which is morally wrong, so it's like what?! I mean, if I kill them it's wrong but then it's like you have to make up in your mind that you are just turning them off and like,

whatever, it's okay, you know?..." and my personal extra bonus would be: "and this dinosaur should be called Sam Amidon".

There is no denying that Jolie Holland, also a Texas-bred Americana singer-songwriter, has a wonderful voice, one that serves as an additional instrument to her guitar – confident, strong and relaxed. Her lyrics are meaningful, personal and nostalgic, mixing prayer and poetry with recrimination. But good lyrics are never enough. Despite the promise of 'a perceived space between ancient and modern' and a 'multi-faceted and powerful' craft, she fails to captivate for long and hold the allure after her first three songs. The backing band doesn't offer much musically, just a simple average supporting beat and tune that resembles more an impromptu studio rehearsal performance than a serious professional repertoire. And it doesn't help either when each song is paced 6/8 (please!), Jolie's permanent posing cries 'boring!' and Sam Amidon's fiddle jolts a random accompanying melody. Timeless? Ancient? No, just outdated.

Liane Escorza

THE DEPUTES / THE VICARS OF TWIDDLY / THE HALCYONS

The Wheatsheaf

"Crisis? What crisis?" Despite a spate of small venue closures, and the recent ruling that all British journalism must contain the phrase "credit crunch" every hundred words, The Wheatsheaf is crammed before nine o'clock. Such is the power of Klub Kakofanney, who effortlessly fill venues with a startling mixture of trendies and hairies, of preening youths and hoary old men, despite the fact their lineups look like they were worked out on the back of a beer mat the night before. If you don't love the Klub, you've either not experienced it, or you're hollow inside.

The Halcyons, featuring members of Amberstate and The Mile High Young Team, play two sorts of tune, either ballsy torch songs smothered in fruity organ and *vox humana* keyboards as heard through a giant filter stamped "1987", or excellent squelchy dance rock numbers, which could easily be the theme to some lost *Logan's Run* spin off mini-series. It's a hugely promising set, and our only criticism is that they can come off as a clinical take on day-glo hedonism, like the bands in the bar on *Buffy*; with a little polishing they could produce an insistent but spacious muso-pop eeriness, like the bands in the bar on *Twin Peaks*. But with more silly

synth noises, natch.

As most enlightened sociologists and historians have observed, all the major movements in rock history can be reduced to the desire to dress up funny. Here The Vicars Of Twiddly score highly, decked in a variety of elaborate Catholic vestments. They also rack up points for slapping out rocking swamp surf - if that's not an aqueous paradox - somewhere between Dick Dale and The Cramps, which could soundtrack an ecclesiastical Tarantino flick (*Pulpit Fiction*, anyone?). Of course, every single riff and trick is shamelessly nicked, but no matter how many unoriginal sins The Vicars commit, they're great fun, and why pontificate when we can dance like goons?

The Deputies struggle to follow the idiosyncratic supports, and their vivacious guitar pop sounds too straightforward, even when they co-opt a B-52s bounce. Sadly, the vocals let the team down too, alternating between a distended groan and the sound of Eddie Izzard's "small yappy type dog". This is a pity, as the songs themselves are well-turned and thoughtful, evinced by a Flying Burrito Bros cover, but tonight the quality compositions get lost in a slightly flaccid performance: it's like The Vicars Of Twiddly in reverse.

David Murphy

THE WEDDING PRESENT / THE PAINS OF BEING PURE AT HEART

The Academy

The Pains Of Being Pure At Heart are the band on everyone's lips in the underground pop world at the moment, and quite rightly so. They specialise in short, sharp pop songs, which bring to mind early Jesus & Mary Chain, in a more well-rounded way, and all those legendary buzzsaw guitar bands of the mid-80. On tracks like 'Come Saturday' and 'Everything With You' they have the early My Bloody Valentine vim and vigour and are pretty much approaching fuzz pop heaven.

And so to The Wedding Present. It's a much-changed line up from the band's 80s glory days, but it has always been Gedge's band, so it doesn't matter. I had high hopes for this, having seen them for the first time in 13 years at the Indietracks festival this summer, where they blew me away, much to my surprise. And they proceed to do the same again tonight, opening with 'Kennedy' and firing out a smattering of oldies.

They don't need to do this, as most people here tonight cheer as much for songs from this year's 'El Rey' set. In 'Spider-Man on Hollywood', 'The Thing I Like Best About Him Is His Girlfriend' and 'Don't Take Me Home Until I'm Drunk' they have three songs that easily stand up against the rest of their back catalogue.

Tonight's high points include 'Brassneck' and 'My Favourite Dress', but it's the frenetic cover of Girls At Our Best's 'Getting Nowhere Fast', that first appeared on 'George Best', that blows the roof off. When it comes to the finale they go with 'Boo Boo' from their latest album, a song that starts like Pearl Jam's 'Alive' and takes you places you never thought the Wedding Present could go. Tonight they prove that they are one of the few bands that it was worth their while reforming, and then some.

Russell Barker



ISIS / TORCHE

The Academy

Have indie kids always liked heavy metal? Aren't they supposed to be at home on cold nights, wearing their stripy tees, drinking pop and listening to The Fat Tulips? Or am I just out of touch? For tonight, at what is ostensibly a heavy metal gig (but more of that assumption of mine later), there's a severe lack of long hair / body odour / black leather /

ornate beard-wearing misanthropes, and instead the place is pretty jammed with hip young gunslingers wearing thick-rimmed glasses, shuffling their way through the crowds in their own special expensively-dressed-down way. Me included. Did early-90s indie lead to grunge, which led to noise and then drone, creating an appetite for

metal? Because the modern indie kid *does* seem to like this stuff, and they seem bonkers for Torche, with their oppressive, down-tuned guitar, double kick-drum strain of gloomy, doomy rock. They're pretty great – mixing up Smashing Pumpkins-esque vocal style, in the main, with the sonic barrage of prime Loop, all played through with the attitude of

Sonic Youth doing 'Mote' in a dank underground basement. I like them when they're weird – songs that stop when you least expect it, and volume that can be described as 'pummeling' filling the room with noise and groaning chunks of powerful sound. I don't like them when they go trad heavy metal, and introduce ridiculous hysterio-vocals and widdly-diddly solos into the mix.

Isis, on the other hand, surprise me by being not particularly heavy metal – of any kind – at all. Now, I'd convinced myself that recordings of theirs that I've heard in the past were crushing, mayhem affairs, but what's this? A set of polite gents awkwardly making their way through weak-kneed post-rock songs, as heard through a teenaged emo's bedroom wall? it's all I-don't-want-to-do-my-homework moany vocals and clichéd structures, pseudo-metal posturing and not unexpected 'surprise' musical corners. They play at an impressively loud volume, and that alone is enough to sustain my attention for a third or so of their set. But once you're used to that, it just seems to get a bit, well, *boring*. And that is truly surprising to me, as I had secretly hoped to be returning home afterwards with some destroyed, or at least severely harassed, faculties. Them indie kids are loving it, though. I guess I *am* out of touch.

Simon Minter

BLACK HATS / MEPHISTO GRANDE / THE GULLIVERS / IAM THIEVES

The Jericho Tavern

The compulsion to watch fourth division football in the pouring rain, coupled with a bout of sinusitis that left your reviewer feeling like a herd of android rats was trying to tunnel out of his skull means we miss the majority of the Winter Warmer weekend mini-festival, but even those few hours we do catch are enough to unearth a good handful of new bands well worth watching in the coming months.

I Am Thieves are straight-down-the-line balls-to-the-wall power rock, with hefty nods to all things Led Zeppelin, but also an intense 60s psychedelic twist which finds them spaced out and drifting before they crunch down once more and come on all MC5 with a garage rock stomp. Not every song hits the spot and their tempo changes are awkward to say the least, but it's mostly big, hairy fun and the singer has a simply immense voice.

Bicester's Gullivers have changed a lot since last we saw them. Gone is the spindly indie-punk and in has come a new female keyboard player and singer. The result is an amiable spangle and jangle of 80s-styled

alt.pop that touches on the lighter side of gothy new wave and full of likeable awkwardness. We're left unsure, though, whether frontman Mark's strange vocal yelp sounds like Robert Smith impersonating Frank Spencer or vice versa.

What to say about this Mephisto Grande set? Put it this way, we offered them a Nightshift front cover feature the moment they left the stage. We'll have to save the best of the long, flowery words we wrote down for that treat but if you can imagine The Magic Band intoxicating The Birthday Party at a Baptist gathering in a Parisian free jazz café, fronted by a man with a voice like rough diamonds being dragged over hot coals, you can get one hundredth of their wayward glory.

Which is a bloody hard act to follow, so respect to The Black Hats for managing to battle their way through: their frenetic power pop, full of flowing 60s melodies and Maximo Park-style spiky intent, is so tightly disciplined and irresistibly anthemic, it'd take some army to hold them back.

Dale Kattack

DEDLOK / THE CRUSHING / JUNKIE BRUSH

The Bullingdon

It's mid-December and, day-glo Winterval decorations aside, daylight has become a distant memory. What better was to celebrate the now near-constant darkness than to showcase some of Oxford's great hardcore and metal talent? Tonight The Bully welcomes metallers and punk rockers alike with open arms; the floor's practically begging for a circle pit.

Junkie Brush, local alt-punkers, rip into a gasping, jagged punk rock-meets-Velvet Revolver set. While the leaping guitar lines and riff-heavy proficiency shriek metal, vocally the band lean towards second-wave stateside hardcore, pitching from Circle Jerks to Dead Kennedys on 'Small Mercies'. It's claustrophobic noise with all the rounded rock'n'roll swagger of Black Label Society; tight riffs delve into heavier, Converge-esque mayhem on the punishing 'Sickening'. Artistically multi faceted the band string tempos all over, with desert rock-style leaps into distortion.

A change of direction, if not of pace, for The Crushing. Surreally close to a scene from one of J.R.R Tolkein's nightmares the band stay in character throughout as jaded metal warlords,

interspersing classic metal riffery and thrash power chords with banter of such quality it reveals Jack Black for the pretender he is: 'Pile of Skulls' delivers a slice of Dio worthy metal, showmanship and good old fashioned guitar solos, ripping riffs by the root before descending into heavier passages.

Finally Dedlok, at risk of being thoroughly upstaged whether they take themselves seriously or try to rival their comedy predecessors. It's a blisteringly uncompromising set, however, that brings the night to a close; an earsplitting guitar assault with an intensity that splits quickly into paranoid claustrophobic riffing, on 'Believe', with the confident self awareness of Suicidal Tendencies.

A fine metal sandwich, then. The earnest intimidation of reference-heavy punk feeds into aggrandized, self-deprecating humor, all without missing a double kick beat. Closing with Dedlok, meanwhile, serves to remind us that while heavy metal is necessarily subject to parody, played well it should still have enough venom to make your ears bleed.

Liz Dodd

BEN OTTERWELL

The Bullingdon

Disappointingly, when Gomez's sort-of front man Ben Otterwell plays this solo, stripped down, acoustic-only gig, it's to a half-full venue. Although Gomez themselves don't receive as much attention as they did in their late-90s heyday, this gig proves the music is still vital and refreshingly different.

Shambling on to the stage in a scruffy hoody and with even scruffier hair, Otterwell performs a set lasting well over an hour to a rather too-polite crowd. There are some unusual choices; he incorporates lesser-known album tracks, b-sides and even a Jackson Browne cover into the performance. 'These Days', sung by German chanteuse Nico and featured in the film *The Royal Tenenbaums*, takes on a quiet, but strangely cathartic quality, a million miles away from Browne's, or indeed Nico's, version.

Otterwell plays a mean guitar; the bluesy riffs and stomps are accentuated by his stripped down approach. His husk of a voice

seems to rattle underneath the simple chords, creating something almost tribal. Although a few recognisable Gomez songs, like 'Bring It On', are played, the real pleasure of the gig is the intimacy of the occasion. Ben also announces that Gomez will release a new album during the spring, and he plays a handful of tracks from it. Although they lack the immediacy of some of the other material, there's potential to be growers.

It's a solid evening of bluesy acoustic rock. The pace does flag at times; certainly the lack of variety in the presentation of the material doesn't do some of the songs any favours. Even so, it's a shame there aren't more people here, and that those who are are less than enthused. An obviously disappointed, and embarrassed, Otterwell slumps back off the stage, but I hope he knows he gave the audience a good gig, whether they appreciated it or not.

James Benefield

MOTION IN COLOUR

The Academy

Motion In Colour might be the band's name but this is really all about singer and guitarist Adam Barnes. Before his backing musicians even take the stage he's opening his set solo and acoustic, offering a sweetly pleading ballad that's deft enough to fall into the Jeff Buckley camp but a little too saccharine to really tug your heartstrings. When the rest of the band do emerge they fill out Adam's songs and add a more propulsive dynamic without detracting too much from his soft-centred songs. 'Just Brief' is almost emo-ish, and we wonder why he has to adopt a mid-Atlantic accent when he proves his more natural singing voice is up to the task in hand, if lacking a little in range.

The thing to remember is that Adam, and his band, are all still in their mid-teens, and they're not the finished product yet. Drummer Oli McVean looks like a real talent, though, solid, dextrous and sparingly

imaginative and threatening to steal the show. The songs tend towards the earnest and angsty, the bigger rock sound failing to ignite and always sounding better on the folkier material, like highlight 'Mountains'.

As Adam trundles through another solo song the rest of the band sit uncomfortably onstage before they return for 'Ballad Of A Little Bird', which gets the mums and mates in the crowd swaying happily along and it feels like a Christian pop anthem, a call to "spread the word". But perhaps we're just interpreting the positivity with too hefty a dose of cynicism.

It'll be interesting to see how a wider Oxford audience takes to Motion In Colour, given their unchallenging nature and almost Boyzone-like soft centre at times. The real test will be hearing what Barnes and his band are creating a year from now.

John Leeson

APOCALYPTICA

The Academy

It's long been acknowledged that classical music and heavy metal share a common taproot of construction. Separated by electricity and different instruments, but still cosy polyphonic bedfellows.

Of course metal got foisted with its pseudo-satanic veneer, making the two almost comically incompatible, but let's face it, those old time composer dudes were really the rock stars of their day, right? Still, it does seem fitting that Apocalyptica, from Finland, where the main keepers of the flame of the various cores of metal live, should be the most commendable and full-blooded attempt yet, to morph the two genres together, with just four cellos and a maniac drummer. It takes a couple of numbers before you stop chuckling at the incongruity and Spinal Tap-ness of it all. Huge steel sculptures of cellos, formed as skulls, backdrop their

foot-on-the-monitor headbanging as they bow through Metallica's 'Fight Fire With Fire', a typical track that they first made their novelty act name with in the 90s. Such covers are dotted throughout the set as familiar touchstones for the audience to sing along with, but it has to be said that on this new world tour, the band's own compositions are very much to the fore and carry a deeper emotional complexity. Pieces like 'Graze' and the epic 'Betrayal' display astonishing musicianship and put to death any question they are a one dimensional act. But then, what other band today can have a sell out crowd singing along to a classical rendition of 'Seek and Destroy', then moshing like crazies to Grieg's 'In the Hall Of The Mountain King'. As the Terminator might say if he saw them, "I'll be Bach".

Paul Carrera

THE HOLD STEADY /

THE MARK INSIDE

The Academy

Overdosing teens getting frisky in the first aid tent: no bi-weekly Daily Mail scare tabloidism, scenes like this form part of the convoluted tapestry tonight's alternative heroes, The Hold Steady, sketch out on stage. From quoting Jack Kerouac to slicing added anecdotes with pseudo Catholic Americana-nostalgia, the band have cornered the market on intelligent college-pop-rock.

Support band The Mark Inside drum up a confident, wholesome alt rock backdrop; part Placebo, part U2 resounding-guitar. All-American in delivery and references, the band guide a generous audience into a packed, near-decade-straddling set by the headliners. Ripping quickly into the most recent album, 'Stay Positive', The Hold Steady drop into bop-ballad 'Sapphire', fusing worldly wise New York pessimism with hazy teenage optimism. The band, a line-up of family-friendly contradictions, works because every element - from guitar through folksy harpsichord into considered, textured vocals - is as remarkable and as humble as any other. Lead singer, bespectacled Craig Finn, alternates dancing across the stage like a hip English teacher on acid - with meditating into the microphone; his compassionate, gentle delivery of knife edge vocals - on 'Southtown Girls' and 'Citrus' in particular - warm and misleadingly naïve: "I've had kisses that make Judas seem sincere", Finn boasts, in one post-modern love song.

Harder numbers, like the anthemic 'Massive Nights', throw Husker Du choruses over Zeppelin guitars, prompting a mass singalong that stretches into the encore; the band even slip into a Sex Pistols reference at the end, wearing their subtler punk-references on their 50s jitterbug-rock sleeves. Drooping chords and a rising bass propel the benign prophets into 'First Night', all bluesy-American meets AC/DC swagger, with none of the compromise of style or intelligence all too common to American college imports.

Hold Steady are the new Beat Poets, immersed in sex, drugs and heartbreak. Lyrically and musically the band compassionately reflect on all three without tilting into self-importance - songs are funny enough to credit teenage angst sung by rockers in their late-twenties, avoiding the pitfalls of contemporary emo. Stay Positive, Finn advises; and if this is what all-American rock is capable of, it shouldn't be too hard.

Liz Dodd

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IGLU AND HARTLY

The Academy

Honesty demands the admission that this was an impulse review, having caught ten minutes of the band on the telly and decided that they'd be great to see live. Almost inevitably reality failed to live up to expectation, but isn't that what reality's for?

Hollywood, California may be the default synonym to sum up all that's wrong with American culture, but it's always had an interesting music scene that's nothing to do with the film studios (who abandoned the place years ago). Iglu and Hartly are an energetic pop band with an 80s tinge and a fondness for breaking into rap, drawing inevitable comparisons with the Red Hot Chili Peppers. But where the Chilis sometimes get lost in self-doubt and introspection Iglu & Hartly prefer straightforward good-time optimism, such as the infectious new single 'In This City'. The live show is unconventional; the melodies are carried by the keyboards, but they're mostly pre-recorded, while the guitar, played by Simon Katz with enthusiastic abandon that surely deserves an Oscar, is so far back in the mix that it's barely audible. Singer/rappers Jarvis Anderson and Sam Martin provide the non-stop visual entertainment, giving the band a pleasing Scooby Doo-like cartoon quality. 'Dayglo' is ridiculously bouncy and cheerful, and almost too long at three minutes but, like most of their songs, sounds too much like it was lifted from the soundtrack of an 80s Bratpack movie. You half expect Molly Ringwald to emerge from the wings sporting an orange perm, dayglo jumper and pink leggings.

The band are clearly ambitious and seem to be heading down a narrowing path; either building on their already considerable success to become the ultimate party band that seems to be their game plan, or jacking it all in. There's no way they could pull this off when they hit their forties. Or thirties for that matter. Longevity doesn't seem to be on the cards, but then people said that about Cliff Richard. Fifty years ago.

Art Lagun

CHRISTIAN WALLUMRØD ENSEMBLE

Holywell Music Room

'Jazz' is one of those terms, a bit like 'Art', which does its job well enough most of the time but fails miserably when applied to those interesting practitioners working on the edge of the cultural spectrum. Billed as Nordic jazz, the Norwegian Wallumrød Ensemble, based around composer/pianist Christian Wallumrød, are just such a group. For a start the instrumentation is unconventional - no double bass or saxophone, but a trumpeter who uses unorthodox techniques to variously evoke Japanese flutes, a Muslim call to prayer and the electronic experimentation of Stockhausen; a violinist who taps deep into his country's folk music legacy; a drummer who also plays glockenspiel; and a pianist who sometimes switches to harmonium and toy piano. And the music is mainly through-composed, so that those essential jazz qualities of improvisation have to find their expression in more unusual ways.

At tonight's concert the playing initially, and surprisingly, disappoints. The first piece

follows a repetitive and uninteresting piano phrase, pacing soporifically while the other instruments add some none too convincing atmospheric gestures. Even the second piece, 'Horseshoe Waltz', with its plodding chords, promises little more than so much minimalist navel-gazing. But halfway through that piece something a little extraordinary happens... it's as if the musicians have suddenly found their radar and tapped into what this group is vitally - quintessentially - about, and that is the concentrated, detailed beauty and strangeness of sound. In this the wonderful acoustics of the Holywell Music Room are ideal for them. Using no PA or amplification, but with an appreciative and attentive audience, they are given space to evoke the richest and most subtle sonic textures, often working from the sparsest compositional material. From the eerie harmonies of 'Lichtblick' to more directly emotive pieces like 'Elias Song' and 'Bris', they draw upon influences as diverse as Baroque

choral music, ancient folk traditions and the darkest dissonances of the last century's avant-garde.

Simply put the quartet is a modest, self-effacing group of outstanding musicians. Nils Økland is probably Norway's premier folk fiddler, extraordinary on the 8-string Hardanger instrument, while Arve Henriksen is equally renowned, and also with a string of challenging solo albums. If Christian Wallumrød and percussionist Per Oddvar Johansen are not quite as stunning as individual musicians, then their playing carries the same commitment, concentration and integrity.

Tonight's programme of miniature compositions and soundscapes, most from the group's 2004 album, 'A Year from Easter', offers an outstanding confirmation of just how important and innovative the Nordic music scene remains.

Steve Thompson

INTRODUCING....

Nightshift's new monthly guide to the best local bands bubbling under

THE DELTA FREQUENCY

Who are they?

Matt Garnham on vocals; Phill Honey on guitar and programming; Tom Sharp on guitar; Alan Brown drums and Jason Warner on bass. Phill previously formed local heroes The Rock Of Travolta, while Tom also plays with Smilex. Matt was a friend of Phill's from years ago; in their teens they'd been in a Christian rock band and done acid together. Sometimes both at the same time. "Alan used to play in a band called The Invisible, but we never saw them." They played their first gig at the Zodiac in March 2006. "We were quite excited about until we realised we were supporting the lame Snow Patrol clones 'Battle' and not 'Battles' like we originally thought." Their first CD got 'Demo Of The Month' in Nightshift and they played The Punt in 2007

What do they sound like?

Frenzied, theatrical electro-goth mayhem with several large brass knockers on. Our review of their first demo hailed their "OTT sense of rock and roll theatricality", particularly 'High Five', which "tries 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", as well as regular set closer 'Charge Me Up', "a squall of grunged-up guitars and synths." Or in their own words, "We're like that fly in the room that contaminates everything it touches. We're like a fungus that grows in the marshes of your psyche. Or simply put: on my iPod we're inbetween Deftones and Derek & Clive."

What inspires them?

"Wrestling, Shania Twain's hemline, crisps, the esteemed Admiral Ackbar and The Two Ronnies."

Career highlight so far:

"Playing the Punt and getting demo of the month in Nightshift. And getting a signed photo and Christmas card from Officer Crabtree out of *Allo Allo* wishing the 'bond a marry crustmouse'."

And the lowlight:

"A spankingly bad live review in Nightshift. They were still booing the



support act when we came on..."

Their favourite other Oxfordshire act is:

"Tristan and the Troubadours. Lovely tunes and nice hair."

If they could only keep one album in the world, it would be:

"Just one album? That's too hard. We've narrowed it down to a few: 'OK Computer', 'Siamese Dream' or 'The Fragile'. Or Queen's Greatest Hits. There's no beating Freddie and big Bry."

When is their next gig and what can newcomers expect?

Equitruck at the Jericho Tavern on Saturday 31st January. "Newcomers can get a free handjob off Matt behind the bins outside afterwards."

Their favourite and least favourite things about Oxford music are:

"Favourite is all these dedicated boys and girls in great bands who turn up and play in venues around the city week after week after week.

"Least favourite is those megalomaniacs at Greene King and their General Zod-like quest to turn every pub and venue in Oxford into places that have all the ambience of an airport departure lounge."

You might love them if you love:

Marilyn Manson, Nine Inch Nails, Bauhaus, Trans Am.

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Whatever happened to... those heroes

CHATSHOW

WHO? Oxford goth heroes from the mid-1980, a time when black was very much the dominant colour of the local music scene, with the likes of Play Dead in the ascendancy. Chatshow's original, short-lived line-up featured guitarist Jon Burton (brother of Candyskins guitarist Nick) and vocalist Steve Thompson, and this incarnation supported Play Dead on tour. Shortly afterwards bassist Alex Keyser joined the band along with a drum machine, and it was this line-up that recorded the band's first single, 'Red Skies', at Dungeon Studios. Later on they would recruit a drummer, Mick Stupp.

WHAT? As we say, early on, and at their best Chatshow were unabashed goth, sitting squarely between the ferocious punk scream of The Birthday Party and the dark, industrial crunk of Killing Joke. In their later months they moved away from this hard-edged sound into a more billowing power-



pop. They were also the first Oxford band Nightshift's editor ever saw – playing at the Polytechnic Student Union Bar.

WHEN? 'Red Skies' was released in 1985 and sold over 4,000 copies, reaching the Indie Top 20. Chatshow toured across the UK, alongside All About Eve and Play Dead, as well as supporting the likes of New Order. A follow-up, 'Shake It Down', followed by 'Kings Of Confusion', were released on a local label. The former fared well but 'Kings' coincided with the demise of indie label distributor Red Rhino and the single was lost forever. Subsequently the band signed to Chappel Music and its in-house record label Ideal. However, after one single release, 'Noisy Bad Thing', the company was bought out by Warner Brothers, leaving the band without any label backing. They continued to tour, very successfully, headlining the Marquee, Electric Ballroom, Nottingham Rock City and Manchester Ritz, but the frustrations brought about by label problems took their toll and they split in 1987.

WHY? In a time well before Oxford bands would start to take over the world, Chatshow were one of the very first to tour outside of the city. In fact they were far more popular in northern England and the Midlands than they were in Oxford (although they, for many years, held the record attendance for a gig at the Polytechnic); in doing so they set the scene for The Candyskins and others to follow. And sales figures of 4,000 for that debut single are astonishing compared to today when a band would be lucky to sell a tenth of that figure.

WHERE? Guitarist Jon had always been a sound engineer and post-split (and following the theft of all his guitars) he started working as one full-time. Currently he is working for The Prodigy after a tour with James Morrison. He now lives in Sheffield. Alex moved to Corsica and works as a production manager, including recently with Hard-Fi and Groove Armada; Alex joined Britpop faves Echobelly for their first album; Tommo was last heard of living in Brighton, while Mick lives in London and was last heard playing with Grand Drive.

HOW? Currently it's pretty much impossible to hear Chatshow anywhere. The records are rarities and there appears to be no online ability to hear them. So, if you're the proud – perhaps oblivious – owner of one of their singles, get it up on Last FM pronto and let the rest of Oxford hear a forgotten but very significant local band.

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50ft PANDA

It's such a simple premise and yet it works a treat: one chap thrashes his drums like the proverbial flight of stairs falling down a flight of stairs while the other fella wrenches a slampit of ugly grunge-core riffage out of his guitar. And that's it. Why in God's name would you need anything more? Thing is, over the course of four tracks which extend over 24 minutes, 50ft Panda might run the risk of getting stuck in a rut, but it just never happens, balancing their attack like a fleet-footed prize fighter crossed with an armoured jeep stuck in fourth gear hurtling precipice-wards with faulty breaks. Possessed of more crunch than the entire US mortgage market, 50ft Panda are a punishing but enticing mix of classic thrash metal and DIY punk clatter. Crank this up to full tinnitus-inducing volume and give your head a well-deserved one-way trip to Oblivionsville. And don't go suing us or them when you can't hear fuck all the next day.

TERMINAL STATE

A follow-up demo to last year's 'Ebola Cola' offering from Wadham College student Gianni Vesuviano, whose name we still like very much for reminding us of cool stuff like volcanoes, or perhaps a wild-haired Italian striker. Like his previous effort it's an occasionally disconcerting mix of frantic electronic beats, even more frantic synth squiggles, really, really frantic guitar riffs, none of which, independently or combined, appear to have any set sense of direction but busy themselves necking as many uppers as they can before the cops arrive, all the while imagining a gabba disco version of industrial rock pioneers Skinny Puppy. It's not pretty and you wonder as to just how off your trolley you'd have to be to be able to dance to it, but part of you wishes someone would sneakily burn it onto a whole batch of Leona Lewis albums just so the gullible mouth-breathers who buy that sort of guff might suffer some kind of rectal haemorrhaging the moment they press Play.

THE SCARLETTS

You're always on slightly dodgy ground playing ska-punk, especially if you hail from rural Oxfordshire, but in 'Fifteen On The Bus' The Scarletts might just have a bit of an anthem on their hands. With a strap-

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line of "Fifteen on the bus / But you're eighteen at the bar", surely a place on the next *Skins* soundtrack must be in the offing? The song itself is a spiky, riotous chunk of punk noise, effusively scrappy and sounding suitably like a scuffle at a late-night bus-stop, possibly in Wheatley as an evening of strong, cheap cider takes hold. In fact its general messiness simply accentuates its perfect encapsulation of a chaotic teenage Friday night. The rest of the demo isn't up to that standard, dropping down a notch, remaining energetic but too lightweight and the hometown accents can sound incongruous, although the Clash-looting 'Piss It Away' is raucous fun. But still, one great song is more than most bands ever write.

TWENTY FIVE TO 9

"We love to rock out!" proclaim Twenty Five To 9, which may be a cliché but does tend to beat "We like to sit in the dark and feel sorry for ourselves because girls don't like us". "We want to know what important people think of us," they continue. You hear that? That's us – important people, so bow down and lick our shoes, lowly scum. We fucking rule this town. Finally, Twenty Five To 9 tell us they "really want you to party with us at one of our shows". Got that? We're important and we're invited to their party. You cannot imagine how glamorous and hedonistic our lives are. Just so long as Twenty Five To 9 isn't the band's bed time. Can't be, can it – they're punk rock. Okay, punk rock of the So-Ca variety, all beefy powerchord chugging, a bit of emo polish and yelping and the odd bit of Youthmovies-style fancy footwork. It's meaty, spirited stuff with enough hooks to hang a family-size batch of coats on, and it's fun enough, but it does tend to sound like about ten thousand other bands of a similar ilk, although with a bit more vim and a lot less whining than most.

THE SHANKS

Sometimes, as if watching an obese man with bad joint problems waddling slowly along a busy pavement while necking a bucket of Pringles and fried chicken, you want to grab a band and shout at them to get a bloody move on. So it is with The Shanks, a not unpleasant five-piece from north Oxford who sound alternately like an old pub blues band and an old pub blues band trying to be Radiohead. On 'Alive' an overly-earnest singer with a strained but gravelly country-blues voice negotiates the jangle and strum and occasionally over-indulgent soloing of his guitarist and you feel

he – and the band – might drop into something dark and meaningful but then he gives up and starts muttering and mumbling and sounding as out of breath as that fat fella we mentioned earlier. The Radiohead stuff comes on 'Perfect Daze', but again they're too busy navel-gazing and lack any sense of direction and their best effort comes with demo closer 'Fly', which has more grace about it, almost touching on ethereal and epic but resigning itself to drift with little apparent purpose. Frustrating stuff, but nothing a few lines of industrial-grade meth-amphetamine and exposure to some old Bolt Thrower albums wouldn't sort in an instant.

LOUIS BARABBAS & THE BLACK VELVET BAND

Think we're a bit late with this one since it's a Christmas song, albeit not the sort to have young children laughing merrily around the tree. In fact in Louis Barabbas' world the only things hanging from Christmas trees are likely to be sinners with nooses round their necks. Here we find Santa checking his list to see who has been naughty and who has been nice, necking a bottle of sherry as he does so, and discovering pretty much everyone has been a bad boy or girl. All this with the sneering, snarling festive goodwill of a bad-tempered Nick Cave, the mood only slightly leavened by the female "Ho ho ho" backing vocals. Replete with banjo and scraping fiddle, it's a great vaudevillian spit'n'sawdust folk dirge and might have sat well on the soundtrack to *Bad Santa*. Really, kiddies would be better off knowing Santa didn't exist than have to face up to this grim reality.

PICTUREBOOK

Describing themselves as a three-piece electronic audio-visual act, Picturebook are more a straight-down-the-line electro-disco beast, albeit quite a timid one. This one-song offering shuffles in somewhere between Pussycat Dolls and Daft Punk, glossy if slightly anodyne female vocals doing their best to sound bored over the top of some digital squelching and a solid, thumping beat. Nothing really wrong with it as such, but it doesn't seem to offer anything new to the world of polished chart fodder. Their line-up does boast a violin-playing singer, though, so it'll perhaps be more telling what they're capable of live.

ZUBE SULTANA

By contrast, few things make us happier than hearing someone making music with

absolutely no apparent desire for commercial success. Banbury's Zube Sultana fixes us with a downright weird five-track demo that threads elements of folk, country rock, classical guitar doodling and acid-fried pop together, often all at once in a decidedly haphazard fashion, to the extent that a couple of tracks here sound like someone's accidentally recorded two separate songs onto the same piece of tape. It makes for a weirdly directionless listening experience but the mess is cleverly constructed and soon you're wrapped up in its strange charm. One minute it feels like you're hearing a long lost Phil Spector Christmas song through the crackle and distortion of a dying radio, the next you're staring out to sea to a soundtrack of a King Creosote-style shanty, tinkling piano and accordion hum mixing with the vocal mantra. The entire demo feels like it exists in a warm, disorientated lysergic fug, but reading Zube's decidedly out-there blogs on his Myspace, we get the feeling he thinks nothing of dropping a couple of tabs of acid into his morning cuppa each day.

THE DEMO DUMPER

CYBERWHORES

As a rule of thumb a good way of getting us on side from the off is to under-pay on your postage so we have to stump up an extra quid for the unbridled pleasure of hearing your demo. For extra brownie points you could also sellotape your CD case so firmly shut it requires the intervention of a specialist explosives unit to get into it. And if all that sounds like a right laugh, you could really go to town and go to all the effort of making music so utterly, irredeemably SHIT that the reviewer can't even laugh or shout at it, merely sit glum-faced in resigned despair at the fact that as the world heads towards a crisis of natural resources, precious electricity and oil was wasted so crazy pranksters like Cyberwhores can inflict their puerile excuse for a sense of humour on us, with a wacky, lo-fi electro paean to anal rape in prisons (oh, our aching sides) called 'Make You My Punk', and a staggeringly hilarious pastiche of 'Lady in Red' about female Muslim suicide bombers. Sorry, did we say staggeringly hilarious? We meant wretchedly tedious. Actually, what really annoys us about all this is that they so obviously want to end up in the Demo Dumper so they can wank themselves into a self-satisfied froth and brag to their equally lobotomised mates about how wacky they are. And we've bloody handed it to them on a plate. Well done. Now fuck off.

Send demos for review to: Nightshift, PO Box 312, Kidlington, Oxford, OX5 1ZU. Or email MySpace link to nightshift@oxfordmusic.net, clearly marked Demo for review.

IMPORTANT: no review without a contact address and phone number. No more than four tracks on a demo. If you can't handle criticism, please don't send us your demo. Demos reviewed may also be played on BBC Radio Oxford Introducing. By submitting a demo for review you also agree to it being played in part or whole on the show.



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