

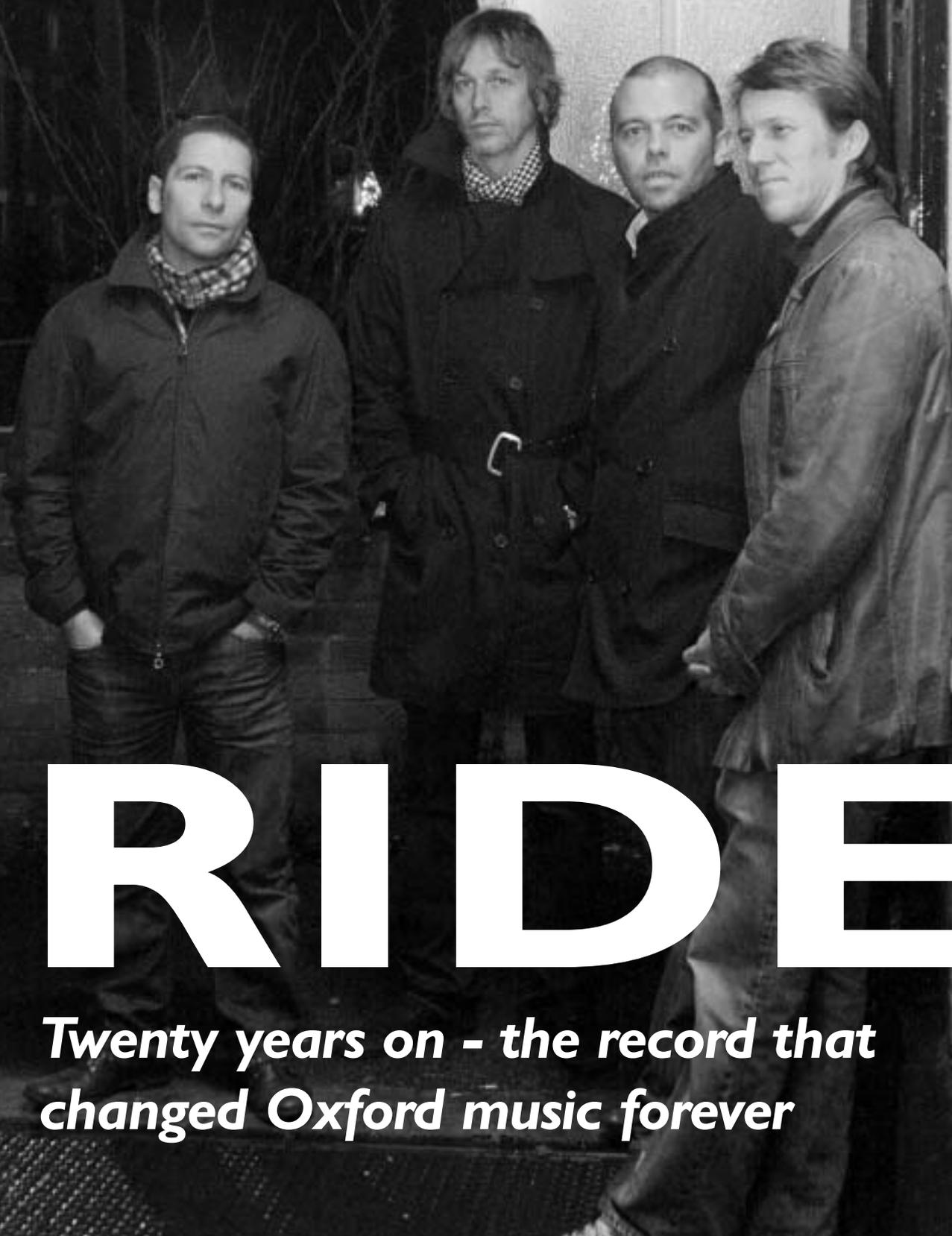
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NIGHTSHIFT

Oxford's Music Magazine

Free every
month.
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RIIDE

*Twenty years on - the record that
changed Oxford music forever*

photo: Sam Shepherd

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NEWS

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A HOST OF ANNIVERSARIES are set to be celebrated in local music in the next couple of months.

In March **BBC RADIO INTRODUCING** will celebrate five years on the air. Launched in 2005 as *The Download*, the dedicated local music show, presented and produced by Tim Bearder and Dave Gilyeat, has consistently championed the best new local acts, helping many of them, including Stornoway, Little Fish and A Silent Film, onto a wider stage. To mark their half-decade, Tim and Dave have commissioned a special tribute to Radiohead's 'The Bends', which itself celebrates its fifteenth anniversary in 2010. Various local acts have recorded their own versions of tracks from the classic album, with all profits going to Children In Need. Full tracklisting for album is: Stornoway: 'Planet Telex'; UTE: 'The Bends'; Jessie Grace: 'High & Dry'; We Aeronauts: 'Fake Plastic Trees'; Spring Offensive: 'Bones'; The Winchell Riots: 'Nice Dream'; Little Fish: 'Just'; The Scholars: 'My Iron Lung'; Richard Walters: 'Bullet Proof. I Wish I Was'; The Family Machine: 'Black Star'; Alphabet Backwards: 'Sulk'; The Evenings: 'Street Spirit (Fade Out)'.

BBC Oxford Introducing launched a weekly podcast in September which has gone on to be the most-listened-to regional Introducing programme in the UK. The show goes out live every Saturday evening between 6-7pm on 95.2fm and is available to listen to all week online at bbc.co.uk/oxford.

Also in March **TCT MUSIC** celebrate the 10th anniversary of their first ever gig. The Club That Cannot Be Named was started by Alan Day and Dave Hale at the Elm Tree in 2000. Initially the pair attracted the best up and coming metal and hardcore bands on the scene to Oxford but over the years TCT rose to become the premier promoter in Oxford, pulling in some of the biggest bands around to the Zodiac and Academy. As part of TCT's celebrations former local hardcore heroes JOR are set to reform for a one-off gig. JOR were the first band ever to play a TCT night. For full TCT listings, visit www.tctmusic.co.uk.

In February **THE CELLAR** commemorates its 10th anniversary under its current name with a series of special gig and club night, with details due to be announced soon.

SUPERTRUCKER TICKETS are on sale now. The special tickets include admission to both Wood Festival in Braziers Park on the 21st-23rd May and Truck Festival itself at Hill Farm, Steventon over the weekend of 23rd-25th July. Supertrucker tickets cost £120 and are available from Videosyncratic on Cowley Road, online from wegottickets.com and various other local outlets. Visit www.thisistruck.com for more details and updates.

Meanwhile, Truck take their pioneering festival to the States this year. Truck America runs over the weekend of the 30th April to 2nd May in the Catskill Mountains area of New York – actually closer to the town of Woodstock than the legendary 60s festival.

YOU! ME! DANCING! are offering special discounted season tickets to their gigs between January and April. The local live music promoters have a limited number of 'Golden Lanyards' for sale which will allow the holder entry to ten Y!M!D! shows up until 1st April (or entry for two people to five shows). The

lanyards are £50, which works out at a saving of £15 on normal gig entry price. Acts already lined up for that period include Vivian Girls, Delphic, Chew Lips, Real Estate, The Scholars, Ebsen & The Witch, Hot Club de Paris, Fionn Regan, DMMYYYY, Tubelord, Errors, First Aid Kit, Antlers, Exlovers, and Chris TT. Passes are on sale from Videosyncratic on Cowley Road or The Scribbler in Oxford. Visit www.ymdpresents.co.uk for more details.

CORNBURY FESTIVAL 2010 takes place over the weekend of July 3rd and 4th, it has been announced. The live music festival returns for its sixth annual outing in the picturesque grounds of Cornbury Country Park, near Charlbury. Some line-up details will be announced soon on the festival website. Last year's festival was headlined by Sugababes and Scouting For Girls. A limited number of early-bird tickets are on sale now, pegged at last year's prices. Visit www.cornburyfestival.com for more details.



THE OXFORD PUNT 2010 will take place on **Wednesday 12th May** across five venues in the city centre. In a change from recent years the Punt will kick off at Malmaison in the Castle complex, which has been hosting Sunday evening shows since last summer. Other venues on the Punt are Thirst Lodge, the Purple Turtle, the Wheatsheaf and the Cellar. The annual Oxford Punt, which was launched in 1997, showcases the best unsigned acts in Oxfordshire. Past events have featured Young Knives, Little Fish, Stornoway and Elizabeth – the band that went on to become Foals. Last year's event featured acts as diverse as Dr Slaggleberry (pictured), The Original Rabbit Foot Spasm Band, Desert Storm and Matt Kilford. Acts wanting to take part in the Punt can send demos in to Nightshift at PO Box 312, Kidlington, OX5 1ZU or email Myspace links to nightshift@oxfordmusic.net. Please clearly mark all submissions Punt and include a contact number and some band or artist details. All acts should be based in Oxfordshire and have some gigging experience. Deadline for demos is the 10th March.

THE JOE ALLEN BAND have gone their separate ways. Violinist Angharad Jenkins has returned to her native Wales after finishing her university course, while Joe remains in Oxford and plans to continue gigging locally. Joe and Angharad met at Brookes University in 2006 after coming to Oxford from Birmingham and Swansea respectively. The pair played the Oxford Punt in 2007 before expanding to a four-piece and gracing the cover of Nightshift in July 2009. The band bowed out with a show at the Wheatsheaf in December.

OX4FM COMMUNITY RADIO has been granted a full five-year broadcast licence. The Blackbird

Leys-based station has enjoyed several short-term broadcast runs in recent years but can now consolidate its local community-based broadcasting, which will include local music. For more details, visit www.ox4fm.net.

THE JAMES STREET TAVERN is looking for promoters who want to put on acoustic or semi-acoustic gigs on a Thursday night. Anyone interested should email Lance at zappapt@yahoo.co.uk. The pub is also looking for local music to play; bands can drop their CDs off at the Tavern. A new Friday night DJ session, Tell All Your Friends, kicks off this month, playing rock, punk and indie tunes from 9pm through till 1am.

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a quiet word with

RIDE



Ride reunited: (l-r): Steve, Andy, Mark, Loz. Opposite page: the way they were; Ride in 1990.

TWENTY YEARS AGO THIS MONTH THE most important record in Oxford music history was released.

There have been far more successful singles and albums by local bands than 'The Ride EP' since, not least by Ride themselves. Records that have achieved incredible global sales and significance, but that debut four-song EP back in January 1990 opened doors for Oxford musicians that had previously seemed as unattainable as portals to another dimension. Ride's debut release was an epoch-making moment. It showed aspiring local bands that real success beyond the city was possible, and to the outside world, and the music industry in particular, it proved that Oxford was much more than just a university town. Without Ride's success, the stories of Radiohead, Supergrass, Foals and others might have been very different.

SUCH IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF 'THE RIDE EP', the passing of its twentieth anniversary seems a worthy cause of celebration, a great reason to reunite the band's four members: singers and guitarists Andy Bell and Mark Gardener; bassist Steve Queralt and drummer Loz Colbert, and reflect on the time and events leading up to the release, the Oxford music scene as it was back then, and the ambitions and dreams that drove Ride.

Reuniting the members of Ride isn't as difficult as you might expect. The quartet remain friends fourteen years after they split, meeting up a couple of times a year to discuss the band's ongoing financial matters. Mark and Loz have stayed in Oxford, while Andy and Steve have moved away, but on this evening they are all gathered in the Rusty Bicycle pub on Magdalen Road, along with Dave Newton, who continues to manage Ride's affairs.

The four faces have a changed over the years, but

the personalities remain: friendly, enthusiastic, still passionate about the music they made together, proud of what they achieved but modest about their influence.

These days Mark works mainly as a producer in his own studio, as well as writing and performing himself (most recently at Truck Festival). Andy, of course, has spent the past decade playing bass with Oasis and, according to reports, is set to continue working as a guitarist with Liam Gallagher. Steve lives and works in London for an Italian furniture company, while Loz is still drumming, playing on tour for The Jesus & Mary Chain as well as with International Jetsetters.

RIDE'S STORY BEGAN AT CHENEY

School in Headington where Mark and Andy were classmates. Their first appearance together was in a school production of *Grease*. Steve was two years up from the pair but knew them through his younger brother. When Mark and Andy went to study at Banbury College they met Loz and the quartet bonded over a mutual love for bands like The Smiths, Sonic Youth, The House Of Love, My Bloody Valentine, The Jesus & Mary Chain and Spacemen 3.

They had also begun to go to gigs at the Jericho Tavern regularly, and I wonder which local bands of the time, if any, provided an inspiration to get the band started.

ANDY: "It was a local band, Here Comes Everybody, who made me want to start a band when I was about 16, at an outdoor show they played in Bury Knowle Park in Headington. Members of the band turned into the Anyways and Talulah Gosh. By the time Ride got together there was a band called the Wild Poppies that we all liked. We used to drink in the same pubs as them, mainly the Jericho Tavern and the New Inn. Shake

Appeal were going as well; they were probably the biggest band in Oxford."

MARK: "Shake Appeal really excited me, and Talulah Gosh. I bought 'The Jericho Collection' album of local artists that came out around this time, which had The Wild Poppies and The Anyways on and just thought it was very cool that there were these local bands and that they were all part of this record. All of these bands excited me but I wouldn't say that I wanted to emulate them musically. At this time I was getting more excited by the tunes that we started to write that would become the first songs of Ride."

AFTER A COUPLE OF PRIVATE GIGS AT

their college, Ride's first public appearance came at the Jericho Tavern in February 1989 – a baptism of fire for the fledgling quartet, supporting cult local thrash-metallers Satan Knew My Father in front of a packed house.

Working in Our Price Records at the time with Steve, I went along expecting little more than the usual mate's band fun, but Ride tore the roof off the place that night. So incredible was their impact that they even had the crowd cheering their soundcheck as they filed in; their actual set was greeted with nothing less than delirium. Within days local gig-goers were raving about the new boys on the scene.

MARK: "I was pretty terrified to face a paying audience for the first time, especially as they had come to see a thrash metal band! In a way though, the fact that everybody came in while we were sound-checking and started applauding us got a lot of the nerves out. Our sound-check was like our own support band, so by the time we came on to play our set the place was packed and buzzing and my life changed in a big and great way. I think we blew everybody away, including ourselves."

That gig was promoted by Dave Newton, who ran regular shows at the Tavern, bringing the latest rising indie stars to town, while also running the then local music mag, Local Support. Young and totally focussed on the music, Ride quickly turned to the local scene figurehead to help them move things up a gear.

LOZ: "Dave was a friend of Steve's, working with him in Our Price. Dave steered us to getting the demo deal, which was basically some recording money, and this allowed us to record the four songs that ended up going on the first EP."

ANDY: "After we did a few gigs we recorded a self-financed demo and Steve played it to Dave. I guess we wanted to get some advice from the central figure in the local scene. We started getting label interest immediately the tape got out, and because of Dave's position in Oxford it felt natural to ask him to be our manager, so there was somebody these people could talk to. I don't think Dave had any contacts outside of Oxford; he was just a level-headed guy who could deal with 'music business' people because we had no interest in that. It was because of all the label interest Alan McGee ended up following us round on tour when we were supporting the Soup Dragons."

MARK: "Dave sent out a single demo tape to a

guy he knew at Warner Brothers and then Warners started phoning us up and coming to the shows and put out the word that they were going to sign us and this is how we came to the attention of Alan, who basically steamed in and signed us when he realised that the Warners deal was not a done deal and he also realised that we were fans of the main bands on his label.”

VERY QUICKLY RIDE’S LOCAL

popularity mushroomed; they progressed from the Jericho to headlining the Co-Op Hall (now the upstairs venue of the Academy), a rare thing for a local band back then.

ANDY: “It felt like it was getting bigger all the time. The potential felt huge and kids would come up to you on the street and all that. It was great and it felt like it was going to go all the way. My intention for us was always to be a big successful band whose singles topped the charts, but without compromising our music. We were definitely ambitious.”

The big break, though, came with that tour support to The Soup Dragons, at the time pretty big favourites on the UK indie scene. Apart from exposing Ride to a national audience and national music press attention, it was here they met and formed a relationship with Alan McGee, head of Creation Records – home to many of Ride’s heroes and easily the coolest label around.

MARK: “I think Sean from the Soup Dragons asked us to support them and the link came through Dave and the Warners connection at that time. I remember feeling like we were blowing the Soup Dragons off the stage every night and this was also the time that Alan started coming to see us one night after another and talking to us after every concert. It was an amazing time.”

LOZ: “It was art college kids on tour, but with the usual touring antics, I suppose. Steve was so grown up he had something called a ‘girlfriend’. Andy and I would take photos, play tapes and often sketched in our sketchbooks; Mark seemed to be in a cosy state of preparation for impending stardom... it was all pleasantly odd.”

ANDY: “They let us use their gear, which was nice of them. So we were playing through Marshall Stacks instead of tiny little combo amps. We got our first national music press on that tour, in *NME*, *Melody Maker*, and *Sounds*. I remember that we played very loud!”

Having Alan McGee as a fan must have been an incredible feeling.

ANDY: “In theory, we were aiming for 4AD because we felt that Creation was too obvious. But then, once there was an actual offer on the table from Creation we decided to take it. McGee seemed nice enough and was obviously mad on the band. But there was no relationship until later on. We’d send Dave up with our recordings and sleeves and everything and he’d come back having got us what we wanted. Later on, McGee became one of my closest friends but that was after Ride finished.”

MARK: “Alan quickly became like family to me, and I still feel the same way about him now. He supported us in a big way and let us make the records that we wanted to make and from the sidelines also personally educated and turned me and all of us on to lots of other great music that had a big influence on us.”

ONE OFTEN UNRECOGNISED LANDMARK

of ‘The Ride EP’ is that it was the first record released on Creation Records to enter the charts, peaking at a modest but significant Number 71. The cult label was reaching a tipping point that would eventually lead to far greater success. Later

in their career, sales from Ride’s albums would keep Creation in business as it struggled with debts racked up by other artists.

The recording for the EP took place at Union Street Studios, off Cowley Road and featured four songs: ‘Chelsea Girl’ was a blast of swirling, crystalline power pop, ‘All I Can See’, a breezy, circumspect meshing of My Bloody Valentine dreaminess and Byrds-inspired melody, ‘Close My Eyes’, a brooding slow-burning gothic hymn. But it was ‘Drive Blind’ that burned brightest: a chiming storm of musical sleet and thunder, awash with bleak romantic nihilism.

ANDY: “It was a huge struggle to get the engineer to do what we wanted. No-one in Oxford was trying to record guitar sounds the way we were and it was like speaking a different language. We were kind of happy with it in the end but I think Cally Caloman at Warners, who paid for the session, might have helped us to get the mix right. Generally speaking, all record companies were the enemy but Cally and Alan McGee were different; they understood us better so we let them into our bubble.

MARK: “I remember Calvin, the engineer, trying to mix the tracks and he was saying, ‘I can’t hear anything it’s all too much guitar and white noise,’ and we were all saying, ‘Great, leave it like that.’”

How did the band feel when they listened back to their recorded songs for the first time?

LOZ: “When that sound comes back at you through the speakers, properly recorded, it can sound like ‘someone else’; and when that ‘someone else’ is the best thing you’ve heard in your life, that’s fairly close to what it felt like.”

Fans, critics and newcomers were smitten. There was no turning back now: Ride’s great journey had begun. In Jon Spira’s forthcoming film of the Oxford music scene, Talulah Gosh singer Amelia Fletcher, at the time temping at Our Price, recalls her astonishment when Steve told her he was leaving to concentrate on the band. That sort of thing simply didn’t happen to Oxford musicians.

RIDE’S SUCCESS LASTED FOR SIX YEARS,

four studio albums, numerous chart hits and several world tours before they fell apart during the recording of ‘Tarantula’, a difficult time both for the band and Creation itself, with McGee largely absent and suffering from exhaustion. But any bitterness surrounding the split was quickly forgotten.

Despite paving the way for other Oxford bands like Radiohead and Supergrass, Ride are keen to underplay their part in the story. Those other bands were more important in how Oxford became

perceived than themselves, they believe.

ANDY: “Radiohead are the band who started all that with ‘Creep’. That was when the idea of an ‘Oxford scene’ started, and for a couple of years you’d get bands coming to Oxford to get signed. I don’t think Ride caused any kind of stir locally at the time – all we got from the local press and radio at the time was ignored, or criticised because our audience trashed the Town Hall – that kind of thing. When we were coming up we couldn’t wait to get out of Oxford; it just felt like the sleepest place in the world.”

LOZ: “Perhaps there was a sense that ‘yes, you can really do it’, but Radiohead and Supergrass would have to shoulder a lot of that in the later years, also.”

MARK: “When we first released our EP, by chance we were the first band to get any real success globally as a band coming from Oxford. After this lots changed. The door was open and A&R guys started coming to the city and other friends and people that you bumped into in the local pubs and gigs at that time were getting bands together, such as Supergrass and Radiohead and then BANG! So in 20 years Oxford is now seen globally as a city that has and is still continually producing interesting and truly great bands. I think after it all happened with us bands could see that coming from Oxford would not work against them and if the music was good enough then the world could be your oyster!”

THE BAND DO THEMSELVES A DISSERVICE

with such modesty. Before Ride, Oxford bands’ ambitions were modest and opportunities limited. The steady stream of local successes since bears testament to their influence and inspiration, and their sound too has stayed influential on bands around the globe. As such, and with every other band seemingly reforming to cash in on musical nostalgia, we have to ask the \$64,000 Dollar Question: will Ride ever reform? The response is perhaps predictably equivocal.

MARK: “It’s funny how many people apologise for asking this question! There are no plans to reform. Personally I’m very into my mixing, writing and production work now and being back and feeling a bit more settled in Oxford. I’m still a dreamer and much more excited by what could happen with records I am involved in now and what I don’t know, rather than what I do know and have well and truly done.”

ANDY: “I’d like to play with them again sometime but I can’t put a date on it.”

LOZ: “I would love us to... but all the planets have to be in alignment!”



RELEASED

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NICK COPE

‘What Colour Is Your T-shirt?’

(Own Label)

With more and more chart hits aimed at the younger audience and with Cbeebies and CITV regularly using everything from Motorhead to The Velvet Underground and Supergrass as soundtracks, children’s music is a far more complex thing than it once was. But for every Bratz wannabe or Ben 10 acolyte, there are still dozens of ankle biters hooked on ‘The Wheels On The Bus’.

As frontman of The Candyskins, Nick Cope is a bona fide local pop legend and a songwriter with few equals, so as he went on to have kids of his own and subsequently run music sessions for pre-school children, he was better placed than most to notice the paucity of new songs being written for that age group. And so here is his contribution to that rarefied genre: one where the audience remains heroically impervious to ideas of what constitutes cool. Here the tunes are all that matter.

There are ten songs here, dealing with such traditional pre-school subject matter as brushing your teeth, jumping in puddles, counting monkeys and doing some exercise. There’s also a song about gravity: a concept many adults would struggle to understand, but here wrapped in toddler-friendly imagery. The songs are instantly recognisable as Nick’s: sweet-natured, sleepy-eyed and full of warmth, with the occasional echo of an old Candyskins track.

But really it’s not for the likes of us to judge the



album’s success. Luckily Nightshift has a semi-tame four-year-old to hand, one who likes to sing along to Buggles’ ‘Video Killed The Radio Star’ and Beaker’s ‘Backgarden’, but still young enough to dance along with the Teletubbies. And she loves it. The problem with little’uns loving something though, is they want to hear it again and again so we rarely get past album opener ‘As I Lie Here In My Bed’. But what the heck, it’s a fantastic song.

Great stuff then, and we’re so inspired we’re thinking of commissioning an album of specially-written kids songs from a whole swathe of local bands. Starting with Smilax explaining how babies are made; Richard Walters crooning about how kissing girls only leads to heartache and Headcount making it quite clear how badly you’re going to be punished if you don’t tidy your room.

Dale Kattack

THE BLACK HATS

‘Magnets’

(In The Pocket)

Consistently one of the most invigorating live bands in town over the last year, The Black Hats’ debut album, ‘What’s Not To Understand’, gathered their tunes well enough but perhaps left some of their live energy behind. This new four-song EP more than adequately makes up for it. The songs here are sharper and more succinct than those on the album and course with yobbish swagger and singalong gumption.

‘Magnets’ itself is a staccato pop-punk bundle, jerky and robotic with nods to The Automatic and even Foals for brief moments, while, ‘The Getaway’ is a skinny-armed, punked-up Who. ‘Just Fall’ is (by The Black Hats’ usually frenetic, knock-and-run standards) spacious and languid, a chance to out their inner U2, a battling pocket pop anthem. But they leave the best to last with ‘We Write Things Down’, that leaps with abandon into full-on post-hardcore thrash-pop territory.

That The Black Hats have followed up their album so quickly shows they’re not standing about

waiting for anyone to come to them. That they’ve produced an EP of such consistency and melodic strength, while retaining all that on-stage vigour shows that they may well be on course to be one of the most exciting bands around in 2010.

Dale Kattack

THE HALF RABBITS

‘Of This City’

(Punk Elvis)

Sombre of mood and possessed of a vocalist, Michael Weatherburn, with a slightly theatrical delivery, it’s difficult not to review The Half Rabbits without mentioning the word gothic. Back in action two years after ‘The Final Days Of Rome’, they’re unbowed by the intervening vagaries of musical fashion, here pumping out a spidery post-punk pop that’s big on lyrical portent and stridently fuzzed-up guitars. So far so Joy Division, but Michael’s debonair vocal style, particularly on ‘Birthday Song’, adds a bit of Divine Comedy-style camp to proceedings.

Dale Kattack

PHANTOM THEORY

‘Shotguns & Sharks’

(Mother Python)

Proving yet again that less is more, Phantom Theory’s debut single defies previous perceptions of the band as classic rock riffs played with hardcore aggression, instead presenting a spindly, militant post-punk tattoo that’s closer to Liars or Gang Of Four, using the extra space that being a two-piece gives them to explore all angles while still hammering home their message in an uptight and neatly compact two and a bit minutes. A tripped-out remix from Rise East Strike West shows there’s another, more interesting string to that band’s bow, but the main lesson here is that Phantom Theory are a young band developing apace and dead set on a destination unknown.

Dale Kattack

MILTON J REWOLF

‘The Magic Sound Of’

(Own label)

In an heroic act of either musical perfectionism or sheer laziness, Banbury’s Milton J Rewolf (aka Miles Flower) has taken an entire decade to complete this debut album, many, many years after landing himself a Demo Of The Month in Nightshift. Listening through its rough and ready twelve tracks the former explanation seems unlikely, but then we’re no fans of over-polished pop and that early favourite of ours, ‘Insecurity Guard’, still sounds as sweet and fresh as ever: two-chord guitar thrash, shouty vocal lead, heavily-phased guitars, chirpy female backing vocals and all. It’s like The Wedding Present injected with a little feminine floweriness and cracked out in a no-frills three minutes.

Nothing else on the album matches that song but ‘Love’s Young Dream’ is painted in similarly bold colours, big, meaty hooks favoured over complexity or subtlety at each turn and the fact that Mike is no great singer is quickly forgotten as he belts every line out with unabashed vigour.

Given the time taken to make the album it’s no surprise the influences seem to shift, from The Kinks and Small Faces in the power pop moments and occasional whimsy, to Morrissey, I, Ludicrous and even Cornershop. ‘Football Match’ echoes I, Ludicrous’ dour ‘Three Football Grounds’, while ‘Flying’ nabs chunks of ‘Brimful Of Asha’ as it bounces along. Miles even gets his daughter (we presume) Daisy to sing the album’s closing track, the daft, cuddly ‘Carrot Kids’, admirably oblivious to coherence or cool.

It’s a bit of a mess of an album truth be told and tends to wander off at various points but it’s that cheerily rambunctious simplicity and amateur feel that ultimately seals its appeal.

Ian Chesterton

DR SHOTOVER Blueberry Ragga Muffin

Ah, there you are. Pull up a pew and buy me a drink. What's your name again? You're new at the East Indies Club, aren't you? We were just talking about our latest chef. Bit of a checkered history with all



Reggae Chefs in the Herb Garden – Seen?

that. As you would expect with the indie cads, Sports Goths and emo oiks who make up most of the EIC membership, we tend to get catering staff from the darker, some would say *dingier* recesses of the entertainment world. The chef before last – Jamie Oliver-Reed (a bit of a hellraiser in the kitchen) – sadly spontaneously combusted on Christmas Eve a couple of years ago. That'll teach the bounder to mix freebase cocaine with lighted brandy. The next one? Oh God – the Choux Gazer. I think he'd previously played spoons in some band or other, Kitchens of Distinction or some such... All those *swirls of this and over-egged that* – the blighter had to go. Anyway, a new chap has just started... used to work at the Caribbean Club back in the day. No-one knows his name – he is referred to simply as MC Dubstep or The Rasta with The Pasta. Sample menu: 'Erb 'n Feta Wraps with So Solid Croutons

Cod Reggae with Chips

Misty In Root Vegetables

Fatty Boom Boom Sweet Dumplings

We are looking forward to a New Year of exotic herbs, Red Stripe and short-term memory loss. (What was your name again, blood?)

Next month: Sensi-Millionaire's Shortbread.

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Please include full contact details and band info. The Punt is open to unsigned bands from Oxfordshire only. All musical styles catered for. Most hairstyles considered.



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GIG GUIDE

FRIDAY 1st

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

SATURDAY 2nd

BASSMENTALITY: The Cellar – Reggae, roots, beats, breaks and hip hop club night.

SUNDAY 3rd

MOON LEOPARD + OVERRATED + NATTY MARK + HEADINGTON HILLBILLIES: Donnington Community Centre – Free live music night.

Friday 15th

DELPHIC:

O2 Academy

You! Me! Dancing! are building themselves quite a reputation for bringing the best rising indie and electro acts to town lately, and tonight's show confirms their musical mettle. Having reinvented themselves from their former incarnation as Snowball Fight In The City Centre, Manchester's Delphic have found themselves releasing a single, 'This Momentary', on the ultra-cool Kitsuné label as well as playing shows with Kasabian, Doves and Super Furry Animals and most of the summer's major festival. Now, after a series of well-received singles, they're off on a headline tour to support debut album 'Acolyte', on Polydor, and were recently shortlisted for the prestigious BBC Sound of 2010 Award. Since their early, rockier days, they've taken to the electro-pop side of things, acid house squiggles and chattering electronic beats mingling with the chiming guitars and plaintive, downbeat vocals. New Order's 'Brotherhood' and 'Lowlife' albums seem to be their starting points but they tip their cap to the likes of 808 State and Underworld as well as Editors and (whisper it) Coldplay and with a dancefloor-friendly approach to electronic indie, they're likely to be many people's tip for success in 2010.

JANUARY

MONDAY 4th

RESERVOIR CATS: The Bullingdon – Good-time, hard-rocking blues from the local favourites, playing their traditional New Year show at the Famous Monday Blues.

TUESDAY 5th

JAZZ CLUB: The Bullingdon – Free weekly live jazz club, tonight featuring keyboard-led funky jazz outfit The Howard Peacock Quintet.

WEDNESDAY 6th

STYLAH + LOGIC + BROTHERMAN: The Cellar – Launch gig for the 'Personal Statement' EP, plus DJs No Requests and Soothsayer and human beatboxer Shoebox.
ACOUSTIC LOUNGE: Fat Lil's, Witney – Weekly all-comers open mic session.

THURSDAY 7th

HUCK: The Cellar – Big Hair club night with live music from Will Oldham and Johnny Cash-inspired country-folk types Huck.
APPLE PIRATE NIGHT: Fat Lil's, Witney – Rock, punk and post-hardcore bands tbc.
CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre – Oxford's longest-running open mic club continues into another new year with their characteristic mix of singers, musicians, storytellers, poets and performance artists
ELECTRIC BLUES JAM: The Jack Russell, Marston
OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon

FRIDAY 8th

MINOR COLES + NAPOLEON IN RAGS + CAT MATADOR: The Wheatsheaf – Gentle-natured, harmony-heavy indie pop from promising local newcomers Minor Coles, plus swirly, sunshiney guitar pop in the vein of Shack from Napoleon in Rags. Local dark-minded new wave rockers Cat Matador open the show.
BOSSAPHONIC: The Cellar – Latin dance, Balkan beats, world breaks and nu-jazz club night with residents Dan Ofer and Gil Karpas, plus a live set from nu-gypsy folk and beats outfit Chancery Blame and the Gadjo Club.
TELL ALL YOUR FRIENDS: James Street Tavern – New DJ night with Thomas Instone, Room 101's Leigh Slater and Mutiny's Cara Louise playing punk, rock and indie tunes every

Friday from 9-1am.

BACKROOM BOOGIE: The Bullingdon
GET DOWN: The Brickworks – Weekly dose of funk, Latin and afrobeat tunes.

SATURDAY 9th

SEXTODECIMO + DESERT STORM + SOMNUS + K-LACURA: The Wheatsheaf – A monolithic bill of metal noise tonight with black hole-heavy stoner-core monsters Sextodecimo cranking it out loud and sludgy in the vein of Eyehategod, Iron Monkey and Swans, while brightest newcomers on the local heavy scene Desert Storm add a fresh psychedelic and stoner twist to grizzled and growly classic heavy rock. Support comes from Metalcore outfit Somnus and south Oxfordshire hardcore crew K-Lacura.
TRANSFORMATION / TRASHY / ROOM 101: O2 Academy – Three clubs in one every Saturday with indie and electro at Transformation; 80s, glam and trash-pop at Trashy plus metal, hardcore and alt.rock at Room 101.
MIX & BLEND: The Cellar – Reggae, dub, soul, funk, hip hop and electronica with DJs The Daywalker, Sumba Youth, Amen and Dr Erbz.
JOHN OTWAY: The Port Mahon – The Clown Prince of rock continues bringing the madcap pop mayhem, headbutts, acrobatics and long-lost hits singles and all.
THE HI-LO HI-FI: Hi-Lo Jamaican Eating House – Count Skylarkin spins a selection of ska and reggae classics.

SUNDAY 10th

THE PETE FRYER BAND: The Swan, Thame – Inimitably eccentric blues and rock covers from Mr Fryer and friends.

MONDAY 11th

THE MIGHTY REDOX: The Bullingdon – Swampy blues rocking and psychedelic funk from the local favourites at the Famous Monday Blues.

TUESDAY 12th

JAZZ CLUB: The Bullingdon – With special guest Alvin Roy.
INTRUSION: The Cellar – Monthly goth, industrial and darkwave club night.

WEDNESDAY 13th

ACOUSTIC LOUNGE: Fat Lil's, Witney



THURSDAY 14th

NATIONAL SNACK: The Cellar – Stripped-down spazzcore punk noise and lo-fi pop from National Snack, coming in somewhere between McLusky and Moldy Peaches.

STEVE CARROLL: The Boat Inn, Thrupp – Covers and originals from the local folk-pop multi-instrumentalist and singer.

CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre

ELECTRIC BLUES JAM: The Jack Russell, Marston

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon

FRIDAY 15th

VIVIAN GIRLS + SEALINGS: The Jericho Tavern – Sugar-coated surf-pop from Brooklyn's girl rockers – *see main preview*

DELPHIC + MIRRORS: O2 Academy – Manchester's rising electro-indie starlets – *see main preview*

ABSOLUTE BOWIE: Fat Lil's, Witney – Tribute to the Thin White Duke.

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

TELL ALL YOUR FRIENDS: James Street Tavern

BACKROOM BOOGIE: The Bullingdon
GET DOWN: The Brickworks

SATURDAY 16th

MEPHISTO GRANDE + THE LONG INSIDERS + HUCK & THE HANDSOME FEW + UNDERSMILE: The Wheatsheaf – Return to local live action for the mighty Mephisto Grande, Hell's own blues band, coming on like a demonic collision of Captain Beefheart, Tom Waits and The Birthday Party. Long Insiders provide cinematic country-surf pop support, alongside downbeat alt.country types Huck.

CHEW LIPS: The Jericho Tavern – London-based electro-pop types sounding like a cross between Howard Jones and Frankmusic, last scene at the Academy supporting Howling Bells.

TRANSFORMATION / TRASHY / ROOM 101: O2 Academy

THE PETE FRYER BAND: The Royal Standard, Headington

SUNDAY 17th

DOORS ALIVE + EMPTY VESSELS: O2 Academy – Tribute to The Doors.

ROGER BEAUJOLAIS: The North Wall, Summertown – Live jazz from the renowned vibes player.

JACK HARRIS + AIDEN CANADAY + KARL HARRISON: Malmaison – Acoustic and semi-acoustic session in the castle complex, including Welsh folk-pop and blues singer Jack Harris and sweet-natured local bard Aiden Canaday.

MONDAY 18th

EASY TIGER: The Bullingdon – Roadhouse blues, southern fried rock and psychedelic boogie from the local favourites at tonight's Famous Monday Blues.

TUESDAY 19th

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

WEDNESDAY 20th

REEL BIG FISH + SONIC BOOM SIX: O2 Academy – Stomping ska-punk from California's ever-touring party rockers Reel Big Fish, with support from Manchester's hard-gigging punk, hip hop and ska crew Sonic Boom Six.

FREE RANGE: The Cellar – Drum&bass and dubstep club night.

ACOUSTIC LOUNGE: Fat Lil's, Witney

THURSDAY 21st

ECLECTRICITY: The Cellar – Electro and techno club night.

CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre

ELECTRIC BLUES JAM: The Jack Russell, Marston

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon

FRIDAY 22nd

LAURA VIERS + CATALDO + OLD BELIEVERS: O2 Academy – The Oregon-based songstress plugs her seventh album – *see main preview*

CARETAKER + PHANTOM THEORY + ROLL CALL FOR SECOND NIGHT + IVY'S ITCH: The Cellar – Ace atmospheric stoner grooves and squalling grunge-core riffage from Winchester's mighty Caretaker, back in town after their recent support to Winchell Riots. Hardcore psychedelic riffs and beats from Phantom Theory in support, alongside mathcore screamers Ivy's Itch.

BACKROOM BOOGIE: The Bullingdon
TELL ALL YOUR FRIENDS: James Street Tavern



Friday 15th

VIVIAN GIRLS /

SEALINGS:

The Jericho Tavern

Indiepopland was once such an innocent place: an idyllic village where bands had no ambition beyond cranking out sweetly serrated two-chord thrash-jangle in thrall to Phil Spector and The Jesus & Mary Chain and making fanzines that offered recipes for chocolate picnic cake. It's a semi-mythical world that Brooklyn's Vivian Girls have been searching for since their birth in 2007. Cassie Ramone, Kickball Katie and Ali Koehler deal in sugary three-part harmonies, rudimentarily punked-up surf pop and fantastically tinny production values. Which might get you to thinking Vivian Girls smell of that musty old perfume, Pastiche, but really they're just lovely. Big mates with neighbours Crystal Stilts, the trio remind us of great forgotten girl-dominated bands like The Shop Assistants, Slumber Party, Pain Teens and The Flatmates, bands who could make a virtue of their less-than-accomplished musicianship because they had such great pop songs at their disposal. Sealings are similarly minded but sound more like a fantastically dour mash-up of an early Mary Chain rehearsal and Godflesh's industrial grind: fuzzy riffage and stubbornly indecipherable vocals; they're a duo with no focus on anything beyond ploughing their own singular furrow.

GET DOWN: The Brickworks

SATURDAY 23rd

WHOLE LOTTA LED: O2 Academy – Tribute to Led Zeppelin.

HEADINGTON HILLBILLIES: The Chequers, Headington Quarry – Quirky Americana and country rocking.

TRANSFORMATION / TRASHY / ROOM 101: O2 Academy

THE PETE FRYER BAND: The Bricklayers Arms, Marston

ECLECTEC: The Cricketers Arms – House, techno and minimalism from DJ Art Lagun and guests.

SUNDAY 24th

SUNDAY ROAST: The Cellar – Live bands plus soul and rock'n'roll sounds from resident DJs.

LIVE LOUNGE ACOUSTIC SESSION: The Eight Bells, Eaton – Acoustic sets from Off The Radar, Sam McNeil and Seraphim.



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Friday 22nd

LAURA VIERS:

O2 Academy

A Colorado-born, Oregon-based folk and country music fan with a degree in Mandarin Chinese and geology who was only inspired to pick up a guitar by the advent of riot grrl, Laura Viers is not your typical acoustic singer-songwriter. Since the late-90s she's released a series of consistently excellent albums that have seen her teeter tantalisingly on the edge of commercial breakthrough but forever remaining a cult concern and critics' favourite. Following on from 2005's 'Year Of Meteors' and 2008's 'Saltmakers', Viers releases her seventh album, 'July Flame', this month, continuing to expand her horizons beyond her beloved traditional folk sounds. She taps into jazz, blues and electro at various points, wrapping them all around her seductive voice that can be sharp and invigorating or breathy and dreamy. Often sounding like it's about to go out of tune and, live at least, surrounded by a band that retains a studiously thrown-together vibe, Viers is as close to the likes of Bjork, Granddady or Lambchop as she is to Sheryl Crow or Suzanne Vega, while lyrically she's poetic and obsessed with nature. Whichever way she turns, ever new album breathes a little new life into the modern folk genre.

VENUE PHONE NUMBERS

O2Academy: 0844 477 2000 (ticketweb)
The Bullingdon: 01865 244516
The Wheatsheaf: 01865 790380
The Cellar: 01865 244761
The New Theatre: 0844 847 1585
The Jericho Tavern: 01865 311775
Fat Lil's: 01993 703385
The Purple Turtle: 01865 247086
East Oxford Community Centre:
01865 792168
Isis Tavern: 01865 243854
The Port Mahon 01865 790970
Malmaison: 01865 268400

MONDAY 25th

REAL ESTATE: The Jericho Tavern – Lovely, autumnal psych-folk from New Jersey's Real Estate, in the vein of My Morning Jacket, Galaxie 500 and Creedence Clearwater Revival.

CADILLACS BLUES BAND: The Bullingdon – Rocking blues and rockabilly from the longstanding UK band at tonight's Famous Monday Blues club.

TUESDAY 26th

JAZZ CLUB: The Bullingdon – With guests The Hugh Turner Band.

DISCORD: The Cellar – Rock, metal, punk and industrial club night.

WEDNESDAY 27th

PHAT SESSIONS: The Cellar – Fortnightly live jam session and club night with in-house band Four Phat Fingers, plus DJ Geenee playing a mix of funk, reggae, hip hop, dubstep and drum&bass.

ACOUSTIC LOUNGE: Fat Lil's, Witney

THURSDAY 28th

TWENTY TWENTY: O2 Academy – Drippy punk-pop from the Essex hopefuls.

THE PROGRAMME INITIATIVE: The Cellar – Big Hair bands night.

LES CLOCHARDS + GREG WEBSTER: Baby Simple – French café pop meets alt.country in Les Clochards' sweetly exotic world. Support from former-Razorcuts chap Greg Webster.

CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre

ELECTRIC BLUES JAM: The Jack Russell, Marston

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon

FRIDAY 29th

MIKE SNOW: O2 Academy – Not an annoyingly-named person, but an annoyingly-named band, but a band formed by Swedish production team Pontus Winnberg and Christian Kalsson, who wrote Britney's sublime 'Toxic', so you'd expect something a

bit special from their own outfit, fronted by American singer Andrew Wyatt. Mixing up 90s chillout, 80s soft-rock and a slightly dreamy electro-funk, the end result is closer to Peter, Bjorn and John than you might have imagined.

WE AERONAUTS + ALPHABET

BACKWARDS + MESSAGE TO BEARS: The Wheatsheaf – Expansive, ambitious folk-pop from local rising stars We Aeronauts, plus spangly singalong electro-pop from Alphabet Backwards and ambient folktronica from Jerome Alexanders' Message To Bears project.

HQ: The Cellar – Hip hop and drum&bass with Zero T, Tasha and Beka.

BACKROOM BOOGIE: The Bullingdon TELL ALL YOUR FRIENDS: James Street Tavern

GET DOWN: The Brickworks

SATURDAY 30th

GAPPY TOOTH INDUSTRIES with VIENNA DITTO + 1877 + SMALL

MACHINE: The Wheatsheaf – Great mixed bill at this month's GTI night, with Vienna Ditto sounding like Edith Piaf fronting a rockabilly Portishead, while Aylesbury's dark-hearted post-punk industrial pop types 1877 support along with melodic grunge rockers Small Machine.

SHEPHERDS PIE: Fat Lil's, Witney – Heavy rock covers.

TRANSFORMATION / TRASHY / ROOM 101: O2 Academy

DUBSTEP: The Bullingdon

DENNY ILETT Jr & Co.: The Port Mahon – Jimi Hendrix tribute from the local guitarist and chums.

SUNDAY 31st

IGLU & HARTLY: O2 Academy – Return of Hollywood's shiny happy hip hop-funk-pop crew.

THE SCOTTY GORDON BAND + MATT KILFORD + HEARTS IN PENCIL:

Malmaison – Acoustic blues and roots rocking from Scotty Gordon at tonight's session, with emotive folk-pop from Matt Kilford and a semi-acoustic set from Witney's indie rockers Hearts In Pencil.

BLUES JAM: Fat Lil's, Witney – Open blues session, all welcome.

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THE EPSTEIN / THE WINCHELL RIOTS / RICHARD WALTERS

The Holywell Music Room

It seems the recipe for a perfect gig has been found. Take two artists from the Nightshifts Top 20 of 2009 (tonight's selection of Richard Walters and The Winchell Riots seems to work exceedingly well), place them in Oxford's most historic venue and toss in a band who won Glastonbury's Emerging Talent competition, The Epstein. Slowly stir in an elective audience (for best results, ensure there are equal measures of those who dare tread the floors of the Wheatshaf and those who wouldn't) and sprinkle generously with a good measure of festive cheer.

It's rare when the biggest fault you can find with a gig is the audience. Those who arrive late miss feasting upon Richard Walter's stirring vocals and inquisitive lyrics, which, though filled with lovelorn themes, possess enough soul to leave us rejoicing. 'The Animal' sees him layer beautiful vocals over breathtaking rhythms, juxtaposing these against the brutal subject of domestic violence, while his inspired cover of Daniel Johnston's 'True Love Will Find You In The End' encapsulates incredible emotion into a three-minute snapshot with perfect focus, confirming his standing as one of the finest artists Oxford has ever produced.

Less is more, as they say and a stripped-back acoustic set from The Winchell Riots confirms it. 'Red Square' feels like a ball of stripped-back raw emotion, while 'Glasgow Spaceflight' is



Epstein photo by Johnny Moto

simply spine-chilling, creating a sense of exhilaration. Their only fault lies in the decision to incorporate a snare drum into the set, which at times overshadows Phil's vocals but regardless of this, it seems that a large number of the audience are so appreciative of the band they leave early, assuming it can't be topped.

In fact, there's a moment of worry as the bands change set, that a wrong decision has been made on running order, but The Epstein soon set our

doubting straight, claiming their rightful place at the top of the bill. They range from haunting in 'Leave Your Light On', to the foot stomping 'Dance The Night Away', rounding off with a breathtaking acoustic number, about coach rides to London, which is so outstanding we arrive home to find smiley faces in place of its title in our notebook. In short, with such a cracker of a gig, Christmas feels like it's come early

Lisa Ward

MARIACHI EL BRONX / JAKKO & JAY

O2 Academy

This is no ordinary punk gig – before we get the pleasure of The Bronx going all Mexican on us, there's the incredibly exuberant Jakko and Jay to contend with. With a genre definition all their own – Finnish acoustic hardcore – they're a distinctly unusual prospect. We're used to Frank Turner's self styled "Campfire punk rock" but this is a different beast altogether. Their drum "kit" consists of a snare drum, a ride cymbal (mostly missing – presumed dead) and the floor miked up to provide a primal bass drum. It is of course pounded relentlessly, while the acoustic guitar is shed of its strings continuously as the duo attempt to score weed and make some clumsy political points. It should be rubbish, but the pair's undying enthusiasm and rampant showmanship make them thoroughly endearing – we wish them well on their quest for weed.

Mariachi El Bronx is a project that finds Los Angeles hardcore types The Bronx donning finely crafted suits and a series of sly grins and trying their arm at authentic Mexican music. With such projects there

is always a danger of self-indulgence and tin-pot novelty, but with the band taking their music incredibly seriously, concerns such as these all but evaporate when they launch into the brilliantly executed 'Cellmates'.

Such a change in styles means that we're discovering a few new things about The Bronx. Matt Caughthran possesses a great voice, something which isn't always particularly apparent with The Bronx's normal all out assaults and bassist Brad Magers is a pretty fine trumpet player. Caughthran looks to be having the time of his life, his smile beaming from his face at the end of every song as his band evoke the spirit of dusty old Western taverns, tequila and Ennio Morricone. Their covers of Prince's 'I Would Die 4 U' and Warren Zevon's 'Carmelita' (apparently Caughthran discovered the song via GG Allin of all people) provide interesting curios along the way. Mariachi El Bronx may have been an indulgence on the part of the band, but thankfully it's one that deserves to be shared.

Sam Shepherd

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STAFF BENDA BILILI

O2 Academy

Tonight's is a gig with a happy, warm vibe right from the start. Asked to shout "Staff Benda Bilili!" to welcome the band to the stage, a packed Academy responds eagerly and loudly. From the streets of Kinshasa in the Congo, on come five paraplegic middle-aged men and a couple of street teenagers, plus a bass player. Within moments they've got their funky mix of soukous, the African variant of Cuban rumba, township dance, r'n'b, and reggae rhythms going and there's movement all over the stage. The band's frontmen, in wheelchairs, are doing hand dancing, each wearing an ecstatic grin, and a fellow vocalist on giant crutches is performing his own routines. The crowd's British reserve instantly cracks and dancing breaking out even at the back of the venue.

The band's name means in Congolese Lingala, "Look beyond appearances", and what Staff Benda Bilili show is what a really fine live band they are regardless of their (desperately poor) background. They've got lots of 'E's': energy, ebullience, enthusiasm, and enjoyment. Their music is driven along by the bass and a drum kit not much more than a packing case and tin can, blitzed by a long-limbed youth who, when he spreads his arms, looks like he's readying himself on the runway for take-off.

With six singers, the band ring enough subtle vocal changes to ensure the seductive lilting croon of Afro-Cuban rumba never becomes over familiar. Just when it feels it might, I love that the vocalist on crutches unleashes out of nowhere the jolt of a cocktail of high energy crazed rap and Captain Beefheart-like rant. Then there's the truly weird sound, like a high pitched theremin on amphetamines, of an instrument invented from the rubbish of a discarded milk can, a basket strut and a single wire. One long, soaring, swooping solo possesses guitar god status. But what tonight's OCM-curated gig is all about is the great collective performance of the band. They leave the stage to fully deserved acclaim.

Colin May

RINGO DEATHSTARR / SEALINGS

The Jericho Tavern

Lack of ambition can be a virtue, especially when, in the case of local newcomers Sealings, it takes the form of ploughing such a singular musical furrow, aiming only to please the band themselves, that it sets itself free from the constraints that a craving for commercial acceptance bring. There are just two of them, plus a tinny drum machine that sounds like it's well past its prime of life. The duo crank out a dour, grey gothic industrial form of noise that sounds like it's been nicked from the very depths of John Peel's record collection and partially dusted off. The vocals are so sullen and indecipherable they barely counts as human speech and the entire set feels like it's wading through thick, dark, viscous treacle to try and gatecrash the first ever Jesus & Mary Chain rehearsal. A terrible old racket, you say? Hell no; this is great stuff.

Texas quartet Ringo Deathstarr (whose name alone is worth the admission fee) are no strangers to noise either, though theirs is more likely to shift a few CDs. They're a rush and a blur of scree and feedback and huge, honey-dripping melodies. Or, cutting to the chase, they sound pretty much exactly like My Bloody Valentine at that point where they moved from 'Strawberry Wine' to 'You Made Me Realise'. Their set is punctuated by long, awkward silences where they're forced to retune their guitars after bashing the bejesus out of them in each song, which reminds us of Ride's early, glorious gigs, but mostly they're a cauldron of hot fuzz and faraway, dreamy vocals, an unadulterated celebration of late-80s indie revolution, when any gig worth its salt would crash and burn in a climactic storm of white noise. As if to accommodate our desires, Elliott Frazer jumps into the crowd before hurling his guitar back on stage and allows it to bleed itself dry, and we leave the Tavern feeling suitably scoured and cleansed.

Victoria Waterfield

THE FAMILY MACHINE

Malmaison

Local music scene stalwarts The Family Machine are wolves in sheep's clothing. On the surface their music is perfectly constructed, harmony-heavy indie pop played, more often than not, in a minor key. Underneath, however, there's something subversive discreetly bubbling.

This is no more apparent than during their opening number, 'Flowers By the Roadside'. Instrumentally it's pretty, if a little mournful. Lyrically it's a deeply sad and unusual tale of a road accident. Likewise, later on, the apparently sad and low-key 'Did You Leave' explodes suddenly into an epic guitar-driven ballad (not a million miles from U2) before tapering off again into quieter, navel-gazing territory. They're a band full of surprises. So it's interesting to see them playing the semi-acoustic night in the cooler-than-thou visitor's room bar of Malmaison hotel. Not only is it a different atmosphere to the usual music scene (some of the clientele clearly have no idea what is going on), but the band are forced to reinvent some of their songs. They seem a little nervous about it, confessing on at least two occasions that they play mostly with a backing tape (something that makes songs such as 'Got it Made', complete with recorded spoken samples, distinctive).

Although some of their tracks (notably the gorgeous ballad 'Remind Me of You') clearly have no problems with any stripping down due to their inherent melodiousness (although I have to confess I prefer the strings and echoes version that appears on their album), it allows other songs a chance to breathe a little, and take on a life of their own. And it's not always a complete success; something probably not helped by the apathy of the audience they are playing to. However, it once again proves these guys are not resting on their (well-deserved) laurels.

James Benefield

THE HORRORS

O2 Academy

Black-clad, skinny and spiky-haired, The Horrors look like a Jamie Hewlett cartoon of an imagined futuristic goth band, and when they first appeared on the national radar back in 2006 most people probably concluded that's exactly what they were. Fast forward to 2009 and the Southend quintet have been shortlisted for the Mercury Prize, topped NME's end of year album list and featured in virtually every magazine and news paper best-of run down.

Although the style is as eye-catching and contrived as it's possible to get, it's the substance beneath that's won these accolades. The band's second album, 'Primary Colours', is a stunning tour de force, a rich, rampant collision of post-punk, krautrock and, yes, goth sounds from the past 30 or so years; everything hurled into the mixer in heaped spoonfuls and brought up to 21st Century date with a production so vehemently maxed you feel the whole thing might start seeping out of the speakers if you don't watch the volume.

Live tonight such dedication to ramped-up rock power means many of 'Primary Colours' subtleties bleed into each other amid the clamour of heavily-reverbed guitars and swarming keyboards, Faris Badwan's

wonderfully sonorous baritone powering through the storm, a glowering fusion of Ian Curtis, John Lydon and The Chameleons' Mark Burgess. 'Mirror's Image' shimmers softly before coalescing into a rich cloud of pop portent, while 'Three Decades' scours along a warped path, shrapnel fragments of My Bloody Valentine and Psychedelic Furs tearing its skin. Best of all is a searing 'Sea Within A Sea', Joy Division take on Can in a seven-minute psychedelic face-off. At each turn you feel The Horrors must have studied hard to come up with such a perfect blend of period cool, but it's performed with such enthusiastic panache, it can only be natural. An encore brings a cover of Suicide's 'Ghostrider' alongside a frankly mental barrage of 'Sheena Is A Parasite', a ninety-second highlight from the band's more primitive garage-punk early life. None of the band utters a single word to the crowd between songs, but the detachment and disdain that suggests sits as neatly on their wiry frames as their bible-back shirts. At the end of a decade dominated by bloke-next-door greyness, it's refreshing to see rock and roll where it belongs: back in black.

Dale Kattack

HORSE FEATHERS / THE MOUNTAIN PARADE

The Jericho Tavern

The Mountain Parade's perky indie-pop is pleasant enough, and potentially interesting; they include strings, trumpet and accordion on some songs, but it's all executed in too much of a straightforward way to make it truly compelling or interesting. I often find this kind of whimsical, cutesy music much better to hear on record than in a live situation, and tonight is an example why. Much of this crowd don't seem to be here to concentrate on the music at all, but instead to chatter loudly for most of the set. That doesn't really sit well with a band who don't have a whole lot of stage presence beyond looking slightly nervous and shy, and it unfortunately compounds the experience into one of 'yet another indie-pop band'.

Horse Feathers, initially, seem not a million miles away in their instrumentation and general sound, but with a bit of banjo thrown in. Soon, however, they become more obviously a band of interest, as a truckload more conviction and (albeit muted) passion becomes apparent. Regardless of the lead

singer's fascinatingly Ron Howard-esque looks, which are somewhat discombobulating, the band holds my interest by stepping outside the comfort zone of simple song arrangements. Their songs turn into weird, unexpected passages and corners, and middle eights become semi-Godspeed!-style sweeps of strings. There's a general sense of *oddness* at play here that holds the attention. It'd be good for them to take this further, but when Ron Howard Mark Two utters "so guys, we have a few more left" after six or so songs, an urge in me is triggered to leave. By this point things have become too repetitive, and the vocal range being demonstrated had traversed all of its available (narrow) limits, and the sense that this is a band who could really 'get weird' seemed increasingly unlikely. When things almost drop to silence it's quietly spellbinding, but beyond the cosy, fuzzy music, the lack of power on display becomes too clear. A nice gig, but not one that'll hold in the memory for more than a couple of days.

Simon Minter

ANDREW POPPY'S SUSTAINING ENSEMBLE

The North Wall

We first came across Andrew Poppy in the mid-80s, playing a cheeky breed of pop-minimalism, injecting a little classical rigour into the ZTT roster, whilst puncturing the solemn salon atmosphere of British composition with situationist jokes and artrock packaging.

We lost track of Poppy some time ago, but aside from growing a cascade of beautiful bone-white locks, like some posterboy for new *Timotei Goth*, it would appear that little has changed. His music is still indebted to the giants of minimalism, and still features absurd texts intoned over slowly shifting sonic weavings.

The set, a selection of quartet arrangements of pieces from his last album, '...And The Shuffle Of Things', is a definite success. In some ways Poppy has honed his strengths over the years. Firstly, he has embraced the development of electronics in the past quarter century, and the pre-recorded parts of the performance are intricate without being needlessly flashy, often adding a disquieting Lynchian buzz to the pieces. Secondly, Poppy's vocals have matured noticeably: where his delivery was a tad smug and portentous in the 80s, it has mellowed into a stately, melancholically comic recitation. At times he sounds like a cross between Laurie

Anderson and John Hegley, and 'My Father's Submarines' or 'The Head Of Orpheus Football' are truly hypnotic, at once hilarious and mystifying.

Sadly, some of the experience simply feels second hand. The stage is an array of pitched percussion, and everyone knows that massed marimbas are the new music equivalent of Marshall stacks, and the ensemble play behind moody projections on gauze, the arthouse version of dry ice. Also, 'Periscope' is just those same old Glass / Reich melodic cells jumbled together on two keyboards, and seems to last most of the week (an effect not helped by the hackneyed projections of clocks running backwards – cheers for that). Frankly, the world has changed, and what sounded pretty radical in 1986, now sounds like the soundtrack to a Barclays advert. Whilst the show is wonderful, we're concerned that Poppy is creating a heritage industry for a contemporary classical movement in which he never felt comfortable to begin with. We love him, but we hope he takes more inspiration from the restless individuality of his ex-teacher John Cage, and less from the reductive autophagy of his ex-colleague Genesis P-Orridge. Stop shuffling, try a new deck.

David Murphy

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DEMO OF THE MONTH

BEARD OF ZEUSS

With the mighty Sextodecimo back in action (it is compulsory to precede their name with "the mighty", before you ask) and Desert Storm set in stone as the best new metal band in town, this is a good time to be reminded of yet another of our local stoner-rock monster heroes. Beard Of Zeuss's demo comes in the form of a startlingly (blindingly would be more accurate) orange CD with no indication of which way up it should go, and accompanied by a photo of the band offering the hapless viewer outside for a good beating, all of which is a gentle bit of scene setting for the punishment within. The band have come on some since we last heard them: this is a beast of a demo, though it sounds like it could have been mixed a bit louder for full impact. It's a rumbling, rampaging riot of Kyuss and Led Zeppelin riffs, cascading drum rolls and angry goblin hollering and it powers along with a big fat spliff hanging off its lip, paying no heed to the trembling pleading of the next door neighbours as it fills the room with molten fuzz and shouting. Beard Of Zeuss don't paint from quite such a varied palette as Desert Storm but they do make up in sheer focussed hellbastard noise what they lack in subtlety, and in these circumstances, sheer focussed hellbastard noise will do just fine.

MONDAY MORNING SUN

As we review this month's batch of demos it's very nearly Christmas and we're awash with uncharacteristic festive cheer, as you'll doubtless notice further down the page – willing to offer constructive criticism and jovial praise where perhaps we'd previously have lobbed a metaphorical dog turd taped to a metaphorical brick through a few bands' windows. But even at this time of year, it's good to know there are some right royal misery guts out there, and who in Oxford's musical firmament is more miserable than our friend Umair Chaudhry, demo page regular and one-time Xmas Lights electronics chappie? Here he is back once again with fellow former Xmas Lights

Demo of the Month wins a free half day's recording at Keynote. Call 01189 599944 to claim your prize and get special deals for local bands!

screamer Marco, and just to get us off to a merry start they've covered Nico's 'Frozen Warnings', a song that makes Joy Division sound like party time with The Wiggles. Tackling a song by one of the most startling vocal talents of all time is never going to be easy but they make a decent fist of it, creating a suitably ghostly dirge that billows from the stereo like a Siberian breeze. Umair's impeccable feel for a menacing ambience continues through three tracks that shift from a doom-funk jam through industrial drones and drifting to an oddly uplifting final segment that could be the climax of a particularly morbid Christmas mass. So, Yuletide-flavoured fun all round after all. With fucking great big black baubles on.

IN OCEANS

A bunch of metalcore teens from Witney way, whose band photo makes them look all of 14 years old. As such this is pretty accomplished stuff, even if the production values outweigh any semblance of originality. In Oceans chug and churn through standard post-hardcore and metal, switching from melodic vocals to growling while the music steers a clumsy course from full-on metal riffage to lightweight contemplation via the usual breakdowns. '83rd Reminder' is the stronger of the two songs here, a more coherent and bullish beast that manages to pack a reasonable punch without throwing up any surprises, but 'Puzzle' is overlong and turgid, held back by the constant switching between styles when you feel they'd be far better off cutting all the sensitive stuff out, slicing the song in half and just rocking out with the Judas Priest and Metallica riffs. It might still not offer any startling revelations but it'd be a whole lot more fun and they've got age and time on their side to build something bigger and bolder from these occasionally impressive early foundations.

FEDETERRA

Now this really is promising stuff from a very young local band. Fedeterra are all 15 years old and from Didcot and Stevenon and if these two songs tend towards the rough, ready and sometimes rudimentary, they suggest a fair bit of imagination going on too. 'Glass Shattered' isn't much to write home about, a cheap and cheerful clatter of cymbals apparently being kicked around someone's bedroom, a one-chord jangle and some shimmering guitar noise,

but 'Break, I Don't Know' starts off suggesting some Boards Of Canada droning and drifting in the offing, before building up into a sneering, more brooding plateau of leftfield pop noise, not unlike Tristan & The Troubadours at times, particularly in the slightly pleading vocals, and with a steely determination that rises above the sometimes clunky dynamics to suggest even better things to come.

LANCE SKYBABY

With an assumed stage name that makes him sound like a confused grandparent's attempt to engage a small child about *Star Wars*, and an accompanying photo that makes him look like every market town's pet goth-metal layabout, Lance Skybaby doesn't seem to have much going for him. Especially when he talks about his "kick-ass band", but this old-fashioned, no-frills, spit'n'sawdust sleaze-rock comes with a fair bit of vim about it, an unpretentious reliving of Motley Crue, Tigertailz and Backyard Babies-style leopard-print-and-leather pop-metal, all chest-beating bar anthems and songs about whisky and the sort of girls your mum wouldn't like. It's not done with quite the style or vigour of Pistol Kixx, and there's always a desire to remind Mr Skybaby that it's actually 2010, not 1982 and this is Oxford, not LA's Sunset Strip, but he sounds like he's having so much fun we couldn't be so curmudgeonly as to spoil his party.

BRASSNECK

Possibly having named themselves after an old Wedding Present single, Brassneck do tend to tick a fair few indie boxes. Maybe a few too many for their own good at times if the slightly over-egged demo opener 'Mess Of Contradictions' is anything to go by – the sweetly plucked strings and sunshine harmonies promise more than the yobbish lead vocals deliver, sounding like two different bands trying to play vaguely similar songs simultaneously. It's not quite a mess of contradictions but the prettier pop path would have suited a spirited romp of a song far better. 'Treasure It Because You Care, Natasha' is pure late-80s jangle pop, in the mould of The Anyways, but with a female lead that's just too shrill to win your heart. Further in Brassneck manage to rip off Lou Reed's 'Vicious' and Crowded House's 'Always Take The Weather With You' at the same time, before coming back round with a more lachrymose ballad that sounds like Nine Stone Cowboy on the wagon and losing their lager-bitten wit along the way. With each song they promise a little more than they ultimately deliver but perhaps it's simply a case of a bit of a spring clean that's needed rather than a full-on

refurbishment. Blimey, all this festive cheer really is bringing out the good will to (nearly) all men in us.

DEAR LANDLORD

More merriment, this time from a nine-piece folk-pop collective who, apparently, boast a six-foot tall Welshman in a white suit playing a seven-foot tall concert harp. You can just about make out his delicate tinkling behind the clutter of mandolins, trumpets and sweet vocal harmonies of demo opener 'Snowdrift' and we decide that this is music it's simply churlish to dislike, so good-natured and unpretentious is it. Shame 'Identical Hearts' brings the mood down slightly, coming on like a low-rent Waterboys, but it does manage to retain a folky earthiness that continues through into 'Steve Goodman', a perky, almost skiffle-flavoured slice of throwaway Pogues-lite pop. Probably more suited to soundtracking snug bar folk sessions than ruminating too intently on at home, though saying that, we're not sure you'd fit all of them in a snug bar, at least not with a giant Welshman and a full-sized harp.

THE DEMO DUMPER

LUCKYFINGER

Such cheer couldn't possibly last. While some of this month's other demos are by very young bands just finding their musical feet, this one sounds like a bunch of jobbing musos who have simply given up trying. Nominally a soul and blues-rock band, Luckyfinger just sound like any one of a million jaded corner-of-the-pub chuggers who between them have got the technical ability but slot it together with all the soul and passion of a charity shop jigsaw puzzle. You know, one with a couple of pieces missing. 'Blue' is jaunty but shrill, accomplished and trotting along with a modicum of abandon but 'Touch Me' is laboured and ungainly, bereft of any sense of direction and the supposedly gravelly and sultry female vocal lead just sounds like a closing-time lush out for a quick grope behind the bins. 'Cheap Perfume' ups the pace considerably and hopes are raised but it just sounds like any number of European blues circuit also-rans, all workmanlike graft and no spark or elan. There's some hammy 60s-style folk-rock on 'Kings & Queens' but the absolute nadir arrives with 'Bears', a knuckle-chewingly awful blues waltz take on 'The Teddy Bears' Picnic'. We hope to god they don't try this one out on a party of toddlers, else they'll deserve every piss-sodden nappy that gets hurled their way.

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.



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