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Oxford's Music Magazine

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Young Knives

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NEWS

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WILCO JOHNSON AND DEACON BLUE are the latest names added to this year's **Cornbury Festival** bill. The pair join already-announced headliners **James Blunt**, **The Faces** and **Status Quo** on a big-name bill that also includes **Ray Davies**, **Cyndi Lauper**, **Bellowhead**, **Olly Murs**, **The Like** and **Sophie Ellis-Bextor**. Other new names on the bill are prog-folksters **Stackridge**, **Ben Montague & Pete Lawrie**, **Toy Hearts**, **Saint Jude** and **Jack Bruce & The Stax**.

This year's Cornbury Festival takes place over the weekend of **1st-3rd July** at its new home of **The Great Tew's Estate**, near Charlbury. Tickets are on sale now, priced £160 for an adult weekend camping pass, with concessions for under-18s and under-16s and over-70s admitted free. Visit www.cornburyfestival.com for more details.

SOWETO KINCH, **NORMA WINSTONE** and **BOBBY WELLINS** headline the 2011 **Oxford Jazz Festival** this month. Running over the Easter weekend (**21st-24th April**) and featuring 60 acts across 30 venues, the festival plans to celebrate British jazz with a rolling series of "jazz neighbourhoods" across the city. Thursday's events will concentrate on Cowley Road, Friday's around Jericho, Saturday's up in Summertown and Sunday's in the city centre. Festival co-founder Alissa Robinson explained: "We are growing to such an extent that each area of the city is developing its own jazz culture around the Festival. It makes perfect sense to help this along by allocating a festival day to each neighbourhood so visitors and residents can enjoy performances that are very close to each other throughout the day." Soweto Kinch's show at Oxford Town Hall will be the central attraction of the festival but full

listings for the weekend, plus ticket details, are online at www.oxfordjazzfestival.co.uk

WITNEY MUSIC FESTIVAL returns for its fifth annual run this month. The festival runs from **24th April** through to **2nd May**, featuring a selection of mostly local acts across a dozen venues in the town. Amongst a host of acts confirmed are Johnson Smith and the Cadillac Blues Jam, Phousa, Alice Messenger, Black Hats, Deer Chicago, Prohibition Smokers Club, Samuel Zasada and Bethany Weimers, while the Witchwood School Of Rock will be running music workshops for young musicians. Visit www.witneymusicfestival.co.uk for a full programme of gigs.

OXFORD CONTEMPORARY MUSIC are inviting local acts to submit demos for this year's OCM Open Talent night. This year's event is being run in conjunction with the Pegasus Theatre and Oxfringe. For the first time there will be a separate young musicians event. The OCM takes place on **Saturday 11th June** at the Pegasus, as part of a county-wide music and arts event called Something For the Weekend, with the under-18s concert at 1.30 and over-18s event at 6.30. Original acts of any style can submit demos as MP3s or weblinks to info@ocmevents.org. Deadline for submissions is **Friday 15th April**. Visit www.ocmevents.org for more details.

APPLETREE STUDIOS celebrates a quarter century of recording this year with a major refit. Run by Phill Goss in Ludgershall since 1986, Appletree is one of the longest-running studios in the region. Visit www.appletreestudios.com to see the new-look studio.

AS EVER, don't forget to tune into BBC Oxford Introducing every Saturday evening between 6-7pm on



GRUFF RHYS AND BELLOWHEAD have been announced as headliners at this year's **TRUCK FESTIVAL**.

For the first time Truck will run over three full days, over the weekend of **22nd-24th July** at Hill Farm in Steventon. The festival will also enjoy an increased capacity and the entire site has been redesigned to accommodate new stages.

Multi-award-winning folk big band Bellowhead top the Friday night bill having stolen the show at last year's Truck, while Super Furry Animals frontman Rhys heads the Saturday line-up, playing his first ever Truck and showcasing songs from his new 'Hotel Shampoo' album.

Other acts already confirmed include electro-pop stars **St Etienne**; indie supergroup **Jonny**, formed by Teenage Fanclub's Norman Blake and Gorky's Euros Childs; folk-pop troubadour **Johnny Flynn**; former-Czars frontman **John Grant**; soul and country ensemble **The Duke & The King**; local psychedelic dance faves **Fixers**; Blessing Force trio **Trophy Wife**, **Jonquil** and **Chad Valley**, plus **Caitlin Rose**, **Marques Toliver**, **Treetop Flyers**, **Marcus Foster**, **Richmond Fontaine** and **Dreaming Spires**.

Talking about the new-look festival, organiser Robin Bennett said, "We've experimented with partial Friday opening over the last two years and it feels like this year is the right time to make Friday a full day. We have headliners and acts on all the stages including the main stage. People can arrive from midday Friday with music starting shortly after that. And as we'll all be camping for longer, this is the first year there will be showers at Truck! We've also taken the opportunity to redesign the site and use some of the more attractive fields for new camping areas and a family field.

"We're teaming up with three of the best independent labels to programme the 2nd stage this year, Transgressive, Heavenly and Bella Union. For licensing reasons we'd had to reduce the capacity of the barn over the last few years, so we've decided to start afresh with a much larger marquee."

Tickets for Truck are priced £99 for an adult camping ticket and £79 for under-18s. Under-12s go free. They're available from the new Truck Store on Cowley Road or via See Tickets at www.seetickets.com. Visit www.thisistruck.com for more details and line-up news.

95.2fm. The dedicated local music show, presented by Dave Gilyeat, plays the best new Oxford releases and demos and well as featuring live sessions and interviews by local bands. The show is available as a podcast or to stream on the BBC iPlayer.

TRUCK STORE is still keen to sell local bands' releases. The new music shop at 101 Cowley Road, co-run by Truck and Rapture, opened in February on the site of the old Videosyncratic store. Bands can drop CDs or vinyl into the shop.



THEA GILMORE, **MAMA ROSIN** and **UISCEDWR** are among the new set of acts to be announced for this year's **WOOD FESTIVAL**. They join headliners **Willy Mason** and **Eliza Carthy** (pictured) over the weekend of **20th-22nd May** at **Braziers Park**, near Wallingford.

This year is the fourth Wood Festival and with the eco-friendly festival having picked up a number of awards for its innovative approach to festival organisation, including a Gold Green Festival Award, tickets for this year's event are already on the way to selling out.

Other acts already confirmed include **The Dreaming Spires**, **Treetop Flyers**, **Jali Fily Cissokho** and **The Epstein**. Aside from live music on the solar-powered stages there will be the usual workshops and talks, a cycle-powered cinema and disco and family-friendly activities.

Tickets, priced £95 for adults, £65 for under-18s and free for under-12s, are on sale from the Truck Store on Cowley Road as well as www.thisistruck.com

a quiet word with

Young Knives

photo: Cat Stevens



“THE USE OF THE WORD

poppy makes me defensive. I know we are often a pop band, but ‘poppy’ makes it sound like we tried to make a Keane record, or a Feeling record, and that suddenly we thought ‘shit, we need to make a record that actually sells a load’. We didn’t. We couldn’t have done it even if we had tried. First and foremost we had to make a record that we felt happy with and to feel like it had kicked us out of the rut you inevitably fall into when you’ve been making music together for this long.”

YOUNG KNIVES SINGER

Henry Dartnall is talking about Young Knives’ new album, ‘Ornaments From The Silver Arcade’, the follow-up to 2008’s ‘Superabundance’, and an album that signals a shift away from the often downbeat, occasionally folk-inflected, frequently cynical nature of the trio’s previous output.

Nightshift has put it to Henry that ‘Ornaments...’ is Young Knives’ pop album; it’s got a real sheen about it

and there’s a more prominent funk edge to some tracks. The use of horns and female backing vocals add to the general feeling of exuberance on standout tracks like ‘Vision In Rags’. One song, ‘Woman’, sounds like it could be Young Knives’ disco hit. Was there a conscious effort, we wonder, to make a relatively more poppy record?

HENRY: “It wasn’t a conscious decision to make a poppy record; it was a conscious decision to make a *joyful* record.

“On ‘Superabundance’ we started down the route of making darker songs. I kind of felt that at the moment the only music people take seriously is ‘serious’ music, if you get me. There is a tendency to think that anything that is in anyway upbeat or cheerful is stupid. Maybe that’s because a lot of it is. It feels like credible music uses Radiohead as its bar. Don’t get me wrong, I love Radiohead, but I wanted to try and break from that idea that credible music has to be serious music. It’s a very English thing too. I mean I

know I am being general but we felt a pressure in a way to write darker and more serious songs so that we would be taken seriously. Some of my favourite artists from pop history – Beefheart, Zappa, The Kinks – have written joyful songs *and* have been credible, so we wanted to make songs that had some genuine joy in them. We have written some pretty cynical songs in the past and it’s easy to be grumpy old men and make jokes at other people’s expense. Although we often meant the songs to be about our own character flaws too, I think they came across as cynical. So we thought it was more of a challenge to make a happy yet credible record, something that celebrates life and has genuine heartfelt lyrics without being mawkish or trite, fun without being wacky or vacuous and artistic but without being deadly serious.”

IT’S ALMOST A DECADE SINCE

Henry, along with brother Thomas (aka House Of Lords) and drummer Oliver Askew, moved to Oxford from their native Ashby-de-la-Zouch

to make a go of their band – back then called Ponyclub – and use the fertile soil of the local scene to grow into a critically-acclaimed, internationally-loved chart act.

Three years on from the success of ‘Superabundance’ and five on from the Mercury-nominated ‘Of Animals & Men’, Young Knives are at a crossroads in their musical career. How to follow up two such lauded and loved albums? More of the same or a sharp left turn into new territory?

The answer, with ‘Ornaments From The Silver Arcade’, is somewhere in between. As soon as you listen to it it’s obviously Young Knives: the quirky, militant post-punk snap of opener ‘Love My Name’ and the blatantly Fall-like intro to ‘Everything Falls Into Place’ hark back to the band’s earliest offerings. But then there are curveballs like ‘Woman’, which sounds like it emerged from a New York night-club sometime in the early-80s, or the irresistibly exuberant ‘Glasshouse’, which closes the album, full of

childlike glee and pure pop fun.

The new album is less instant than its predecessors, but repeated listens bring equally rich rewards.

HENRY: "I think we have still kept what makes Young Knives, but just tried to add space and pacing to our music. We often used to fill in any space and add more ideas than a song needed. We were inherently scared of the silences and we have tried to change that.

"We spent a lot of time touring 'Superabundance', but when we finally stopped we realised that we didn't know what we were going to do next. Or at least we knew there had to be a really good reason to make another Young Knives record, rather than just churning out some more of what had gone before. We really didn't stop working and in hindsight maybe we should have had a few months off, but we really wanted to push ourselves so we just hit the studio and started again."

A significant change since 'Superabundance' is that Henry has become a dad twice over. How has that affected him, particularly his lyrical outlook which has always had a sharp, sardonic bite amid the often surreal imagery. Does he feel any less cynical?

HENRY: "It has definitely has some effect, but maybe subconscious so I can't put my finger on it. It may have been something to do with the cheery nature of this record but I dunno. 'Glasshouse' was definitely written from a childlike point of view. I think I got bored of being lyrically cynical anyway, just because we've done that and I kind of think it's too easy and is a bit ugly sometimes."

FOR 'ORNAMENTS...' YOUNG Knives went into the studio in Los Angeles with Nick Launay, a legendary producer with an exemplary CV that includes The Yeah Yeah Yeahs, Nick Cave, Arcade Fire, Talking Heads, Public Image Limited, Lou Reed and Kate Bush. What was it like to work him? What did he bring to the sound of the new album? How different was it to work with Nick than Andy Gill?

HENRY: "It was great. We had talked to Nick about the last record but he wasn't available at the time so when his name came up again we jumped at it. When we are choosing producers we always tend to choose the most enthusiastic person – if we can afford them. So it was mutual. As we are not spunking major label cash we had to do the record on a really tight budget, but actually recording in LA is cheaper than doing it in London. We chose Nick also because we knew we wanted to work with someone who had a strong grounding in good songs. We came up with a lot of the sounds and feel of the record at the demo stage but Nick just

helped us to get to the essence of the songs. As a three-piece with two brothers we benefit greatly from a mediator, someone to focus our scribbly ideas.

"In a way Nick did a very similar thing to Andy in terms of how he approached our songs, but he was also very keen for us to play them all together a lot before we actually recorded them. Nick is so chilled as well. Nothing would get him riled, even after 18 hours in the studio when we decide that we have taken a wrong turn 10 hours ago. He would just laugh, press delete and say 'let's get in with it then'."

Did he have any good scandalous anecdotes to tell from his past collaborations?

HENRY: "Nick had loads of stories but they weren't scandalous. He is the kind of guy that keeps your secrets and you rarely hear him speaking ill of anyone, even if you know that they are notoriously difficult. He just seems to have had a

touring the world; where have been the best and worst places?

HENRY: "The best was Beijing. Stuff is thousands of years old there. It makes Saffron Walden look like San Diego. The worst... I dunno. It tends to be just about the hotel or whatever. We went to Paris a little while ago and got put in a hotel called Mr Bed. And the bed was the worst bed I had ever slept in and the room smelt of shit. You would think that a hotel that calls itself Mr Bed would at least make sure its main focus was decent beds. There are some pretty grim UK venues, but I don't think I should start slagging anywhere here."

You had a track used in a sunglasses campaign in China. That helped you survive between albums. How important are things like that to you?

HENRY: "We did it because it meant we got to go to China! So we did a few gigs while we were there.

Something we couldn't have afforded

Did you know that Bicester Village is in the top 10 most popular attractions in the UK amongst Chinese tourists? You do now.

great time with everyone he has worked with. He had some great stories about working with Silverchair when they were all 17, making their second album and being holed up in a residential studio with loads of teenage girls camped outside. Made me a bit jealous."

How was it recording in LA? As a band generally considered very English in your sound and lyrics did any of the local culture rub off on you? Any partying on Sunset Strip?

HENRY: "It was hot, and there were a lot of trendy types there. It was great really. Mainly we worked and sometimes went swimming in the pool. We had already decided to make a happy record, and it was definitely easier with a load of vitamin D coursing round our systems. But to be honest, when you are in a studio and the producer is pretty much English, with a slight Aussie twang, and you are working hard, you could be anywhere in the world. We did go to a couple of great parties up at Nick's house in the hills. Very cyber goth. We definitely looked a little out of place.

"It was great for us not to record in the UK anyway. We had pretty much decided to try not being so English, just so we don't fall into the trap of becoming caricatures of ourselves, so LA seemed like a pretty un-English choice."

OF COURSE YOUNG KNIVES' success, since 'Of Animals And Men', has allowed them to enjoy every band's fantasy of

to do without making the ticket price too expensive for anyone apart from rich expats. The poverty gap is much bigger and we wanted to make sure that Chinese kids could afford to go. The other reason we did it is because in China, people have a completely different attitude to corporate sponsorship. The best gig was definitely the sponsored one because it validated the gig for Chinese kids. Did you know that Bicester Village is in the top 10 most popular attractions in the UK amongst Chinese tourists? Well you do now. There isn't that cynicism that we have in the west. I'm not a big fan of doing corporate stuff, but it's a fact of life, especially in today's music industry where there is no money unless you are Coldplay or equivalent. People who don't want gigs sponsored by mobile phone companies should stop downloading music for free. And sponsorship is just the tip of the iceberg. As soon as companies get hold of music they get power over what you hear and even how music is written. I have in the past had emails from publishers saying have you got any songs that have the following words in.... and people know what lyrics are more likely to get big synchs. So do musicians start to add these words into their songs so that they get more chance of scoring an advert? Hell yeah. Do we? It has crossed my mind, but I couldn't crowbar the fuckers in, so it's back to just writing stuff I care about, hoping Coke agree."

BACK ON THIS SIDE OF THE

globe, Young Knives release 'Ornaments...' on April 4th on their own Gadzöök label and head off on a UK tour that brings them back to Oxford at the end of May. How does Henry view the Oxford music scene now, having moved so far on from those early gigs?

HENRY: "I don't see as many bands as I want to, but that's mainly because I have kids now. I'm always missing stuff I really want to see. I mainly get to see the bands I want by getting them to support us or on days off in other towns. I'm really hopeful for the recent success of Oxford bands. I really like Fixers but I haven't seen them yet; when I find a cheap teenager to babysit I'm going to go check them out proper, although I might have missed their 'local band' period.

"It definitely helped being in Oxford. We have never really been an Oxford band as such because we aren't from here, we just moved here specifically for the music scene. I'm sure our story would be very different if we had stayed in Ashby."

Part of the Young Knives live experience has always been the between-song interaction between Henry and House; is that something it's easy to keep fresh when they're on the road for long periods?

HENRY: "No, it's not easy to stop yourself from lapsing into repetition. But the idea has always been to interact with audiences and make them feel wanted. I hate it when bands don't speak: they may as well be playing to no-one. If you're in a room full of people you've got to acknowledge that fact to make people feel part of what is going on. Our rule of thumb is if you've got nothing to say, say nothing, it's just that we rarely have nothing to say."

WHEN YOUNG KNIVES LAST

graced the cover of Nightshift back in February 2006 Henry, Thomas and Oliver had just quit their jobs to concentrate on the band fulltime. Any regrets on that front?

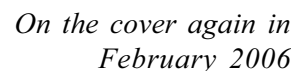
HENRY: "No way. Apart from no regular pay check there is nothing to miss. I am totally unemployable now and proud."

You said back then you were looking forward to a life of drunkenness and debauchery. Has that come to pass?

HENRY: "I think that has passed. Getting wasted is fun for a bit, but there is more to life. We still smash it up more than we should sometimes, but in all fairness we are better musicians when we aren't drunk. We are definitely quite funny drunk, but I prefer being a musician to being a comedian."

'Ornaments From The Silver Arcade' is released on 4th April on Gadzöök. Young Knives play the O2 Academy on Tuesday 24th May.

*Scrapbook highlights of
Young Knives' coverage in
Nightshift over the years*



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YOUNG KNIVES

'Ornaments From The Silver Arcade'

(Gadzöök)

It's been a quietly impressive career for Young Knives so far. Over their first three albums (discounting the lost great 'Nolens Volens'), they've been the local band destined for big things; tweed-wearing English gents pumping out surprise hits to a worldwide audience (reaching number 21 in the album charts in the process); and a band that weathered the storm of a coolly-received third album (although not *that* coolly - it did reach number 28). What next? With 'Ornaments From The Silver Arcade', they're out on their own, free of the shackles and pressures that can sometimes knock lesser bands off focus and even out of the game altogether. Sticking to their guns for more than a decade is itself worthy of a theoretical manly shoulder-punch for the band, but on the basis of these tracks their metaphorical shoulder will be black and blue.

The world is a strange and often depressing place at the moment. There are a lot of tough things going on, and bad events happening to good people. What's perhaps the strongest, greatest aspect of 'Ornaments From The Silver Arcade' is its almost relentlessly 'up' feel - it bursts at the seams with positivity, egalitarianism and a love of life in all its facets. This isn't unappreciated, and



the album not only affirms life, it affirms what an extraordinarily talented band Young Knives actually are. In the past they've been lazily pigeonholed into musical and sartorial corners, but across its eleven tracks this new set is a line drawn from their post-punk-tinged earlier work through the rest of the 1980s, taking in doses of new romanticism, C86 and Stock, Aitken & Waterman's 'Hit Factory' production sheen along the way. That's not to say that it's a vacuous or style-over-substance body of work; anything but. As much as being a 'hit after hit after hit'-style collection of melodic gems, it suggests a strong sense of quality control, with echoes of Blur's poppy experimentation on 'Modern Life Is Rubbish' and Beck's 'throw everything in'

production values on 'Midnite Vultures'.

'Love My Name' opens the album as the closest link here to the Wire/Gang Of Four-referencing previous work of the band, but quickly trashes that with its sheer oddness. Strange, synthesised sounds - and, indeed, sound effects - make themselves known, and over the next few tracks the elements for a new phase for the band's career are laid out. 'Woman' has a horn section and 'yeah yeah yeah'/'la la la' female backing vocals. 'Everything Falls Into Place' fizzles with an A-Ha-style rush of synthetic melody. 'Human Again' buzzes like an out-take from the 'C86' album. Towards the middle of the album, there is the tiniest threat of a dip in both mood and quality, unfortunately - the plodding beats of 'Sister Frideswide' sounding too much like something this band has done many times before. However, this doesn't last: the track bursts into a rich, warm cacophony, before leading into a couple of more reflective, sad-sounding songs. Don't worry, though - 'Go To Ground', for example, is sad in the same way that Nick Drake was sad - not depressing, more a forlorn belief that things really will turn out okay in the end.

By the end of the album, it's almost ridiculous how much a mastery of melody and spirit-lifting ability the band have displayed. Getting such a consistent level of not only emotional kick but also outstandingly catchy tunes is very, very difficult, and Young Knives pretty much make it feel like it's no bother at all. This is a fantastic, soul-enriching album, and another step up on an interesting journey for a uniquely interesting band.
Simon Minter

SHARRON KRAUS

'The Woody Nightshade'

(Strange Attractors Audio House)

The sleeve notes to this new CD are a paean to the album format, eroded and endangered in our MP3 playlist era. We couldn't agree more, but, like those scientists who try to explain how minuscule a fraction of the universe's lifespan human beings have existed in, we would expect a folk singer to be unconcerned with a format that has been around for only fifty odd years, a tiny fragment of the history of song.

But this is definitely an LP, not a random selection of songs, and it's a record with a constant, misty atmosphere. Kraus' voice is high

and delightfully reedy, but it lends itself more to ghostly melody than cracking out a rousing folk narrative: her allusive singing and vaguely evocative lyrics are more Bert Jansch than Norma Waterson. There are even hints of PJ Harvey's recent recordings. Musically it's ethereal and unsettling too, from the keening feedback that opens the album to the woozily plucked strings on 'Two Brothers' that sound like a weary traveller pushing through a dense forest: it's like a night at the sound of the Twin Peaks Folk Club. All drums on the record are reverberated and stately like the faded memory of percussion, the washed out toms of the title track a resigned, slow walk to the gallows (roll over, Berlioz).

Individually these songs may not be startling, and it's certain that Kraus couldn't challenge Spiers & Boden for the Oxford oral tradition trophy, but The Woody Nightshade is a gorgeous, immersive listen, that you want to start again as soon as it's finished... which is about the best definition of a good album we can think of.

David Murphy



SPRING OFFENSIVE

'A Stutter And A Start'

(Own label)

With a recent support slot with The Go! Team under their belts and glowing reviews surrounding just about everything they do, it's fair to say that things are going well for Spring Offensive.

The band's last single 'The First Of Many Dreams...' was a brave move: a conceptual mood piece based around Swiss psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross' 'Grief Cycle' that stretched out beyond 13 minutes. 'A Stutter And A Start' finds the band back in pop territory, keeping things relatively lean and tight. Their spidery math-rock-inspired riffs provide a fragile framework for this tale of a relationship on the brink of seizure. On first listen, it all seems rather lightweight and uninspired, but the intelligent textures the band creates do in time become apparent. The rolling basslines and twitchy drum patterns evoke a sense of unease as singer Lucas Whitworth provides a wonderfully assured and emotional vocal. If the use of a knackered car as a metaphor is a little clunky, then the smattering of ice-laden imagery just about makes up for it. The bleak and unforgiving backdrop is entirely fitting. 'The Well' continues in downbeat fashion. It's at its best when the tired sounding math-rock influences take a backseat and the band indulge in carefully-crafted vocal harmonies and allow the song to flow rather than lurch. The shimmering guitars that wash across the last few moments of the song are utterly beautiful, and point to a band that are gifted at creating emotional tension.

A Gunning For Tamar remix of 'Abacus Rex' wraps things up, but the aggressive lo-fi edge it's been given is out of kilter with what precedes it. In more suitable surroundings it would be undoubtedly be a success, but given the introspective tone of the single, it feels somewhat out of place.

Sam Shepherd

RICHARD WALTERS

‘Pacing’

(Kartel)

A wise man once said, “I wouldn’t paint a rose, but if the garden gate needed a lick of paint, so be it”. In musical terms Richard Walters’ voice is the rose, a thing of such untutored, natural wonder it’s ideal setting would be completely unaccompanied.

Richard’s long-awaited debut album, ‘The Animal’, came close to fulfilling that need for almost nothing – only the sparsest instrumentation was allowed to encroach on his desolately autumnal voice as he lyrically walked amid the detritus of a life and love in the process of unravelling.

Having rebooted his long-time songwriting relationship with former-Suede man Bernard Butler, ‘Pacing’ is Richard’s swift and far more fulsome follow-up album. It sounds like Richard’s been given a lick of paint. With its gated drums and electronic squiggles, album opener ‘When You’re Young’ steals a little of the aching humanity out of Richard’s voice. Come its conclusion, via a full-on electric guitar solo blow-out, it’s close to American FM rock. ‘14 Days’, documenting a relationship teetering on the edge of collapse, is similarly bolstered by big production and instrumentation and feels uncharacteristically euphoric.

It takes until ‘Mattress Fire’ before the more familiar Richard Walters re-emerges, the band reined in, the song frostier, almost desolate, the voice free to seduce and hypnotise. Similarly ‘End Of The World’, which is ‘Pacing’s gorgeous coda, relies on little more than plucked acoustic guitar and cello, while elsewhere full string arrangements and bold percussion rule the roost.

It’s not that ‘Pacing’ is a disappointment on this



front, more a sort of culture shock. The songs themselves, particularly the album’s title track and a reworked ‘Elephant In The Room’ are damn close to melodic perfection, so close they simply don’t need to be gilded thus.

The flipside of all this, though, is that we’ve banged on an on for so long about Richard deserving to be a star and this approach perhaps offers his best opportunity, particularly in the States where ‘Elephant In The Room’ is already a cult hit after its use on *So You Think You Can Dance*. The spectral bleakness we so adore from him simply won’t speak to such a mass audience, nor gain mainstream radio play. People want their pop with a little polish. Hopefully ‘Pacing’ will allow Richard’s career to blossom more fully; for our own personal tastes – and we’re judging harshly here only because of the phenomenally high standards he” already set himself – a little pruning might not go amiss.

Dale Kattack

THE HALF RABBITS

‘The Optimist EP’

(Own label)

As the title suggests, ‘The Optimist EP’ finds local gothsters The Half Rabbits casting off their dark-hued take on rock music and covering a selection of bright-eyed 80s disco hits.

Well obviously not. The Half Rabbits don’t do optimistic, unless it’s looking forward to death or somesuch. Something which appears to be praying on singer Michael Weatherburn’s mind a lot over the course of these four new songs, recorded with sometime Primal Scream and Mary Chain producer Pat Collier. Michael’s mannered, slightly theatrical voice and staccato delivery is such that he could be reciting a shopping list that included turkey twizzlers, rhubarb and strawberry cup cakes and he’d make it sound like A Very Serious Thing Indeed. In this case it’s gasoline he’s intoning portentously about, possibly in some kind of *Max Max*-style post-apocalyptic kind of way. ‘Poor Me/Poor You’ deals with the fall-out from war over a Killing Joke-style industrial stomp and by the time Half Rabbits hit ‘How The West Was Won’, they’re under the knife and fighting for their lives, with Michael’s chanting “The wind in the east is a terrible beast”. It’s characteristically foreboding stuff, but musically more polished and expansive than their recent debut album, ‘From The Horizon To The Map’.

Not that that is going to brighten their moods any; their particular musical furrow is deep and dark and sheltered from sunlight. All together now: “Always look on the bright side of death / Even as you draw your terminal breath...”

Dale Kattack

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GIG GUIDE

FRIDAY 1st

KLUB KAKOFANNEY with **STEAMROLLER + SUPERLOOSE + MOIETY + HORNS OF PLENTY: The Wheatsheaf** – Heavyweight blues-rocking from Steamroller at tonight's Klub Kak, plus sweet-natured semi-acoustic pop from Moiety and more.

NINE-STONE COWBOY + MOGMATIC: The Bullingdon – Darkly humorous, observational pop from Mark Cope's 9SC, plus bluesy rock from Mogmatic.

SKYLARKIN SOUNDSYSTEM: The Cellar – Count Skylarkin's monthly reggae party tonight hosts Bristol's seven-strong collective Laid Blak, set to release their debut

Saturday 2nd

ESBEN & THE WITCH / TEETH OF THE SEA: The Jericho Tavern

After the disappointment of their ramshackle showing at Truck last summer, it'll be good to see Brighton's Esben & The Witch back at the venue where they shone last year, a free gig that aimed to get a decent crowd in for a then-unknown band. The intervening months have seen the band, along with the likes of Zola Jesus, forge a new wave of gothic pop success. Their debut album, 'Violet Cries', on Matador Records, should bring a little chill to your heart even as spring approaches. Formed in the ghostly mould of acts like Dead Can Dance, Bat For Lashes and This Mortal Coil, the trio exist in a twilight world of shimmering, spidery guitars, ethereal vocals, Victorian horror, doomed romance and lashings of forbidding atmospherics, with singer Rachel Davies' captivating voice full of passion and portent, surrounded by the band's gently glowering collage of sampled dialogue, chattering electronics and Batcave guitar fuzz. Great support from Teeth Of The Sea, last seen round here at last November's Audioscope festival with Wire, making a suitably crazed no-wave inspired racket

APRIL

album after breakthrough single 'My Eyes Are Red'. Support from London's dancehall dons Bam Bam Sounds and the Count himself spinning a selection of reggae, dancehall and hip hop.

FUNKY FRIDAY: The Bullingdon – Classic funk, soul and r'n'b every Friday.

FOUNDATION REGGAE: East Oxford Community Centre – Roots and dub every Friday.

WHO DO YOU LOVE?: The Duke, St. Clement's – Alt.rock, 60s garage, soul, new wave, punk and electropop DJ session.

SATURDAY 2nd

ESBEN & THE WITCH + TEETH OF THE SEA: The Jericho Tavern – Dark-hearted tribal pop from the spooky gothsters – *see main preview*

BG RECORDS PRESENTS: O2 Academy TASTE MY EYES + HELLBENT & HAMMERED + MOTHER CORONA + CRYISIS: The Wheatsheaf – Great bill of local metal at tonight's Buried In Smoke promotion. Virulent metalcore types Taste My Eyes make sure the growling and screaming factor hits peak levels, while Mother Corona bring a hefty dose of sludgy thrash and Crysis fuse Pantera and Lamb of God to pleasingly brutal effect.

THOMAS TRUAX + LYDIA KAVINA: Modern Art Oxford – Another characteristically unusual show from Pindrop performance, tonight pairing Thomas Truax – well-known round these parts for is array of bizarre, self-created instruments and richly poetic roots-pop – with Russian theremin virtuoso Lydia Kavina, the grand-niece of the instrument's inventor Leon Theremin. So the two of them should know a thing or two about otherworldly instrumentation. As well as separate sets, including songs from Truax's new 'Sonic Dreamer' album, they'll be performing together. Theremin versus Hornicator? We like them both. Only one way to find out which is best..... FIGHT!

THE THIN LIZZY EXPERIENCE: Fat Lil's, Witney – Tribute band.

VIXENS + SECRET RIVALS + EVO SYLVIAN + HOOKS: The Port Mahon – Big, bold gothic rock and post-punk from Vixens tonight, with support from boy-girl indie fuzzsters Secret Rivals and electro-pop from Dead Jerichos offshoot Evo Sylvian.

STEAMROLLER + NOT TOO SHABBY + OX4 ALL-STARS + ANNERO: The Cellar – Charity gig with reformed 70s blues-rockers Steamroller cranking it out in the style of Cream

and Hendrix.

PROPAGANDA + TRASHY + ROOM 101: O2 Academy – Weekly three-clubs-in-one, with indie and electro at Propaganda, kitsch pop, 80s and glam at Trashy and metal and alt.rock at Room 101.

DAVE MEDAY + MARK PIDGEON + MANDY WOODY + DAVE REYNOLDS: Tiddy Hall, Ascott-Under-Wychwood – A night of acoustic Americana.

KUBRIS + ASTEROX: The Folly Bridge Inn
LANDSCAPE: The Bullingdon – Old school dance sounds with DJs Kieran, Seth C, Loco and Chriss Hall.

SETURIA + THE DEAD LAY WAITING + SACRISITY: The Wheatsheaf, Banbury – Jambox rock and metal night.

CHILL'N'CO: Magic Café (1pm) – Lounge and ambient jazz and dance grooves.

SUNDAY 3rd

CARL BARAT: O2 Academy – Oh lordy, choices, choices. Where's an eager little music fan to go on a night like this when there's such a devastating clash between the boring one out of The Libertines who is unleashing his inner James Blunt in one room, while the musical equivalent of supermarket own brand lager are laying it on thick and grey in another? We suppose hacking your own throat out with the nearest available kitchen implement is a third, and probably preferable, option.

PIGEON DETECTIVES: O2 Academy – Hmmm... but which kitchen implement? And hey, why should it be *our* throats that get hacked out anyway?

THOUSANDS: The Jericho Tavern – But stay that hand! Salvation may be at hand. For here are Seattle duo Thousands, playing their first ever UK tour, having recently signed to Bella Union on the recommendation of Fleet Foxes. The acoustic duo share some of Foxes' hymnal pop elegance, adding elements of Simon & Garfunkel, Elliot Smith and Bert Jansch, their debut album, 'The Sound Of Everything', recorded utilising natural reverb, birdsong, falling leaves and the sound of the wind to augment its pastoral simplicity.

BEARD OF DESTINY + SUE & PHIL + MIKE ABBOTT + RICHARD & JEREMY: Donnington Community Centre – Free acoustic music session.

ACOUSTIC & OPEN MIC SESSION: The Hobgoblin, Bicester – Live sets from Dave McPherson and Simply Sloth, plus open session.

MONDAY 4th

THE MARCUS MALONE BAND: The Bullingdon – The Detroit guitarist returns to the Famous Monday Blues, kicking out a hard-rocking form of blues and soul that borders on



metal at times, having made his name on the UK and European blues circuit in recent years.

SANDI THOM: O2 Academy – Anyone not driven to self-immolation by last night's Pigeon Detectives shitstorm can feel free to gouge all their sensory organs into mincemeat as oxygen-stealing talent vacuum Thom uncorks 'I Wish I Was A Punk Rock Girl With Flowers In My Hair' once again, demonstrating an almost heroic lack of musical or cultural history awareness.

TUESDAY 5th

SPIERS & BODEN: The North Wall, Summertown – Multi-award-winning folk duo play a special low-key date after the cancellation of the Oxford Folk Festival, which they were due to headline - *see main preview*

CLARE MAGUIRE: O2 Academy – Following her placing in the BBC's Sound Of 2001 poll, the latter-day Annie Lennox heads out on tour to promote debut album, 'Light After Dark', following supports to Hurts and Plan B, as well as working with Mike Skinner and Chase & Status.

MARCUS FOSTER + BEAR DEN: The Jericho Tavern – Soulful acoustic blues-rock from the London singer in a Van Morrison vein.

JAZZ CLUB: The Bullingdon – Free weekly live jazz club night, tonight featuring singer Alison Bentley.

GOOD VIBRATIONS: Café Tarifa – Weekly unplugged and semi-acoustic session.

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Port Mahon

WEDNESDAY 6th

LIBRARY TAPES + MATT WINKWORTH + BETHANY WEIMERS: St Michael's Church, Cornmarket – Sweden's ambient soundscapists return to the scene of their last Oxford show – the suitably atmospheric setting of St Michael's, where they're joined by inventive, literate singer and pianist Matt Winkworth and ethereal goth-folk songstress Bethany Weimers.

13 GAUGE + HEADCOUNT + BEELZEBOZO: The Wheatsheaf – Moshka goes punk and metal crazy with grindcore types 13 Gauge going up against Killing Joke-inspired punk titans Headcount. Beelzebozo bring some old-school metal craziness to proceedings.

ACOUSTIC LOUNGE: Fat Lil's, Witney
FREE RANGE: The Cellar – Drum&bass and dubstep club night.

THURSDAY 7th

SPRING OFFENSIVE + GUNNING FOR TAMAR + DEER CHICAGO: The Bullingdon – Spangly math-popsters Spring Offensive launch their new EP, with support from post-rockers Gunning For Tamar and epic indie pop types Deer Chicago.

THE GRACEFUL SLICKS + ULYSSES STORM + THE SCREAMIN JOE

JEFFERSONS: The Cellar – 60s-styled psychedelic rock from Graceful Slicks, plus classic blues-rocking support from Ulysses Storm and Screamin' Joe Jeffersons.

APPLE PIRATE PRESENTS: Fat Lil's, Witney – Unsigned indie, punk and rock bands showcase.

TAMARA PARSONS-BAKER: The Port Mahon – Stark, drama-laden acoustic blues and pop from the local songstress.

CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre – Oxford's longest-running open-mic club every Thursday, showcasing singers, musicians, storytellers, poets and performance artists.

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon
BLUES JAM: Jack Russell, Marston

FRIDAY 8th

DAVID RODIGAN: O2 Academy – Reggae and dancehall tunes from the veteran Kiss FM DJ and former-Kidlington lad.

THE ROCK OF TRAVOLTA + VERY NICE HARRY + ED LOFSTEDT + GENERALS & MAJORS: O2 Academy – Expansive electro and symphonic rock from The Rock at tonight's Fox Rocks show.

DESERT STORM + STONE AXE + TRIPPY WICKED + STUBB: The Wheatsheaf – Buried In Smoke night with psychedelic stoner-rock heavyweights Desert Storm alongside Washington State's Sabbath-esque heavyweights Stone Axe, harking back equally to Free, and Cream. Ambient acoustic metallers Trippy Wicked support.

MACKATING: The Bullingdon – Roots and dub reggae from the enduring local faves.

TREVOR WILLIAMS: The Hollybush, Osney – Oxfordshire MIND benefit from the Faringdon troubadour.

BOSSAPHONIK: The Cellar – Latin, afrobeat, Balkan dance, world beats and nu-jazz club night, featuring a live set from Edinburgh's eight-strong funk brass band Horndog Brass.
BON GIOVI: Fat Lil's, Witney – Bon Jovi tribute.

FUNKY FRIDAY: The Bullingdon
FOUNDATION REGGAE: East Oxford Community Centre

SATURDAY 9th

BORDERVILLE + BROTHERS WELSH + THE YARNS: The Wheatsheaf – Flamboyant and inventive vaudevillian rocking from Borderville, plus fluffy 80s-style jangle pop from The Yarns.

YOOF! with IS TROPICAL + KISMET: The Cellar – New indie sounds from Yoof!, tonight featuring London's euphoric loungey electro-pop trio Is Tropical and local synth-popsters Kismet plus DJ sets from Rockfeedback's Mike H and Keyboard Choir.

DEFINITELY MIGHTBE + CHANGING MAN: O2 Academy – An Oasis tribute act and a Paul Weller tribute act on the same bill? With this, ambassador, you really are spoiling our weekend.

REPLICA: Fat Lil's, Witney – Party rock covers.

JAGGY EDGES + PHOUSA + LOST DOGS: The Port Mahon – Acoustic country and folk-rock from local trio Jaggy Edges, plus support.

PROPAGANDA + TRASHY + ROOM 101: O2 Academy

SELECTA: The Bullingdon – Drum&bass club night.

THE RETROS: The Centurion, Bicester



Tuesday 5th

SPIERS & BODEN: The North Wall

Tuesday 12th

THE FUREYS & DAVEY ARTHUR: Oxford Town Hall

This year's Oxford Folk Festival may, sadly, have been cancelled but here's two shows to keep both trad and new wave fans more than happy, showcasing the best of the old and new guards of roots music. Spiers & Boden's star has been in the ascendancy for a while now, both as a duo and with their storming folk big band, Bellowhead, who'll be blowing away all-comers on the big festival stages this summer. As a duo they're no less entertaining, mixing musical wizardry with wit and warmth and managing the difficult task of fitting the bill on the smallest or largest of stages. That their collective mantelpieces must now be groaning under the weight of folk awards is fitting testimony to their talents.

If Spiers and Boden have made the past half a decade their own, The Fureys & Davey Arthur have over 30 years of experience behind them, including, for an Irish folk band, a rare UK chart hit with 'When You Were Sweet Sixteen'. Dublin brothers George and Eddy Furey, along with Davey Arthur have toured the world, playing their takes on classic Irish folk songs and tonight's show should include all the favourites, including the immortal 'Green Fields Of France'.

SUNDAY 10th

BIG COUNTRY: O2 Academy – The Scottish rockers continue to play their guitars that sound like bagpipes, Alarm frontman Mike Peters replacing the late Stuart Adamson on vocals.

MONDAY 11th

THE CLARE FREE BAND: The Bullingdon – Electric blues-rock in the vein of Bonnie Raitt from the local singer and guitarist.



Friday 15th

WILLIE NILE: The Bullingdon

Hardly a household name in this country, Stateside, Willie Nile (real name Robert Noonan) is one of the most critically-lauded cult artists of the past 30 years, going back to the late-70s when the Buffalo-born singer and multi-instrumentalist made his name on the Greenwich Village folk scene. A 1980 debut album on Arista saw him compared to everyone from Bob Dylan and Buddy Holly to The Clash and handpicked to tour with The Who, but protracted legal problems put a stop on his career until the late-80s when he re-emerged with a new deal for Columbia and an album featuring guest appearances from Richard Thompson, Loudon Wainwright III and Roger McGuinn. Since then he's performed regularly with Bruce Springsteen at the Boss's biggest Stateside stadium shows, as well as working with Ringo Starr, Tori Amos and Elvis Costello. If critical praise hasn't always translated into commercial success, Nile remains highly respected amongst his more famous peers, continuing to create a vibrant form of rootsy blue-collar rock that is partway between Springsteen and Dylan. He's over in the UK to plug his seventh studio album, 'The Innocent Ones', but it's live – and particularly in such intimate confines as this – that he really shines.

GROANBOX: The Red Lion, Stratton Audley – Raw, eclectic blues, Cajun and gypsy folk from the American-Canadian trio, drawing comparisons to Ry Cooder, Seasick Steve, Gogol Bordello and Dr John.

TUESDAY 12th

THE FUREYS & DAVEY ARTHUR: Oxford Town Hall – Classic trad folk from the Irish legends – *see main preview*
JAZZ CLUB: The Bullingdon – Funky keyboard-led jazz from The Howard Peacock Quintet.
GOOD VIBRATIONS: Café Tarifa
OPEN MIC SESSION: The Port Mahon

WEDNESDAY 13th

BOWLING FOR SOUP ACOUSTIC: O2 Academy – An acoustic evening with Jaret and Erik.
AS GODS + DROWN IN ENTROPY + PROSPEKT + THE CRUSHING: The Wheatsheaf – A night of progressive metal, with the return of Hampshire's As Gods, with support from Brighton's prog-core outfit Drown In Entropy and local starlets Prospekt.
PHAT SESSIONS: The Cellar – Fortnightly open jam session with house band The Phat Sessions Collective playing hip hop, Latin, ska, drum&bass, reggae and funk, plus resident DJ Fu.
HIGH JINKS: The Chapel, Banbury

THURSDAY 14th

KILL CITY SAINTS + HOT HOOVES + ZEM: The Bullingdon – Country-rock from KCS, with support from Hot Hooves, formed by former-ATL? frontman Mac and erstwhile Talulah Gosh and Heavenly guitarist Pete Momtchiloff.
GILLESPIE: The Port Mahon – Live show for the local rapper.
FAULTLINE + LIGHT DIVIDED + AVENGE VULTURE ATTACK: The Hobgoblin, Bicester – Jambox rock night.
CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre
OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon
BLUES JAM: Jack Russell, Marston
WORDPLAY: The Cellar – Hip hop club night.

FRIDAY 15th

WILLIE NILE: The Bullingdon – Stadium-sized Americana from the New Jersey cult hero – *see main preview*
TAMARA PARSONS-BAKER: The Wheatsheaf – Emotive and expressive acoustic rocking from local singer and guitarist Tamara.
FUNKY FRIDAY: The Bullingdon
FOUNDATION REGGAE: East Oxford Community Centre
WE ARE ELEMENTS: The Cellar – Garage, dubstep and house club night.
FAULTLINE + LIGHT DIVIDED + AVENGE VULTURE ATTACK: The Wheatsheaf, Banbury

SATURDAY 16th

SPIKEFEST: O2 Academy – A Viking banquet of metal pleasures – *see main preview*
BENGAL TIGER, SHANGHAI DRAGON: Oxford Playhouse – A night of world fusion sounds as composer Tony Haynes draws on Indian and Bangladeshi ragas and time cycles, combining them with traditional Chinese show tunes and folk music and hefty dashes of jazz improvisation and Latin and African rhythms. Among the musicians performing are sitar and dilruba player Baluji Shrivastav, tabla player Yousuf Ali Khan, singer Lucy Rahman, Chinese harp virtuoso Zhu Xiao Meng and UK jazz players Claude Deppa (trumpet) and Louise Elliot (tenor sax and flute).
EMPTY VESSELS + VON BRAUN: The Wheatsheaf – Great old-fashioned blues-rock and proto-metal from Empty Vessels, harking

back to Blue Cheer and Led Zep. Support from local indie rockers Von Braun.

BRICKWORK LIZARDS + LE MORTE SUBITE: The Cellar – Brickwork Lizards launch their debut album, 'Zaman', their eclectic blend of hip hop, Arabic music and jazz having long marked them out as one of Oxford's most exotic live bands.
LEE THOMPSON'S SKA ORCHESTRA + ONE-STOP EXPERIENCE + THE SKANX + GLADDY WAX SOUNDSYSTEM: The Regal – Madness saxophonist and songwriter Thompson brings his own ska outfit to town, leading a night of ska, rocksteady and roots, ably supported by Jennie Bellestar's One-Stop Experience and renowned Jamaican soundsystem Gladdy Wax, playing ska, dancehall, rocksteady and more.
SHEPHERD'S PIE: Fat Lil's, Witney – Hard rock covers, from AC/DC to Guns'n'Roses.
PROPAGANDA + TRASHY + ROOM 101: O2 Academy
DJ SEX MACHINE: The Bullingdon

SUNDAY 17th

BEETROOT JAM: The Port Mahon – Live bands and open jam session.

MONDAY 18th

THE CARVIN JONES BAND: The Bullingdon – Texan roadhouse blues-rock from electric guitarist and singer Jones and his band, inspired by the likes of Stevie Ray Vaughan, Jimi Hendrix and John Lee Hooker.
MAGNUM + GWYN ASHTON: O2 Academy – The reformed British hard rockers hit the road again, reviving their 80s heyday, playing songs from Top 10 albums 'Wings Of Heaven', 'Storyteller's Night' and 'Vigilante' as well as tracks from their latest 'Visitation' album. Support from Australian-born, locally based blues-rock guitarist Gwyn Ashton, kicking out a raw, rootsy electric blues and garage rock, inspired by Led Zep, Hendrix and White Stripes.

TUESDAY 19th

JAZZ CLUB: The Bullingdon – With a live set from The Hugh Turner Band.
GOOD VIBRATIONS: Café Tarifa
OPEN MIC SESSION: The Port Mahon

WEDNESDAY 20th

METRONOMY + CONNAN MOCKASIN + KEYBOARD CHOIR: O2 Academy – Electro-a-go-go from the synthtastic Metronomy – *see main preview*
SMALL MACHINE + MOIETY + CRAYON: The Wheatsheaf – Grungy hard rocking from Small Machine, plus airy semi-acoustic pop from Moiety.
FREE RANGE: The Cellar

THURSDAY 21st

THE EPSTEIN + LEFT WITH PICTURES: The Bullingdon – Elegantly cinematic country-rock from The Epstein, launching their new EP tonight.
TIM WHITEHEAD & THE SPIN TRIO: The Wheatsheaf – The weekly Spin jazz club welcomes tenor sax player Tim Whitehead

along as part of this year's Oxford Jazz Festival.

ELISA CALEB QUARTET: The Ashmolean Dining Room

ROGER BEAUJOLAIS: The Jacqueline du Pre Building – The local guitarist plays as part of the jazz festival.

THE JEZ COOK TRIO: The Half Moon

DEIRDRE CARTWRIGHT & CATHY DYSON: Café Tarifa – Jazz guitar duo pay tribute to the late New York guitarist Emily Remler as part of the Oxford jazz Festival.

AS WE CLIMB + RUN FROM ROBOTS: Fat Lil's, Witney

ELLIOT VANDERHYDE + DAUGHTER OF DAVIS + PRAXIS BOLD: The Port Mahon – Melancholy acoustic pop from Elliot, plus 60s-style soul and folk from sisters duo Daughters of Davis.

CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford

Community Centre

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon

Saturday 16th

SPIKEFEST:

O2 Academy

Nightshift's metal special issue last November has helped elevate the standing of local heavy bands and more and more of them are playing at the Academy. Today's eight-band show, organised by local metal club Skeletor, is a great showcase event for some of the best metal bands in town and beyond. **Desert Storm** and **Taste My Eyes** should be no strangers to gig regulars: the former's molten stoner-blues take on classic rock riffage is ferocious but melodic, touching bases as diverse as Killdozer and Hendrix, while the latter feature former-JOR frontman Ben Hollyer, kicking out a splenetic racket, big on brutality and screaming. Also on the bill are hardcore thrash titans **Dedlok**, leaning towards Bolththrower's none-more-heavy scheme of things; stylishly technical newcomers **Prospekt**, finding common ground betwixt Slayer and Rush; ramped-up thrash outfit **Crysis**, inspired by Lamb of God and Pantera, and melodic death metallers **Aethara**. From out of town come Nottingham tech-metallers **Galleons** and Southampton's thrash crew **Terrathorn**. Spikefest coincides with the birthday of popular local metal fan Matt Jones, who died last year and fans are invited to celebrate his life as well as a local metal scene that goes from strength to strength.



photo: Johnny Moto

BLUES JAM: Jack Russell, Marston
DYING BREED + THE MARK + VIOLET BONES: The Hobgoblin, Bicester – Jambox rock night.

FRIDAY 22nd

A HAWK & A HACKSAW + WE AERONAUTS + BRICKWORK LIZARDS + CAT MATADOR + MESSAGE TO BEARS + THE BRAINDEAD COLLECTIVE: The Bullingdon (4.30pm) – Exotic eastern European and Balkan folk from AH&AH headlining this Pindrop Performance special – see main preview

SOWETO KINCH + BIG COLOURS BIG BAND: Oxford Town Hall – The Oxford Jazz Festival's main event features saxophonist Soweto Kinch, returning to the city where he obtained his university degree. Inspired by Wynton Marsalis and mentored by Courtney Pine, Kinch has become one of the UK's leading young jazz talents, winning myriad BBC Jazz Awards and a MOBO as well as being nominated for the Mercury Prize. Tonight's show features tracks from his most recent 'New Emancipation' album. Local jazz big band Big Colours support.

THE ORIGINAL RABBIT FOOT SPASM BAND: The Jericho Tavern – The local 1930s-style New Orleans speakeasy jazz rioters play as part of the Oxford Jazz Festival.

BEHOLDER: Phoenix Picturehouse

FUNKY FRIDAY: The Bullingdon

FOUNDATION REGGAE: East Oxford

Community Centre

HEADINGTON HILLBILLIES: The Chester Arms

ABSOLUTE BOWIE: Fat Lil's, Witney – Bowie tribute act.

SATURDAY 23rd

DIVE DIVE + CHRIS TT: O2 Academy – Postponed from last month, local punk-pop heroes Dive Dive head off on a joint-headline tour with songsmith Chris TT, promoting new album, 'Potential', and enjoying a stint out under their own steam after being on the road with the very great Frank Turner.

DESERT STORM + BEARD OF ZEUSS + KOMRAD + MOTHER CORONA: The Cellar – Seriously heavyweight stoner-metal frenzy at tonight's stand-off between psychedelic behemoths Desert Storm and Beard Of Zeuss, while Komrad offer crunching prog-core noise in support.

JUNE THE BAND + MINOR COLES: The Wheatsheaf – Local indie double bill.

BOBBY WELLINS QUARTET + ALYN SHIPTON: The North Wall, Summertown – The renowned tenor saxophonist plays as part of the Jazz Festival.

ALY TADROS & CHLOE CHARLES: Café Tarifa (1pm) – Harmony-heavy Cajun duo Tadros and Charles headline a full day of live music.

THE NICHOLAS MEIER GROUP: St. Michael's Church, Cornmarket – Flamenco, Latin and middle-eastern sounds from the jazz guitarist.

THE ROB TERRY TRIO: Modern Art Oxford – Modern jazz pianist.



Wednesday 20th

METRONOMY / CONNAN MOCKASIN / KEYBOARD CHOIR: O2 Academy

Having undergone a major line-up change since their last album, 'Nights Out', Metronomy now sound like a more organic and accessible pop act than the oddball, knowingly ironic electro-dance act they once were. Now playing with a live drummer and bassist, they sound funkier than before, although at heart still the same supreme synth-pop act they ever were. Led by Joseph Mount, possibly better known for his work as a remixer for everyone from Goldfrapp and Gorillaz to Ladytron, Metronomy have ditched the kitsch lightbulb t-shirts and endearingly daft synchronised dancing but remain quirky and fun, their most recent single, 'She Wants' a great mix-up of Cure, Kraftwerk and 'Dance'-era Numan. A third album, 'The English Riviera' is out this month and after making their name supporting Foals, Bloc Party and Klaxons, they're leading the way for electro-pop revivalism. Tonight's main support, Connan Mockasin, should ensure the oddball pop count remains high, with a lo-fi psychedelic take on electro-pop, while local synth orchestra The Keyboard Choir conjure grandly-proportioned electronic soundscapes, taking inspiration from Eno, Kraftwerk, The Orb and more.

FUSED: Fat Lil's, Witney – 90s and noughties indie and rock covers, from Kings of Leon to Killers and Green Day.

ACE BUSHY STRIPTEASE + THE GULLIVERS: The Port Mahon – Twee punky indie pop from Birmingham's Ace Bushy, plus ethereal pop from The Gullivers in support.

PROPAGANDA + TRASHY + ROOM 101: O2 Academy

DUBSTEP: The Bullingdon

SUNDAY 24th

NORMA WINSTONE, GLAUCO VENIER & KLAUS GESING: The Randolph – The Grammy-nominated trio of singer Winstone, Italian pianist Venier and German reeds player Gesing come to the Oxford Jazz Festival.

ZARA MacFARLANE QUARTET:

Malmaison

BLUES JAM: Fat Lil's, Witney (3pm) – Open jam session.



Friday 22nd

A HAWK AND A HACKSAW: The Bullingdon

Jackdaw With Crowbar; Sparrow & The Workshop; A Hawk & A Hacksaw: what is it about those darned birds and their fascination with dangerous tools? Not that there's anything threatening about New Mexico's A Hawk & A Hacksaw, the band formed by former-Neutral Milk Hotel chap Jeremy Barnes and violinist Heather Trost. Eclectic inventiveness is more their bag, the duo's journeys into sound taking in everything from Jewish klezmer, through Mexican mariachi to gypsy waltzes, onto which AH&AH project their own particular brand of bucolic Eastern European and Balkan folk to create something that's both bleak and eerie and otherworldly escapist. Having set up their own label, LM Duplication, to release other Eastern European music, they've also just put out their own, fifth, album, 'Cervantine'. The duo's set is part of a special celebration gig by Pindrop Performances who excel at bringing exotic leftfield world music to Oxford and today's supporting cast includes local acts We Aeronauts, Brickwork Lizards, Message To Bears, Cat Matador and The Braindead Collective to make for a suitably varied and esoteric cocktail.

MONDAY 25th

ROB TOGNONI: The Bullingdon – Driving blues-rock from the Tasmanian guitarist and his power trio band, back at the Famous Monday Blues.

TUESDAY 26th

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

GOOD VIBRATIONS: Café Tarifa

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Port Mahon

WEDNESDAY 27th

PHAT SESSIONS: The Cellar

THURSDAY 28th

AGNESS PIKE + RELEASE THE BATS + THE CELLAR FAMILY: The Bullingdon –

Molten thrash-metal in the vein of Machine Head and Anthrax from Agness Pike, and fronted by the reliably lunatic posturing of Martin Spear, plus great post-punk noise somewhere between Young Knives and McLusky from Cellar Family. No information on Release The Bats but if they're even vaguely anything like The Birthday Party, we're there. **PROHIBITION SMOKERS CLUB + HALF DECENT: Fat Lil's Witney** – Jam session with expansive ambient pop collective PSC, plus full sets from both bands. **MUNKINPURE + STOLEN PEACE: The Port Mahon** – Ballsy blues-rock, funk and stadium-rock balladry from South Africa's Munkinpure, plus heavyweight blues-rock from Derbyshire's Stolen Peace. **A WORLD DEFINED: The Hobgoblin, Bicester** **CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford community Centre** **OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon** **BLUES JAM: Jack Russell, Marston**

FRIDAY 29th

KATY B: O2 Academy – Already sold-out show from the r'n'b and dubstep chart star – *see main preview*

SPOKES: O2 Academy – Euphoric strings and harmonies-drenched choral pop from Manchester's Ninja Tunes-signed outfit.

THE ROCK OF TRAVOLTA + BLEEDING HEART NARRATIVE + VON BRAUN: The Bullingdon – Symphonic electro-rocking from TROT, plugging their new album, 'Fine Lines', which sounds like it should be the soundtrack to some spectacularly violent sci-fi epic. Folktronica support from Bleeding Heart Narrative and dark-hued new wave pop from Von Braun in support.

ABOVE US THE WAVES + THE DAN HUTCHINGS BAND + JESS & NESS: The Wheatsheaf – Melodic post-rocking from AUTW.

ALPHABET BACKWARDS + MINOR COLES + WINTER OLYMPICS: The Cellar – Celebrate posh baldy fellow and posh commoner type's wedding nuptials with the suitably joyous sound of sunshine electro-popsters Alphabet Backwards and chums.

DEFINITELY MIGHTBE + ADORED: Fat Lil's, Witney – Oasis and Stone Roses tributes.

ALL-DAYER: The Red Lion, Yarnton – Full free day of live music, featuring The Mighty Redox, The Pete Fryer Band, Jeremy Hughes, Moon Leopard, Jamming At Jack's, Mark Atherton, Mark Bosley, Beard Of Destiny, Jack Bourne, Maeve Bayton, Headington Hillbillies, The New Moon and more.

FUNKY FRIDAY: The Bullingdon FOUNDATION REGGAE: East Oxford Community Centre

HEADINGTON HILLBILLIES: The Red Lion, Yarnton

HQ: The Cellar – Drum&bass club night.

SATURDAY 30th

GAPPY TOOTH INDUSTRIES with THE DACOITS + KAMIKAZE TEST PILOTS + MacGILLIVRAY: The Wheatsheaf – Polished PJ Harvey-styled rocking from The Dacoits at tonight's Gappy Tooth club. They're joined by Afrobeat-infused funk-rockers Kamikaze Test Pilots and bleak ghost-folk songstress MacGillivray on a characteristically eclectic bill. **SIMPLE: The Bullingdon** – House and electro club night.

V8: Fat Lil's, Witney – Hard rock covers.

PROPAGANDA + TRASHY + ROOM 101: O2 Academy

MAY EVE with FRESH OUT THE BOX & DJ FU: The Cellar – Hip hop, funk, reggae, disco, house and techno into the early hours of May Morning.

BLACK SKIES BURN + CIRCLE US: The Wheatsheaf, Banbury – Extreme metal and hardcore from BSB at tonight's Jambox metal session.

Friday 29th

KATIE B: O2 Academy

Tonight's show is already long-since sold out, which hardly surprising given young Katie Brien from Peckham's current status as the voice for hire in dubstep/r'n'b/funky circles and recent chart success. Hers is a star that look likely to shine even brighter in the coming months with the release of her debut album, 'On A Mission'. From singing hi-NRG covers of old Katrina & The Waves hits under the name Kattie B, through a stint as Baby Katie on the Ministry In Sound label, Katie found her own feet after working with Magnetic Man and being championed by Geenius. Top 5 solo debut hit 'Katie On A Mission' was lightweight, pop-friendly dubstep, but its follow-up, 'Lights Out' benefited hugely from the more assertive and characterful presence of Ms Dynamite. Perhaps it's her BRIT School background that makes Katie sound a bit too polished for all her soulful vocal chops, but her perky, fresh-faced image and radio-friendly take on new dance sounds has made her a shoe-in for greater success and, doubtless, a good few awards when the next season comes round.



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7th **BACK&TOTHELEFT** presents **SPRING OFFENSIVE / GUNNING FOR TAMAR / DEER CHICAGO**

14th **KILL CITY SAINTS / HOT HOOVES / ZEM**

21st **THE EPSTEIN / LEFT WITH PICTURES**

28th **AGNESS PIKE / RELEASE THE BATS / THE CELLAR FAMILY**

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Funk, soul, boogie and R&B. 10.30pm-2.30am; £2.

Early Friday shows

1st **NINE-STONE COWBOY / MOGMATIC**

8th **MACKATING**

15th **WILLIE NILE**

22nd **PINDROP PERFORMANCES** presents **A HAWK & A HACKSAW / WE AERONAUTS / BRICKWORK LIZARDS / CAT MATADOR / MESSAGE TO BEARS / THE BRAINDEAD COLLECTIVE. 4.30pm / £12adv**

29th **BACK&TOTHELEFT** presents **THE ROCK OF TRAVOLTA / BLEEDING HEART NARRATIVE / VON BRAUN**

Includes entry to FUNKY FRIDAY afterwards

Saturdays

2nd **LANDSCAPE** – old and new school dance – 10-3am; £7

9th **SELECTA** – drum'n'bass – 10-3am

16th **DJ SEX MACHINE**

23rd **DUBSTEP**

30th **SIMPLE** – house, techno – 10-4am

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THE WHEATSHEAF

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Sat 9th Alex Behind Logic Present...

BORDERVILLE + BROTHERS WELSH + THE YARNS

Wed 13th

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Fri 15th

TAMARA PARSONS BAKER

Sat 16th Alex Behind Logic Present...

EMPTY VESSELS + VON BRAUN

Wed 20th Alotia Present...

SMALL MACHINE + BLUE KITE + CRAYON

Sat 23rd Alex Behind Logic Present...

JUNE THE BAND (PAN) + MINOR COLES

Fri 29th Three Blind Mice Present...

ABOVE US THE WAVES + DAN HUTCHINS BAND + JESS & NESS

Sat 30th Gypsy Tooth Industries Present...

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MOGWAI / THE TWILIGHT SAD

The Regal

The Twilight Sad's last album was called 'Forget The Night Ahead' - words which, with hindsight, might have been sage advice whispered in their ear as they stepped on stage.

The quintet are the latest in a long line of bands to enjoy the patronage of fellow Glaswegians Mogwai - Fuck Buttons, Dead Meadow, Bardo Pond, Sophia, Part Chimp forerunners Ligament, to name just a few - and for the most part struggle to justify their place in such illustrious company. The disjunction between that searing and deliciously bleak second record (which recalls turn-of-the-century Idlewild gazing intently shoewards but which is largely ignored in the setlist) and this scuzzy shambles, in which out-of-tune vocals collide with a stodgy mix, is almost as great as the huge disconnect between band and audience.

But then something happens, 'Cold Days From The Birdhouse' specifically, which shoves vocalist James Graham up front alone to lament "ruined plans" before exploding into life and suddenly everything's different. The shy Graham, sheepish between songs and hitherto side-on to the crowd, is now gazing straight out, slowly fixing each of us with a stare while mouthing incantations rendered mysterious and unintelligible by the dense racket in which his bandmates are cloaking him. Unnerving and, ultimately, remarkable.

If Oxfordshire's own Radiohead have a rival for

the title of the most influential band in Britain, it would be tonight's headliners. At around the same time as the White Stripes convinced a legion of aspiring musicians that bassists were superfluous, Mogwai were busy demonstrating the value of doing away with vocals. Why cripple your band with some cretin caterwauling through clichés when you could just let the music speak for itself?

Hard to believe it's now fourteen years since they made their grand entrance with 'Young Team'.

In that time they've flirted with mainstream popularity, soundtracked countless documentaries and closed a sun-drenched Saturday afternoon set on Glastonbury's Pyramid Stage with their 25-minute-long version of a Jewish hymn. As you do.

2008's 'The Hawk Is Howling' underlined that Mogwai certainly hadn't lost their knack for naming songs ('I'm Jim Morrison, I'm Dead' and 'I Love You, I'm Going To Blow Up Your School', anyone?); ironic, really, that instrumentalists should have such a way with words, but it did suggest a bunch of pioneers starting to fall into the trap of sleepwalking in their own footsteps.

This year's follow-up, 'Hardcore Will Never Die, But You Will', contributes opener 'White Noise', and it's perhaps a mark of where they're now at. Whereas in the past a song with

that title would have gleefully handed you your ears back in a box, now it's a sumptuous, piano-led comfort blanket. Not that that's a bad thing, as it happens. Unexpectedly, gentler tracks 'Auto Rock' and 'Hunted By A Freak' initially hit closer to the bullseye than the likes of 'Rano Pano', which doesn't prove that thrilling once each of the guitars has come in in turn, grinding on the others like rusty cogs in heavy machinery - a poor relation to older, more savage beasts like the unaired 'Ratts Of The Capital' or 'Glasgow Mega-Snake'. But 'San Pedro' gives greater satisfaction and 'Helicon 1' is sublime, a moment of class more than sufficient to excuse Barry Burns' heinous knitwear. It's swiftly followed by 'Hardcore...'s epic climax, 'You're Lionel Richie' - a song named, or so I heard, after the only words a hungover Stuart Braithwaite could muster when he encountered the great man at an airport. Occasional violinist Luke Sutherland appears to perform vocals on arguably their most conventional song to date, 'Mexican Grand Prix', but it's blown away by an encore which features a towering 'Like Herod', the noise eruption still heart-stopping after all these years, and the viciously heavy-duty riffage of 'Batcat'.

The godfathers of post-rock might be growing old gracefully, but they're not doing it quietly.

Ben Woolhead

THE STRANGLERS / WILKO JOHNSON

O2 Academy

It's good to see Wilko Johnson still sliding edgily around a stage, just like he did in the 70s with legendary Canvey Island pub rockers Dr Feelgood. Still ably assisted by The Blockheads' Norman Watt-Roy on bass, he provides proof of the enduring appeal of the blues. Though about to hit retirement age, the effortless way he fires out riffs and lead runs serves as a lesson to today's young pretenders.

Tonight's packed audience is far more varied in age and gender than expected, in fact I've never seen so many women at a punk gig. Not that The Stranglers' music was particularly punky, the link lay more in their uncompromising attitude and lifestyle. As if to confirm this they open with 'I Feel Like A Wog', which was pretty un-PC even in 1978, and that's saying something. Singer Baz Warne does a competent job at taking on Hugh Conwell's songs, while his three bandmates have all been knocking them out since 1975. Drummer Jet Black is now 72 but doesn't look it; bassist Jean-Jacques Burnel still exudes lean Gallic cool and retains his light musical touch, acquired from his time as a classical guitarist. Only Dave Greenfield appears markedly changed, looking tiny behind his rack of keyboards, the pudding bowl haircut and long moustache replaced by an anonymous crew cut. His unmistakable

rippling style, with its nod to The Doors, remains pivotal to their sound, the guitar as before staying sparse and low in the mix.

Though their long career has progressed down some unexpected avenues and changes of style, tonight's set concentrates as expected on the early years and its sing-along hit singles. With Burnel returning to lead vocal on favourites like 'Five Minutes', this is as authentic a Stranglers experience as you can have in 2011. But the night isn't quite the triumph it could have been. Maybe it's the night of the week (is there some rule that says gigs like this have to be on a Tuesday?) or could there be a whiff of weariness in the air? Certainly the lacklustre mix doesn't help. Or maybe it's just that The Stranglers' longstanding preoccupation with death and the darker corners of life precludes too much celebration. But then comes 'Duchess', a concise and eloquent tale about a lonely aristocrat, and we're reminded of the time when their position in the pop A-League was unimpeachable. To close, 'No More Heroes' hammers the nail in.

The Stranglers were always unpredictable, hard to read and slightly unsettling, and on tonight's showing little has changed.

Art Laguna

THE OSCILLATION / LISTING SHIPS / VILESWARM

The Wheatsheaf

The purpose of instrumentals is to...? You at the back there,...to?.

Okay, let me help you out. Evoke? Transport? Instrumentals bring the sounds; your mind, assisted or otherwise, brings the means of enjoyment.

Vileswarm toy with these concepts. Lee Riley (also of Euhedral) and renowned local electronic experimenter David K Frampton turn their music over and look up its arse, not out of pretentiousness but because they think it might be cool. They explore the negative space of sound, the sound around the shape of sound, and take you to a period in pre-time that even Brian Cox can't imagine, where the hum of an unlit photon is wrapped round a simple funereal, plucked refrain, and they exorcise and swell it for the complete, one-track, set of twenty-two minutes, using electronica, bowed guitar and Gregorian howls on what appears to be the handset of a CB rig. It's both primordial and post-apocalyptic. You can't argue with that.

On the strength of this their debut gig, Listing Ships could turn out to be one of the better 'supergroups' Oxford has produced. Bits of Sunnyside, Witches and Piexo all bring to the party the tightness of their experience and don't waste time in

getting downright brutal. Drummer David Balch, stripped to the waist like a mad-eyed Yakudo, and bassist Stuart Fowkes create the sort of almighty ruckus during the numerous build-ups, that could easily be marketed as a chest rattling expectorant. Post-rock as medicine. The satisfying result is an organic Holy Fuck-type mix of jazz and techno groove born of out of rock's last roll.

The dense amniotic experience of The Oscillation turns your brain into a blurry snow-globe of psychedelic shoe-gaze-cum-Krautrock. Tonight, touring new album 'Veils', it's plain to see that they've at last found their personal space, less Stone Roses via The Telescopes and more a belladonnian haze of their own making, with the occasional nod towards Spaceman 3. They even have an oil slide projectionist with them, who sits off-stage, in the dark, beaver-like an alchemist over glowing lights and racks of colourful eyedroppers, transforming the room into a mindwarp pavilion, and by the time they are deep into the pulsing 'Future Echo' everyone is playing I-spy with my third-eye, far, far away on Planet Gong, while dancing for world peace.

Paul Carrera

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FLATS / PHANTOM THEORY / DEAD JERICHO

The Jericho Tavern

Dead Jerichos take a while to warm up tonight; it's three songs into their set before they even remove their coats, Leo Rayner engulfed in his fur-lined hood as he thrashes his kit. Soon though they're cooking on gas, frontman Craig Evans sporting a new quiff that makes him, combined with his Fred Perry shirt, look like a young Dave Gahan trying to sneak into a northern soul all-nighter. These days Dead Jerichos' set comes with so much reverb it sounds like a calamity in a cutlery factory echoing back off a Himalayan valley, and it's a glorious if odd collision of sounds, uptight and moddish but tinged with subterranean darkness. Back in the 80s such a combination would never have been allowed: mods were too busy kicking chunks out of art-school goth kids to think about nicking their music back then, but this is what 4AD's roster might have sounded like if

they'd been up for signing boot boys back in 84.

If some of Dead Jerichos' intricacies are lost under the welter of effects, Phantom Theory dispense with almost all subtleties from the off, heaving straight into a five-megaton barrage of gruff, agricultural riffage and proceedin to make hay like Led Zeppelin being systemically dismembered by a particularly truculent Black Flag. Modern technology means two people can make a lot of noise in today's music but it bears repeating – Phantom Theory make a lot of noise for a duo. They're all battering-ram beats, primal hardcore riffs and dual shouty vocals and if it does them an injustice to describe them as a barrage of noise, we're enjoying it all too much to care about stuff like justice.

Flats are probably screaming about justice. Then again it might be their shopping list for all

that we can decipher. Scrawny frontman Dan Devine, with his untidy explosion of hair scrunched under a baseball cap and dressed in skin-tight white jeans, looks like a cross between a lost Ramone and Otto from *The Simpsons* but fancies himself as the new Steve Ignorant. His band, after an odd, sludgcore opening that's more Melvins than anything, settle into a grindcore remake of old Crass and Conflict agit-punk thrash while he rails against something and nothing. Turns out he's Alan McGee's long-lost son, which might explain some of the current hype surrounding the band. It's hugely disappointing, especially since Flats' singles so far have been decent retro-punk noise. Really, if Conflict's Colin Jerwood wasn't a militant vegan, he'd eat this sorry bunch of posers for breakfast.

Ian Chesterton

KING CHARLES

The Jericho Tavern

King Charles is an odd character. He's the type that makes you think he'll be arty, creative, aloof, even unreliable. He possibly plays Devil's advocate regarding the Shoreditch fashion scene. He is all hair and attitude, a delight for teenagers. But this trait can be dangerous because what really matters in the end is the music performed, ladies and gentlemen, with or without wigs.

So King Charles is ready to burn down the stage, with band in tow, of which his sister is a member, who apparently studied at Oxford University. And there you have it, her classmates abound like his extravagant hair does but so far, after the first and second tune, this music is a mish-mash of distorted Devendra Banhart-like pop with indie strokes. Even though the melodies are decent, they don't take off into

smooth flight and the eternally relaxed persona of King Charles makes the affair look lazy rather than comfortable.

The most obscure songs work the best; perhaps that's just my personal desire to see a serious King Charles offering some quality and maturity. Either way, 'Time of Eternity' and 'Mr. Flick' seem to define him in a much-improved light. This is when folky, candied harmonies are pretty much ditched and proper rock-based beats incorporated; only then does the act becomes more dynamic and expansive armed with such introversion and aggression. For the rest, the guitar is flat, the drums sound like tin, the odd dance-like-bears-and-crocodiles look stupid and the never-ending loops of notes compressed in one bar at the end of songs are totally unnecessary.

King Charles, for all the love you put on your hair, you should do the same with your entire performance. A pity.

Liane Escorza

ASAF SIRKIS BAND

The Wheatsheaf

Israeli ex-pat Asaf Sirkis is best known as the long-time drummer in Gilad Atzmon's Orient House Ensemble as well being in the excellent Nicholas Meier Group. He has been a frequent visitor to the Spin stage with both and has a reputation among the regulars as a class act. So no surprise the place is nearly full and there's a tingle of anticipation in the air, especially as tonight, instead of his regular guitar-based electronic trio, Asaf is leading a mini jazz supergroup with a different instrumental line-up. Regular lead guitarist Tassos Spiliotopoulos is on hand but alongside him is Mercury-nominated Kit Downes, forsaking his piano for bass guitar duties, and much else, on the organ, and with Mark Lockheart from Polar Bear on saxophones.

Both sets tonight feature Asaf as composer with the band playing tunes from the trio's album 'Letting Go' and taking Asaf's tunes into different territories by strongly emphasising the dreamy, filmic elements and hardly picking up on the early jazz-rock sound which features on the CD.

The band quickly establishes that they are all about an ego free group ethic. There is very little of the tired jazz formula of stating a theme and then each player

soloing. They are all about listening and responding to each other and playing duets more often than soloing.

For most of the first set the band draw you into their sound world and then gently tip you off balance. Just as you're thinking the gig is too quiet for a band with massive powerhouse potential, they unleash 'Life Itself' which Asaf introduces as a homage to all the motorway miles his bands clock up. It's fast, loud and dark with great organ and impossibly fast drumming, a car crash about to happen and deeply satisfying.

Whether it is the buzz hanging over from 'Life...' or the interval beer, both band and audience seem so much more into it in their second set and the intensity in the room climbs whether the music is the quieter spacey likes of 'Ida' or the upbeat vibe of a funky New Orleans- and Arabic-influenced cover of a Thelonious Monk tune. When Downes plays an almost spiritual organ intro to 'Desert Vision' you could hear the proverbial pin drop and I love it when Lockheart conjures Arabic sounds from his sax. Most of the second half Asaf has his eyes shut and the smile of a man totally in the zone.

Colin May

WILD SWIM

The Cellar

On paper it seems inappropriate to have a band like Wild Swim – glitchy but predominantly serene electro-flavoured ambient pop – playing to an up-for-it Fresh Out The Box club crowd, but as soon as the quintet's opening burst of scattershot beats heralds their arrival, you can see how they fit in.

Much of the tremulous invention and subtlety that recently found them winning Nightshift's Demo of the Month does get lost in the mix and amid the chatter of the crowd, but it allows them to ramp up their game at times, the busily thrumming clamour of guitars, electronics and beats providing a firm foundation for Richard Sansom's rich, powerful voice, an unusual instrument in itself, veering into something that might almost be some off-kilter Japanese rock opera at one point.

Wild Swim's rarefied take on electro-infected pop will inevitably draw comparisons with Radiohead and recent Thom Yorke

collaborator Flying Lotus, but there's something of Talk Talk's perfectionism about the way they deftly link up each instrument, while the lysergic fuzz surrounding tonight's performance makes them sound like the house band in some *Bladerunner*-world jazz club.

There are times where Wild Swim seem to lose their focus, but equally it could simply be the intricacies of their sound getting trampled under the weight of venue noises and it's telling they make their mark better on funkier numbers nearer the end, the closing song leaning into the shimmer and thump of big beat.

A band like this will always sound better without the distractions that come with a live gig and you wonder where a sympathetic and imaginative producer might take them, but Wild Swim – all still in their teens – have got more than enough about them to warrant immediate investigation.

Dale Kattack

CAITLIN ROSE

The Jericho Tavern

Caitlin Rose has subtly snuck under the radar in many respects, her country-filled melodies receiving rather less recognition than tonight's performance suggests she deserves. Whilst her songs are somewhat downbeat, even melancholy at times, their wry look at life combines with her humorous stage banter culminating to make those present realise they've witnessed something downright special.

The Jericho maybe isn't the ideal place to witness such an affair and I'm trapped with no chance of ever catching a glimpse of Caitlin's face. To be blown over, in spite of this, says it all. Her voice fills the room with earthy tones, never missing a note despite singing with sincerity and strength. Her PR people like to suggest she follows a lineage from Patsy Cline and maybe she does, but in many ways to create that comparison, or in fact any comparison, does her no justice at all because Caitlin has a spark and virtue all of her own.

She opens with the ethereal 'Things Change', before running

through a set of honky-tonk sounds which fuse country with Americana. Whether she's singing about getting drunk in 'Bottles', therapy in 'Learnin' To Ride' or lost love in 'Shanghai Cigarettes', somehow she makes what should be something forlorn fairly uplifting, and it's clear my thoughts are echoed by a capacity crowd who are captivated by her every move.

Nevertheless my own disgruntled thoughts around not being able to see are echoed by Caitlin herself who rants, "How am I supposed to do an encore in these places? Climb the fucking rafters or hide behind the air conditioning unit?" but it is coupled with a giggle that highlights her childish side. As she huddles with her band towards the back of the stage before returning with a cover of Randy Newman's 'Marie', Caitlin manages to sum herself up. Her lyrics are not the most sophisticated and the music is at times not faultless, but her unabashed attitude to both song and performance carry her through.

Lisa Ward

RALPH TOWNER & PAOLO FRESU

The North Wall

Tonight's musical adventures, in the beautiful forum of the North Wall, are all about the interplay between guitar and trumpet, two instruments rarely seen in the exclusive company of one another without at least a pesky rhythm section getting in the way.

Initially, it's Ralph Towner (imagine a history professor crossed with Steve Vai and you're in the right territory) and his guitar acrobatics that seize the attention. Not only does he hold down the rhythm and structure of each piece, but he intersperses them with pyrotechnic flourishes of accomplishment and speed that belie his seventy years, dancing across the fretboard with a dexterity just the right side of ostentatious.

Fresu, one of the biggest names on the Italian jazz scene, is brilliantly expressive, not just as a player, but as a performer. Knotted over his seat, eyes closed, trumpet bowed almost to the floor, the range of moods and tones he's able to wring from his instrument is remarkable – even employing his effects rack as an instrument,

cranking up the reverb to emphasise darker passages.

When he's not playing, he stares across at Towner as one hypnotised, waiting for his next opportunity to react. But the achievement, of course, is not in individual skill, but how it's assembled into a greater whole. Neither succumbs to an urge to overcook things into a hideous Miles Davis-versus-Yngwie Malmsteen contest, leaving space for the pieces to sink in and leave their mark over time. Guitar and trumpet weave in and out of one another, each taking turns to illuminate the other by contrast and complement. Their interaction has the effortless brilliance of two musicians perfectly in sync with one another – much less a duel between two instruments than an embrace.

Tonight's show is yet another triumph for Oxford Contemporary Music, who continue to fly the flag for the most creative and groundbreaking music in the city.

Stuart Fowkes

LA SHARK / A.HUMAN / SPARKADIA

The Jericho Tavern

Sparkadia have played to thousands of people in their native Australia, so tonight's sparse audience must be a bit of a shock. Luckily, they (well, he – the bequipped Alex Burnett – and his touring band) fill the room anyway with their lush, epic guitar/synth pop. 'Talking Like I'm Falling Down Stairs' is a Bowie-esque joy; 'Mary' a beautifully heartfelt crescendo; 'China' comes filled with great 80s powerchords, and the cover of Kelis' 'Acapella' is a stadium romp. The whole thing is a cinematic melodyfest, and I've totally fallen in love with it.

The crowd is still small for A.Human, but it doesn't seem like much would stop A.Human having fun. There's space to mingle, which brings the engaging sequin-jacketed singer, Dave Human, to the dancefloor for the whole gig. So now everyone in the room is dancing – on Dave's orders – to the shaggy disco pop of songs like the insanely catchy 'Take Me Home'.

La Shark, however, are extraordinary – mostly due to the presence of flamboyant and uninhibited singer Samuel Geronimo Deschamps. There are headstands, manic dancing and gradual disrobing; he gets down to his underpants by the third song. Then come backflips, breakdancing and writhing around on the floor. And at one point, Dave Human is challenged to and loses a dance-off with a

member of the audience. This would all just be silly were the music not so brilliantly quirky – a sort of cosmic avant-garde funk pop, veering towards Muse-like levels of orchestration and pomp in 'Hotel Chevalier' and 60s jangles in 'Modern Man', but never seemingly taking itself too seriously amongst the slap bass and discord. The highlight is the angular, paranoia-laden 'I Know What You Did Last Summer', a double A-side with A.Human's 'Take Me Home'. I haven't had this much fun at a gig in ages. Brilliant

Kirsten Etheridge

INTERNATIONAL JETSETTERS / THE RELATIONSHIPS / LES CLOCHARDS

The Port Mahon

There's only two of Les Clochards tonight, which we guess makes them Les Petites Clochards, but in the intimate confines of The Port, it works quite well, Karen Cleave's playful, flighty accordian lightening Ian Nixon's slurred baritone. It's wistful, after-hours stuff, and you feel we should all be sitting around tables sipping Beaujolais rather than standing around supping lager.

The Relationships have a similar cosiness about them but they demand your attention. Because there are stories to tell here – stories of explorers and strange flying machines and an

escape from the modern world. They're like a steampunk Byrds on songs like 'Number 2, Infinity Mansions', their hazy, almost lazy, pastoral psychedelic jangle pop at once world weary and full of longing for a time when great discoveries were still waiting to be made. There are echoes of Shack on 'Ghostchild', but 'Lovely Flying Machine' is a full-on George Harrison wig-out. Their opening number dreams of "retiring to the 1950s" and 'Girl In A Headband' mentions wearing flares for the first time, but rather than coming over as hopeless nostalgists lost in the past, The Relationships evoke a time and a world before our sense of wonder hadn't yet been worn away.

Playing their first gig together in a year, and set for another hiatus, International Jetsetters up tonight's rock quota considerably, whether it's their showy blues numbers like 'It's Not About You', or more piledriving pieces like 'Inside Out'. The former – thankfully few in number – are unappealing and shrill, fit only for bleak midweek blues jams, but the latter are great room-devouring swirls of psychedelic noise of the kind you'd hope for and expect from a band featuring two members of The Jesus & Mary Chain's live line-up. Singer Fi McFall has a stridently otherworldly, slightly smoky voice not far from Anna Calvi, best demonstrated on the slow-burning 'My Redemption', and if International Jetsetters are, as it seems, to be little more than an occasional concern for all concerned, they, like the rest of tonight's local music old guard, prove they've still got plenty to offer the modern world.

Dale Kattack

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DOCTOR SHOTOVER: Beatley Eye

Ah yes, the Fabs loved their nosh. I was their sous-chef for a while, and [modest cough] unwitting inspiration for many of their finest songs... Buy me a drink and I will tell you more, old boy... ah, thanks, very decent of you... slurp-o... Well, I gave George his first macrobiotic curry in 1966 - after which he wrote his great (and later re-titled) song *I am the Wind... Within You, Without You*. Never one to buck a trend, Ringo quickly penned his famous *Yellow Submarine Sandwich*, and then John and Paul's *I've Got a Feeling* followed two years later. (Cuh, typical! They were **always** the last on the bus, those two, creatively speaking). So, what do you think of that? Worth a free bevvy or two, wack? Yes, ha ha, I can parlez Liverpoolian with the best of them. As can St Liam of Gallagher, I can't help noticing, despite hailing from [looks puzzled], well, another part of the North. In fact if I didn't know that John Winston O'Boogie Lennon was dead, I'd say listening to the Beady Eye debut that he was doing the vocals on most of these songs. Mind you, if they had any sense, Messrs Bell, Gallagher et al would do a cover of *Lovely Rita* with Lord Macca on lead vocals... and I'm sure Sir George Martin would be delighted to repeat his piano solo in the middle, plus tell a few of his interminable anecdotes about "the boys"... Original title? (*She's A*) *Lovely Eater*... And what about the song which I wrote for the Fabs, more of a sketch really, while I was doing the

minesweeping, ahem, clearing up after one of their dinners... Not interested...? Well, f*** you very much then! [Dr S wanders off to annoy other customers, humming, "I'm a Boo-oo-oozer"]
Next Month: Please, Feed Me



HARD DAY'S FRIGHT – will play for food

INTRODUCING....

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

WILD SWIM

Who are they?

Wild Swim are five 18 and 19 year-olds from Oxford (Richard Sansom – vocals, synths; Carlos Posada – guitar, electronics; Jacob Lively – bass, synths; Sam Robinson – drums, percussion; Jamie Jay – guitar, synths, cello). Previously the band went under the names Parachutes and Picturehouse. In their first incarnation they ended up in the Nightshift Demo Dumper, but as Wild Swim the band won January's Demo Of The Month. They quintet have gigged locally and in London and been interviewed on Tom Robinson's 6Music show. A new EP is due out later this month.

What do they sound like?

Wild Swim cherry pick from myriad different genres and cleverly knit the resulting disparate influences into something cohesive and their own. Their hazy, glitchy sound owes something to psychedelia, house, techno, classical, 80s pop, even opera, Richard's startlingly dramatic voice soaring over the shifting, lysergic musical textures of the band. Nightshift's recent demo review admired their ability not to be pinned down and suggested they'd make a great soundtrack to a David Lynch movie dream sequence.

What inspires them?

"Radiohead; Arthur Russell; Wild Beasts; Grizzly Bear; Henrik Schwarz; Flying Lotus; The Roots and Four Tet."

Career highlight so far:

"We all went on holiday together to Jamie's house on the coast in Ireland where our song 'Happy Heat' was recorded with just a laptop and a cheap microphone. All the sounds you hear on the song are organic, taken from the sea, the closing of a book, or even the scrunching of a crisp packet."

And the lowlight:

"Back in 2009, Nightshift put us in the Demo Dumper. We were described as 'some sausage-fingered bedroom hermit collapsing on the random play buttons of every instrument in his room and deluding himself that it's



something akin to avant garde genius.' It was fairly disheartening, but looking back, we appreciate that the CD was fairly awful."

Their favourite other Oxfordshire act is:

"Glass Animals; they're brilliant on both recording and live."

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

"'Calling Out Of Context' by Arthur Russell. It has a wide range of genres and moods which makes it a really exciting and beautiful album."

When is their next gig and what can listeners expect?

"No gigs lined up just now but the next EP will be coming out in April. Expect a slight increase in the use of electronics as well as more layering of the vocals. It has a distinctly different mood to our last EP and the structure of the songs is slightly more linear and progressive."

Their favourite and least favourite things about Oxford music are:

"There are loads of brilliant bands and a great deal of enthusiasm for them. The only problem with this is it can lead to nights that don't always gel, involving bands whose sounds don't necessarily complement the other bands on the night."

You might love them if you love:

Four Tet; The Blue Nile; The Associates; Arthur Russell; Flying Lotus.

Hear them here:

www.soundcloud.com/wildswimmusic

Whatever happened to... those heroes

The Daisies / Medal

WHO?

The Daisies and Medal, while two bands were sort of the same band in two different stages of its life. Formed in 1990 by a group of school-friends from Eynsham, The Daisies comprised Jamie Hyatt (vocals, guitar); Mark Willis (guitar); Dan Kemp (bass) and Simon 'Lemmy' Wickson (drums). They quickly won a following locally playing alongside the likes of Supergrass, Death By Crimpers and others at the Jericho Tavern, gracing the cover of local music mag Curfew and, after recording at Courtyard Studios, were taken under the wing of Radiohead and Supergrass manager Chris Hufford. An album on IRS followed. Gradually frustrated at a lack of progress, the quartet morphed into Medal, recruiting keyboard player Richard Brinklow, signing to Polydor and touring with Cast, The Dandy Warhols and The Bluetones. Dan later left to be replaced by Ollie Wilcox for second album 'Stuntman'.

WHAT?

While the two bands were pretty much the same group of people, with a change of bassist and the addition of Richard Brinklow on keyboards, they were quite different bands. Medal were a sprightly, raucous punk-pop band, all bubbling singalong anthems sweetly coated in Stooges-inspired fuzz. After initially following a similar path, Medal's sound became far cleaner and more epic, almost prog at times, with nods to The Verve and Pink Floyd on tracks like 'Porno Song' and 'Up Here For Hours'; as their vision moved from the toilet circuit to stadiums, they developed an elegant sweep that saw them compared favourably to fellow-90s

nouveau-progsters Ultrasound at times. By the time of 'Stuntman, rootsier influences had taken hold, laying the foundations for Jamie's current band, The Family Machine.

WHEN?

The Daisies were stars of the early-90s, while Medal's time came in the latter part of the decade. After an early single, 'Aeroplane Day', Daisies' sole album, 'Kowloon House' – named after the Chinese take-away on Walton Street that still stands today – came out in 1995 on IRS. After morphing into Medal shortly after, a succession of singles, starting with 'Ordinary', began in 1998, while debut album 'Drop Your Weapon' came out on Polydor in 1999. Its self-released follow-up came out in 2001, by which time the band were coming to a halt, although they never officially split up.

WHY?

The Daisies are fondly remembered as effervescent starlets of that fertile scene than launched Radiohead and Supergrass; for their part, Medal will be best remembered for being managed by Chris Hufford, signing to Polydor, touring the States with Supergrass, enjoying some serious radio play and coming tantalisingly close to emulating the other big local stars of the day before a combination of industry cynicism and band inertia caused their demise.

WHERE?

Jamie of course is still active on the local scene, fronting The Family Machine and running Beard Museum Records; Mark still plays occasionally locally with Toulouse. Of the others, Simon lives in Australia; Dan is an award-winning landscape gardener; Olli is a novelist and one of the UK's top wakeboarders, while Richard lives in Brighton and still plays keyboards in bands.

HOW?

The Daisies' 'Kowloon House' is apparently available online for one cent, if you're feeling extravagant. Medal's 'Drop Your Weapon' is readily available on iTunes and Spotify, while there are a couple of tunes to listen to at www.myspace.com/medalworld



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DEMO OF THE MONTH MUSTARD & THE MONOCLE

An Oxfordshire-Wiltshire quartet whose past musical life has found them going out under the names Whoa! That's My Tail and Wooden Leg, Real Foot, which tend to make Mustard & The Monocle seem pretty conventional by comparison. The music's not as oddball as the band name, but it is bloody good, the first impression of a slightly heavy-handed, or maybe just overly blokey, Stornoway quickly brushed aside as they reveal themselves as hearty and slightly heroic trad folksters with a bellyful of ale and a couple of old punk albums tucked away in their collection. 'Skin & Bone' is an, if not exactly euphoric, then at least optimistic shanty, matey harmonies riding on the banjo and squeezebox melody, while 'The Guards & The Guns' is similarly rustic and full of stomping olde-worlde folk vim, faint echoes of Johnny Flynn and even The Men They Couldn't Hang hovering at the bar. Best of the lot, though, is 'Heart & Soul', an upbeat and carefree slice of airy folk-pop with its tune half-inched from The Tansads' 'English Rover'. You know what, it really is starting to feel like spring.

E 4 ECHO

Overall it's another pretty rum month for local demos, but this lot are pretty decent on balance even if they don't always quite seem to know what they want to be. Demo opener 'Wolf' features a big, bold baritone voice over some ramshackle, rustic indie pop, as if some old Las Vegas Crooner has been dumped into the local toilet circuit with only a battered Scott Walker album to bring him up to date on musical matters and it works well to an extent; it's a great old voice he's got, but he does to spoil the effect by belting out the lines "Did you see a wolf? I saw a wolf!" repeatedly, which just gets us to thinking about Tweety Pie chirping about seeing a pudgy tat cweeping up on him. Probably not the effect he as hoping for. 'Through The Looking Glass' is less bold but far sweeter, a cutesy twinkle of pastoral pop that reminds us of one-time local faves Foxes! who we think now live down in Brighton and recently supported Stornoway up at Brookes. The tune itself reminds us of The Communards' 'You Are My World', which all things considered, is no bad thing. 'White Noise' initially promises some Johnny Cash-style railroad country rolling but ends up sounding half asleep round the campfire when you really want that big ol' baritone to come back out, full of whisky and a more fearsome sense of fun. Still, a bit

more cohesion and a visit to the local lyric masterclass and they could be onto something.

STACK OF HAMSTERS

The sort of band name that Mustard & The Monocle would doubtless have dumped in the bin early on for not trying quite hard enough to sound eccentric, Stack Of Hamsters is the work of someone at Warehouse Studios, which means we're expecting some serious heavy noise, but instead it's more like a mid-70s psychedelia-tinged roadhouse band, all big rolling chords and bluesy hollering. They do get heavier as they go on, mind, 'Like You Did Before' all balls-to-the-wall bluesy metal of a decidedly pre-thrash ilk, while strongest of the bunch is 'Hook, Line & Sinker', which gets closer to the whole hairy metal hog roast, chugging along merrily like there's no tomorrow, or any passage of time since about 1981 for that matter.

ROSS BENNETT

"I wrote these songs because it was the best way to get across my thoughts and show people the workings of my mind," offers Ross, thankfully preferring the acoustic soul-bearing approach to the Raoul Moat shoot-any-fucker-who-gets-in-my-way technique. He does add, though, that "the songs are a terrifying mix of everything, anything, and nothing," which feels like some kind of existential scream into the void, but in reality translates into some not dislikable but not exactly inspirational acoustic folk-pop, songs like 'Wait & See', full of easy pastoral whimsy in the vein of Crowded House, while 'My Bitter End' shows he has an ear for a decent tune. Not sure about the transatlantic accent at times and Ross does occasionally fall into that common pitfall of acoustic singer-songwriters of strumming harder and faster to try and express more intense emotions. We can't comment on the straight acoustic cover of Plain White T's 'Rhythm Of Love' since our doctor told us not to listen to American punk-pop bands in case we got provoked into heading off on a Raoul Moat-style shoot-any-fucker-who-gets-in-my-way rampage. Okay he didn't really but we did persuade him to give us a prescription for a very decent bottle of Shiraz to bring our blood pressure down a bit.

CONOR OWEN

Conor boasts of his "unique" project of driving his bright yellow camper van around various cities before Tweeting the time and place of a live show in the van at only a couple of hours notice. Nice DIY ethic but hardly unique. Maybe it's just a ruse to excuse the fact he probably wouldn't exactly fill a proper venue with his pretty but common-or-garden acoustic strummery, any reasonable critique of which is rendered near impossible

by his Myspace refusing to play more than the first 30 seconds of any of his songs. Or maybe that's another unique facet of Conor's show. And anyway, given each and every one of us is brought up repeatedly being told never to get into a stranger's car or agree to meet up with people who've contacted us online, isn't it a bit much to expect folks to simply clamber into the back of some dodgy old van on the pretence of a "pop concert"? Admit it Mr Owen, you're a crazed nutjob and anyone fool enough to fall for your ghastly plan will undoubtedly end up as the middle section of some human caterpillar in your mobile laboratory somewhere off the A34.

IONEYE

We reviewed this lot this time last year and were probably kinder than we might otherwise be due to them all being 14 or 15 years old. One year on, are they older and wiser? Well, if nothing else, the singer seems to have manned up a bit, although we're not convinced a teenager from Woodstock has any reason or excuse to be singing like a pub-weary Yorkshireman ("Well, 'e moost be fookin' freeeeezin'" being a notable example). Sounds like Ioneye really *really* want to be Arctic Monkeys. A lot. And who can blame them when you think of all them platinum discs and stadium shows. We're certainly not going to piss on that particular dream. Except to perhaps mention they've still a little way to go yet. Is that patronising enough? Condescending pats on heads all round. Can we go and listen to Anaal Nathrakh now please?

THE MONKEYSHINES

Two songs here from a group of 16 and 17 year olds from Culham, although they're so indistinguishable from each other it might as well be just the one. 'Memories' is rudimentary to say the least: drums clatter untidily, guitar twinkles, trills and jangles in obstinately trebly fashion and the singer, who we suspect might not be human at all but actually an adenoidal gerbil, searches for his Vix Sinex nasal spray while trying to pronounce the song's title in as many different ways as possible, with variable emphasis on each syllable, before it all collapses to some kind of conclusion. Ditto for 'In With The New', right down to the over-repetition of the title, the song itself comprised of approximately 99% breathless emoting, hormonal regret and asthmatic hysteria and 1% anything resembling a proper tune. Only the band's tender ages prevent us saying, Monkeyshines? Monkeyshite, more like. Bugger, slipped out anyway.

SCRATCH TUESDAY

There are many things in life that should aim to be inoffensive – bereavement cards for example, or children's party entertainers

(and even that's debatable) – but never music. All fine and well if a great pop tune doesn't upset anyone but if the apparently sole reason for its existing seems to be to not offend *anyone*, then it is no longer a song, it is a soulless abomination. Scratch Tuesday have an entire pre-watershed bathtub full of the things. Led by a female singer with the sort of semi-trained-sounding voice that might fleetingly imagine itself to be Billie Holiday (or more realistically, Kiki Dee) but politely puts aside any semblance of fire, soul or raw emotion in favour of wafty warbling, Scratch Tuesday's music is so bland and non-committal it's the musical equivalent of Travelodge décor. Sparsely-laid acoustic guitars give the vocals full rein to lead but they lack any kind of creative compass and everything strums and hums along with absolutely no discernible character. 'Amazed' introduces some bongos into the mix, while '365' really goes to town by bringing in a full drum kit but honestly, John Bonham on one of his legendary benders would be hard pressed to kick any life into it. Outside in the crisp spring sunshine we can hear bees buzzing about their seasonal business. Strangely their innocuous droning doesn't fill us with the urge to rip our own guts out of our torsos just to remind us that we're still actually alive and not sat in Hell's own waiting lobby.

THE DEMO DUMPER

LE VENS

Jesus Christ on a shiny red bike with flashing green lights on top, if you're asking us to review three specific tracks on your Myspace site, at least have the decency to stick them together, rather than hidden amid the dozen or so other lumpen towers of utter blinding mediocrity that pass for your "art", why don't you? Le Vens describe themselves on their site as "alternative". Alternative to what precisely? Proper music? What's alternative about this? It's as bog-standard retro pub-rock as it's possible to get without forming a Dumpy's Rusty Nuts tribute act and calling yourselves Free Beer & Fags in some misguided attempt at remedial prole humour. There it is, chugging along with all the grace and elan of a slightly tipsy Vanessa Feltz in the pizza aisle at Asda, quoting Joy Division, The Clash and even Desmond Dekker as inspiration but playing a form of over-egged electric blues-rock so hackneyed it makes the idea of Eric Clapton seem unusually alluring. 'Viola' is the band's obligatory slowie, with its obligatory guitar solo and sounds as laboured as an obese HGV driver's heart after a double helping of pork pies and doughnuts and as constipated as said fat lump's next bowel movement, the sight and sound of which would doubtless be more entertaining than this.

Send demos for review to: Nightshift, PO Box 312, Kidlington, Oxford, OX5 1ZU. Or email song links 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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Sat 14th May • £10 adv
6.30pm

Guns 2 Roses

Mon 16th May • £9 adv

Emerge

NME Radar Tour
ft. Anna Calvi + Grouplove

Tues 17th May • £15 adv

The Alarm

30th Anniversary Tour

Weds 18th May • £10 adv

Set Your Goals

Thurs 19th May • £9 adv

The Naked & Famous

Sat 21st May • £8 adv

Gentlemen Dub Club

+ Agitator

Sat 21st May • £5 adv
7.30pm - 12am

Upstairs:

The Launch Edition

ft. Ute, Gunning For Tamar,
Vixens, King Of Cats,
The Graceful Slicks

Sat 21st May • £5 adv / £6 on door
£5 NUS / £4 NHS
10.30pm - 3am + over 18s only

Propaganda

ft. Huw Stephens

+ Trashy + Room 101

Sun 22nd May • £11 adv

Villagers

Tues 24th May • £10 adv

Young Knives

Thurs 26th May • £11 adv

Nick Harper

Sat 28th May • £8 adv
6.30pm

Misstallica

All Chick Tribute To Metallica

Mon 30th May • £12.50 adv

Mayday Parade

+ We Are The In Crowd
+ Rocket To The Moon

Tues 31st May • SOLD OUT

Ed Sheeran + Kal Lavelle

Weds 1st June • £13.50 adv

The Kills

Thurs 2nd June • £7.50 adv

Futures

Sat 4th June • £8 adv
6.30pm - 10pm

Cash (Johnny Cash Tribute)

Sun 5th June • £15 adv

Springbok Nude Girls

Mon 6th June • £7 adv

Wallis Bird

+ Midas Fall
+ Sandra MacBeth
+ Jon Oakeley

Fri 1st July • £10 adv
11pm + over 18s only

It's All About The Music Presents

Prism Reunion

- Part 2

ft. original residents

Sat 23rd July • £7 adv
3pm

Room 101 -

Metal Mayhem

Thurs 28th July • £10 adv

Room 94

Thurs 8th Sept • £10 adv

Pearl Jam

(Europe's No.1 Tribute to Pearl
Jam) - 20th Anniversary Tour
Performing TEN in its entirety

Sat 17th Sept • £12.50 adv
6.30pm - 10pm

The Jamm

Sat 10th Dec • £10.50 adv
6pm - 10pm

Electric Six



Propaganda
THE UK'S BIGGEST INDIE NIGHT
EVERY SATURDAY
O₂ ACADEMY
OXFORD

MR	PROPAGANDA	R	TRASHY	R	ROOM 101
AO	THE BEST NEW	O	KITCH GLAM	O	ROCK
IO	CLASSIC INDIE	O	POP AND	O	METAL &
NM	ALTERNATIVE	M	GUILTY	M	PUNK
	MUSIC	2	PLEASURES	3	ANTHEMS

£5 ADMISSION, £5 NUS/MEMBERS, £4 NHS
10:30PM-3AM, DRINKS FROM £1.95
WEEKLY PHOTOS, MORE INFO & ADVANCE TICKETS:
WWW.THEPROPAGANDA.COM

Tickets for Saturday night shows include free entry to Propaganda / Trashy / Room 101 (or £6, £5 NUS / members, £4 NHS on the door)