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NIGHTSHIFT

Oxford's Music Magazine

Free every
month.
Issue 188
March
2011



FIXERS

**A Poptabulous Psychedelic
Bubble Exploding In Your Mind
*interview inside...***

plus
**Radiohead, Trophy Wife, Blessing Force,
Young Knives, The Rock Of Travolta
and much more**

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NEWS

Nightshift: PO Box 312, Kidlington, OX5 1ZU
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YOUNG KNIVES return next month with their fourth album, entitled 'Ornaments From The Silver Arcade'. The follow-up to 2008's 'Superabundance', recorded in LA with legendary producer Nick Launay, is released on 4th April. Tracklisting for 'Ornaments...' is 'Love My Name', 'Woman', 'Everything Falls Into Place', 'Human Again', 'Running From A Standing Start', 'Sister Frideswide', 'Vision In Rags', 'Go To Ground', 'Silver Tongue', 'Storm Clouds' and 'Glasshouse'.

THIS YEAR'S OXFORD FOLK FESTIVAL HAS BEEN

CANCELLED. A statement on the festival website explained, "Despite having booked a great roster of artists for this year a number of factors are making it impossible for us to hold the festival in 2011. In the current economic climate people are, understandably, more reluctant to commit their hard-earned cash to buy tickets in advance, whilst also costs have increased, with the VAT rise contributing amongst other factors.

"We have made as many economies as we can but with the increasing costs of venue and equipment hire, insurance and so on it is simply not financially feasible to continue the festival this year.

"We really hope to be back in the future and, in the meantime, we wish to express our sincere thanks for your support during the eight years since we started."

This year's Folk Festival was due to have featured Spiers and Boden, Ade Edmundson & the Bad Shepherds and Dervish amongst a host of acts from around the UK and Europe over the weekend of 15th-17th April. Ticket refunds are available from point of purchase.

News of the Folk Festival's cancellation follows confirmation that this year's **Oxford Punt** will not be happening, due to a lack of suitable venues in the city centre, while **Cowley Road Carnival** is

unlikely to go ahead as normal due to roadworks on Iffley Road.

OXFORD CONTEMPORARY MUSIC'S SPRING SEASON

celebrates the music and artwork of self-releasing and self-publishing musicians from this month. Editions Of You, which runs at the O3 Gallery and Oxford Castle from Saturday 26th March through to Sunday 24th April, will feature an exhibition of exclusive artwork, as well as live music events every Thursday from 6-8pm and a zine and artwork fair on the 9th April. Full details of events are online at www.ocmevents.org.

Other highlights of the spring season include improv jazz duo Ralph Towner and Paolo Fresu at the North Wall on Sunday 6th March; world-renowned pianist and composer Joana MacGregor at the Jacqueline du Pre Building on Friday 11th and local folk harp and fiddle duo Steph West and Giles Lewin at Warneford Chapel on Tuesday 22nd.

OUT TO GRAZE FESTIVAL

returns for its fourth year from Friday 10th-Monday 13th June at the Fir Tree Country Park, in Warmington, near Banbury. The festival, co-run by local clubs Bassmentality, Simple and Slide, features a wide selection of dance music, from reggae and rocksteady to funk, hip hop and dubstep, and has doubled its capacity to almost 2,500 this year after 2010's sold-out event. Early-bird tickets are on sale now, priced £50 from www.outtograze.com.

A launch event for the festival takes place at the Cellar on Saturday 12th March, featuring London's The Drop and Cornwall's Backbeat Soundsystem. Tickets are available, priced £5, from the website.

AFTER THE WINTER WARMER

was abandoned due to heavy snow in December, organisers Gappy Tooth Industries have moved to re-book many of the planned acts for a one-day free mini festival at Café Tarifa on Cowley Road on Saturday 12th March. The day of acoustic live music, entitled Reheated, runs from 1pm through til 11pm and features sets from Samuel Zasada, Huffnuff, Anton Barbeau, Ally Craig, George Chopping, King of Cats, Jess Hall, Matt Winkworth, Ross Bennett, Prohibition Smokers



STATUS QUO, THE FACES and JAMES BLUNT are the headliners for this year's **Cornbury Festival**.

Featuring original members Ronnie Wood, Kenney Jones and Ian McLagan, Cornbury will be the recently-reformed Faces' only UK festival appearance of the summer. The band are now fronted by former-Simply Red singer Mick Hucknall.

For the first time Cornbury will run over three days – the 1st-3rd July – as well as moving to a new home at **The Great Tew Estate**, near Charlbury.

Other acts announced include Kinks legend **Ray Davies**, 80s hitmaker **Cyndi Lauper** (pictured), folk-rockers **The Saw Doctors**, rockabilly starlet **Imelda May** and possibly the best live band on the planet at the moment, **Bellowhead**. A supporting cast includes **Buffy St. Marie**, **Eliza Doolittle**, **The Like**, **Ollie Murs**, **Sophie Ellis-Bexter** and **Jon Allen**. A special secret guest is planned for the Sunday.

Having teamed up with 3A Entertainment, Cornbury's line-up boasts more big-name acts than previous years, which will hopefully help the event sell out. Tickets are on sale now, priced £160 for an adult weekend pass with camping. Concessionary prices are available for under-16s with under-12s and over-70s free. Visit www.cornburyfestival.com for more details.

Club, Midnight Boatman, D Gwalia, Helen Pearson and Trev Williams. Visit www.gappytooth.com for more details.

THE O2 ACADEMY launches a new local bands showcase night in May and is looking for local acts to play. Called Upstairs, the monthly night will feature four or five local bands in the Academy's upstairs venue. The launch night is on Saturday 21st May. Acts can email Vicky at vicky@o2academyoxford.co.uk.

HUCK & THE HANDSOME FEE have split up. The lachrymose local gothic folk outfit announced their split on the Nightshift online forum last month, stating, "Due to a combination of logistical impracticalities and precocious personalities, Huck and the Handsome Fee have disbanded. We had a great year in Oxford and a mind-blowing few weeks in the States and will always remember those times with fondness and gratitude.

"Matt, Tommy and I will be continuing as a (currently nameless) three-piece, while Tamara will be fronting her new band Mara with Tommy and me backing her. Fee material will be divided up and reworked as and when we feel it's right. Thanks to Nightshift and the Oxon scene for almost unanimous support."

THE SKITTLE ALLEY celebrates ten years of putting on gigs in Abingdon this year and the collective are putting on a free three-day festival over the weekend of August 27th-29th at the Railway Inn in Culham. They're looking for any acts who have played their nights at various venues around Abingdon over the past decade who are interested in playing the festival. Contact them via www.theskittlealley.co.uk.

A HAWK & A HACKSAW headline a special Pindrop Performance show at the Bullingdon on Friday 22nd April. Pindrop have been attracting some of the best leftfield acts from around the world to Oxford in recent years, including A Silver Mt. Zion, Acid Mothers Temple and Cocorosie. Joining A Hawk & A Hackaw will be We Aeronauts, Brickwork Lizards, Moyle, Cat Matador, Message To Beras and The Braindead Collective. The gig runs from 4.30pm; tickets, priced £12 in advance, are on sale now from wegottickets.com.

AS EVER, don't forget to tune into BBC Oxford Introducing every Saturday evening from 6-7pm on 95.2fm. The dedicated local music show plays the best Oxford releases as well as featuring interviews and sessions with local bands. The show is available as a podcast or to stream online at bbc.co.uk/oxford.

a quiet word with

Fixers

“YOU ALWAYS STRIVE TO produce the best sound possible, conjuring up the best musicianship possible.

I think our epiphany was that it's not the be all and end all of a band's fundamentals. It's detrimental to the etiquette of a band if you have the best drummer in the world but they can barely bring it upon themselves to wake up in the morning for you.”

FIXERS FRONTMAN JACK

Goldstein is contemplating Nightshift's question as to the possible musical epiphany that led to the formation of the band, purveyors of psychedelic pop *par excellence* and currently one of the hottest new pop properties around, having recently signed to the legendary Vertigo label and been championed by everyone from *NME* and *The Guardian* to Radio 1's Jo Whiley and Zane Lowe.

We ask the question because Fixers' past lies in the unexpected world of extreme metal and hardcore grunge. Jack and Fixers drummer Michael Thompson previously played together in Gunnbunny, kicking out a superbly raw bluesy grunge that gave Tad and Mudhoney a run for their money, while guitarist Roo Bhasin was part of monstrous metal titans Sextodecimo, heralded as Oxford's greatest ever metal band by Nightshift last year and once described as what the radioactive fallout from Chernobyl would sound like if it formed a band.

Fixers are reticent to talk about their past, seeing the band as a completely separate entity to their past lives, perhaps for obvious reasons. Fixers do sound like music from another world at times.

FORMED BARELY OVER A

year ago when they were asked to play a Christmas party at the Cellar, the quintet (Jack, Roo and Michael are joined by guitarist Christopher Dawson and bassist Jason Warmer) took shape around a bunch of Jack's early bedroom demos, where he was trying to create music with the scope and ambition of The Beach Boys' seminal 'Smile' album. Amazingly, Fixers appear to have succeeded and the world is not just sitting up and taking notice but leaping up



like an eager puppy to grab a piece of the action.

After an appearance at last year's Oxford Punt exposed them to a wider local audience, Fixers leapt to national prominence on the back of perfectly-formed online demos of songs like 'Iron Deer Dream' and debut single 'Amsterdam' and given an added boost by their association with the Blessing Force collective. Reviews and blogs spoke excitedly of Fixers' exuberant, electro-tinged re-imagining of Brian Wilson's psychedelic dream and a pop-friendly take on Animal Collective's experimental genius.

This month Fixers release 'Iron Deer Dream' on London-based indie label Young & Lost Club. It already feels like a contender for single of the year, packing in more imagination into its euphoric, multi-part harmonies, sleigh bells and glorious summer surf-pop than many bands will muster in several

lifetimes. And just to compound their band's off-kilter credentials, it comes backed with an oddball slice of Detroit-style techno called 'Egyptian Aberration'.

NIGHTSHIFT MET UP WITH

Jack and Roo ahead of the launch gig for 'Iron Deer Dream'. How, we wonder, have they coped with the speed at which things have taken off for Fixers in recent months?

JACK: "2010 had been pretty hectic. That said, it wasn't like we played hundreds of shows; we purposely selected a few, trying to make them as interesting and special as we could. Being a new band, no-one knew who we were so we embraced the idea of playing fewer shows, really nurturing them and pulling as many people as we could to them. It's a much more enjoyable and personable agenda than attempting to do two shows a week and finding yourself

struggling to promote them. It felt great to be able to play with some of our favourite bands, like Kisses, Best Coast and Islet. We did one really enjoyable show near London Bridge, beneath the underground, in a disused part of the subway. Every twenty minutes a train would go over and drown out all the sound; the current from the lines was causing a persistent hum and buzz from every electrical device plugged in... including all of our amplifiers."

NME have been particularly enthused about the band and you've recorded for Radio 1's Live Lounge; is there a feeling of being on a bit of a rollercoaster ride at the moment?

JACK: "It's amazing having national music magazines championing our work as well as the enthusiasm and support shown by the BBC towards us over the past year – it creates a yo-yo effect where ultimately it all ends up in us being given the opportunity to work harder on bigger and better things. We all had high hopes but we didn't expect this kind of thing to happen, not so soon anyway."

ROO: "Getting to go to Maida Vale Studios was a real highlight: walking down the long, dark corridors lined with photos of all the amazing people that have ever recorded there is a real eye opener. It's such a legendary studio and steeped in so much musical history you do feel a little overwhelmed by it all. It's also quite an eerie place to be; there's never anybody there apart from a couple of security guards."

YOU'VE SIGNED WITH

Vertigo; how did that come about? With bands like Kraftwerk and Black Sabbath, the label has quite a legacy; does that add to the excitement of signing and does it add any pressure to what's expected of you?

JACK: "It was very exciting! Being such a young band, it was the pinnacle of what we had achieved musically. Realistically though, it's only the first hurdle. You realise that once everything is finalised, everyone involved breathes a sigh of relief and the amazing reality kicks in – the work hasn't yet begun, it's just the beginning. Being signed to any label shouldn't apply

unnecessary pressure or tension upon what you're doing; musically, you should aim to do whatever you want, regardless. The purpose of the label is to give you the resources you require to help fulfil this. We just wanted to be with people we got on with and felt we could work well with. That's happened."

What plans have the label got for you in the near future?

JACK: "We're talking to producers at the moment; at the end of our February tour we are going to go to RAK studios to record an EP, then we would ideally love to record an album over the summer."

You've released 'Iron Deer Dream' on Young & Lost; how did you get to work with them and what do you think of the single?

JACK: "I love the aesthetic of a seven inch single. Sara and Nadia at the label have both been very nurturing to us as a band, they have provided us with an amazing platform. It felt natural to put 'Iron Deer Dream' out as the first single, it felt like a significant mainstay to our set-list throughout last year, with its arrangement and instrumentation evolving over time. It's strange, presently it feels like a fundamental track but I'd like to think of us hypothetically a year down the line, having substituted it for something stronger in our live show. I really like the b-side, it's the product of listening to nothing but Drexciya for six weeks in a row."

SPEAKING AFTER FIXERS

signed to Vertigo, Jack claimed the next EP would be themed on UFO religious cults; he has also expressed a fascination for Scientology and Dianetics.

JACK: "I felt an EP was a very impersonal recorded entity: more often than not they are construed as little more than a marketing scheme for weaker tracks. This mindset initially deterred us from the idea but when we decided it might be a great way to explore and channel our interest in UFO religions and space cults. We set about writing a bunch of new songs especially for an EP, making it a brief concept. It's the final realisation of what will, no doubt, transpire to have been a rather embarrassing and weird obsession. "I want the songs to reflect every aspect of membership, from the euphoric realisation of a fresh belief system to the uncharted waters of an unprecedented witchdance. We shall see...."

"Controversy doesn't interest me in the slightest; I'm fascinated by the unknown. It seems Scientologists are insistent that the

best way for someone to fully learn or understand their religion is in a individualised manner; it is implied that the best way to do this is by visiting a church for themselves. It has only become encompassed in our current mindset in relation to our fleeting space fascination."

You've also mentioned you'd like to record in space. Is this a serious scientific musical ambition or are you all ripped to the tits on serious drugs? Any chance of a Sun Ra cover at the next gig?

JACK: "NME put us on the spot and asked us where we would ideally love to record. Zappa and Pet Moon had already been underwater; MIA had been on top of a pyramid and X-Raided, Charles Manson and Varg Vikernes had all been in prison. Space was all that was left, I guess. It's obviously a virtual vacuum though, which would mean we would be relying solely upon electronic vibrations."

"Having had more time to consider the opportunity, within the belly of a blue whale may have been a more salubrious answer."

"We would love to do a Sun Ra cover, though. Who knows, perhaps something from 'Night Of The Purple Moon': I can't help but feel that it would be an embarrassingly futile attempt."

UNTIL VERY RECENTLY

Fixers were quite prominently featured among the Blessing Force Collective-associated acts but announced last month that they'd left on friendly terms. What first attracted them to Blessing Force, how much help do they feel its associations helped Fixers and why the decision to move away?

ROO: "We had already been documented as being part of The Blessing Force before we were even aware of their existence. They told us they'd like us to be part of it and we were really psyched, having already been fans of Pet Moon, Wap Wap Wow [now Rhosyn] and Chad Valley for some time. To be part of 'something' was exciting at the time, however, as The Blessing Force progressed, we realised that, although there's a lot of mutual respect and admiration between us all, we are very different people with different ideals and mindsets. For that reason we didn't want to carry on being part of something we weren't really comfortable being involved with. It would be selfish and unfair of us to reap benefits under a moniker we couldn't profess to fully understanding. However, I think as a promotional resource, the Blessing Force is in a position where it could become a

fundamental stepping stone for Oxford music."

Having been in different bands locally over the years; how do you view the Oxford scene? How has it changed in your opinion?

JACK: "Any kind of creative endeavour, music included, is a beautiful thing and Oxford seems to be a place that nurtures the process for a lot of people. Scenes and styles alter but the fundamentals remain the same – lots of bands playing lots of shows in a few venues across the town with the support of people who write about those bands and those shows, as there always has been."

PREVIOUS ALLIANCES ASIDE, with their new record deal and an ever-increasing media profile, Fixers are now in a position to take their music to a higher level and with the very obvious talents to make it happen.

Knowing Jack and Roo's musical history, it feels all the more remarkable that Fixers have honed their own particular version of psychedelic pop to such perfection, incorporating, as it does, everything from surf to techno, African and Asian music to full-on rock; how do they draw such disparate strands together for

a Fixers song?

ROO: "I think that sort of thing is gonna happen naturally when you have five people with very varied musical tastes and that's something we've embraced rather than shunned."

"We haven't set out to make music that can be defined by any particular genre; although we're very influenced by psychedelic music, it's not the only thing we listen to. 'Psychedelic' and 'experimental' are frequently misconstrued words, but they're also very personal words: what's psychedelic to one person might appear as meaningless pop to someone else."

Having come so far so quickly, what does the rest of 2011 hold in store for Fixers? Jack's answer is suitably psychedelic.

"Numerous dreams about conversations with Chloe Sevigny; swimming with Arthur Russell and finger painting with James Franco. It's fundamental you remember the importance of dreams: never allow them to become obsolete."

'Iron Deer Dream' is out now on Young & Lost Club'. Visit www.myspace.com/fixerstheband for dates and tracks

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RADIOHEAD

'The King Of Limbs'

(Own label download)

As with 'In Rainbows', the manner of 'The King Of Limbs's' release threatens to overshadow Radiohead's music. In movie land if a film is released into cinemas without a press preview showing it tends to suggest it's a stinker and its producers want to rake a few bucks in before anyone cottons on. Such cynicism could never be levelled at Radiohead, surely? A band whose world outlook can often be, well, cynical.

No, of course, it's simply Radiohead playing the music industry for a fool once again, albeit with a safer hand than last time – no chance of getting 'The King Of Limbs' for free, with a set download price. As with their marketing tricks, Radiohead's music has regularly been aped but never emulated, even the most accomplished copyists still seem stuck somewhere around 'OK Computer', an album Radiohead have sometimes seemed almost fanatically determined to leave behind in favour of yet more esoteric treasures.

So what's it like, this new opus? For starters it's a pretty compact affair, eight songs in under 40 minutes, neatly avoiding the desire or compulsion to over-indulge. On first listen it sounds too much like a companion piece to 'In Rainbows' and Thom Yorke's solo outing, 'The Eraser'. Opener 'Bloom', along with 'Morning Mr Magpie' and 'Little By Little' scurry along on restless, glitchy



electronic rhythms, guitars notable by the absence, Thom's voice stuck in that barely-decipherable falsetto mumble. By the time you reach fourth track 'Feral', with its scattershot beats and determinedly obtuse wiggle, you're wondering if this is merely Radiohead by numbers.

First listens are deceptive, though. 'Bloom' reveals itself more fully the more you listen, Thom actually delivering one of his strongest vocal performances for years, sounding oddly euphoric as the track comes across as something from the second half of Bowie's seminal 'Low' album if he'd been informed of dubstep back in 1977. 'Morning Mr Magpie', meanwhile is clinical in its fidgety delivery but wonderfully dark in its understated spitefulness.

'The King Of Limbs' really comes into its own in its second half, though. 'Lotus Flower' is a reminder that Radiohead do still, despite the common parody of them as tune-free musical misanthropes, write some stunning tunes, ones that creep up on you rather than hammer on the radio playlist-makers' office doors. 'Codex' is more stunning still, desolate and organic compared to the earlier electronic-based tracks, little more than Thom's voice, piano and sparse but resonant horns; it's reminiscent of the band's peerless 'Pyramid Song' and more fully exposes the human heart that beats within the band. The spectral, somnambulating 'Give Up The Ghost' is bleaker still, a haunted twin to 'For Stars' 'Spectators', although it feels like it shuffles of its mortal coil too readily when you expect something more. Album closer 'Separator' confirms 'The King Of Limbs' strong melodic credentials, although there's a strong resemblance to Sinead O'Connor's 'I Am Stretched On Your Grave', not least in the dubby beats that underpin it all.

Ultimately Radiohead remain kings of a domain that no other dare enter for fear they'd be found wanting. No review, positive or negative, is going to deter the converted nor convert the unbelievers. 'The King Of Limbs' won't go down as a classic Radiohead album, neither will it be looked back on as the point where they lost their way. No alarms and no surprises, then. But no disappointments either.

Dale Kattack

TIGER MENDOZA

'Aim For The Head'

(Own label)

In a live context Tiger Mendoza have had a somewhat changeable line-up, but the music is all based around the core songwriting and composition of Ian De Quadros. 'Aim For The Head', the first full-length release from the outfit, sees De Quadros pull in guest vocals from Smilex's Lee Christian and an Australian fellow named Will Scarlett, to augment the core vocals of Helena Markou.

Overall, the sound is very much informed by the moody trip-hop of Portishead's debut, but it seeps into some harder-edged Nine Inch Nails-lite places with gruff, fuzzed-up guitar and hectic tempos and timings. Such a combination of influences, whilst not pointing to a desperately inventive march into bold new territories, results in a rich, deep sound, with impressively detailed rhythms spidering their way across a set of strong, slick tunes. Opening tracks 'Mellotron' and 'Dark Maybe Darker' set the maudlin tone with slowish, loping beats underneath distant, echoed vocals from Markou, and the vaguest notes of light in some sparse synth lines. 'Last Train To Chiba' ups the pace a little, and introduces some neat production tricks, before '2 Rings' shakes things up with Scarlett's vocals finding their way through a fuzzy maze of increasingly hectic hip-hop beats. 'The Circus' sees De Quadros himself on vocal duty, and it's a great and positive mid-point for the album, confirming Tiger Mendoza's neat balancing act between

electronica and more traditional, guitar-based songwriting. Lee Christian's vocals on 'Don't Hate Me' are so distinctive that they make the track sound very much like a Smilex remix, but it's still a brilliantly taut and aggressive slice of music, with some superb plunging sub-bass in its latter half. 'My House', 'D Song' and 'Kalimba' combine to produce a light and forward-looking close to the album (at least in its context of grimy, moody darkness). There are delicate, skittering rhythms, a wise reining in of the previous density of sound, and some great blues guitar lines.

'Aim For The Head' is very much one man's vision, and perhaps one that reveals its influences slightly too often, but nonetheless it's an impressively consistent and rich-sounding set of tracks that set out a solid base of skills and ideas.

Simon Minter

REFUGE FOR HOMELESS PROSE

'Volume 1'

(Download only)

A collaboration between Richard Ramage from The Relationships and Lee Christian from Smilex, Refuge For Homeless Prose features the former reading short stories he penned back in the 1970s over the latter's soundscapes, all in aid of local homeless charity, Oxhop. Such a format isn't a new thing, even in Oxford circles – Youthmovies'

collaboration with Adam Gnade a couple of years back was a successful experiment, while Meanwhile, Back In Communist Russia's 'songs' were generally more poems and monologues with musical back-up.

On the face of it this pair are an oddly-matched team, coming from very different musical backgrounds as well as generations, but while they don't always gel, sometimes it's the friction between the two halves that creates something interesting. Richard's voice is at once inviting and warm, yet slightly sinister: his monologues are not quite stories, not quite stream-of-consciousness poetry, but apparently innocuous details add an edge to what might otherwise be sixth-form creative writing exercises. For his part, Lee's undulating, chattering backdrops take in everything from trains and waves to glitchy electronic beats and shortwave static. 'Dreams Of Privaleedge' (sic) has the disembodied sense of foreboding of Ultravox's 'Mr X', while 'Closedown Approaches' sometimes feels like an experimental out-take from 'In Rainbows'.

'Desire Caught By The Sun' wanders too aimlessly to engage and you wonder if the novelty has worn off, but the pair's final cut, 'Circle Breaker', is their strongest, the dissonant guitar wandering over retro-futurist machine beats and Richard's deadpan narrative mark it out as Throbbing Gristle reimagined by Alan Bennett and executed by Ryuichi Sakamoto; the sort of thing that makes you want, if you have a home to call your own, to lock the doors and bolt the windows.

Ian Chesterton

THE ROCK OF TRAVOLTA

‘Fine Lines’

(Big Red Sky)

The Rock Of Travolta’s arrival back in 2000 turned the local scene on its head. The expansive collective’s exquisite, dramatic fusion of electronica, classical music and post-rock went beyond the shock of the new as they blew assorted big name bands off-stage. Various line-up upheavals and an extended hiatus inevitably put the breaks on their progress but they never went away and this third album is as assured and possibly more cohesive than their previous outings.

The problem for The Rock, though, is that ten years after they announced their arrival, their sound lacks the novelty it once did – a host of leftfield agitators have fused those disparate musical threads into new sounds. And there are moments here where you wonder if The Rock are simply treading water – the dispassionately contemplative ‘No Pressure’, where Jenny Bates’ cello lead meanders across the carefully-textured backdrop of guitars and electronics before it all follows the band’s characteristic pattern of building tension before releasing it in a cavalcade of noise.

But then there’s plenty more that sounds as vital and fun as ever - ‘Last March Of The Acolytes’ follows a similar path, a sedate cello reverie and pretty guitar picking building to a dramatic finale, but here it rides stridently on galloping bass, a soundtrack to some imagined sci-fi battle scene. Better still is album opener ‘Rock By Numbers’ (which possibly sticks a giant two fingered salute to the criticism we’ve just levelled at them) which



steams in on a nasty, meaty synth drone before the serrated guitar attack and robotic chants take over and lead everything off course with wild abandon.

Similarly ‘The Goddamn Remote’ is a thunderous victory for power over intricacy, monstrous synth squelches meshing with swooping strings as it rides into battle side by side with Add N To (X). The track features Emily Gray, former vocalist with Rock contemporaries Meanwhile, Back In Communist Russia, here recruited for two narrative pieces that add an extra dimension to the sound.

The Rock Of Travolta have never tried to do anything so crass as write a soundtrack to a film that only exists in their imagination, but ‘Fine Lines’ frequently feels like it needs some suitably futuristic and violent visuals to make it whole. With Ridley Scott apparently close to finalising his take on Joe Haldeman’s classic ‘The Forever War’ novel, maybe here’s the perfect band to bring it to life.

Dale Kattack

CAT MATADOR

‘The Address EP’

(Beard Museum)

It’d be unfair to claim that, like a one-man football team, Cat Matador owe their appeal solely to violinist and backing singer Sian Williams, but this new EP does come to life when she comes to the fore.

Often hidden in the middle distance, Sian’s gently droning violin always adds an air of tension to Cat Matador’s slender, regretful songs, while frontman Liam Martin’s voice benefits enormously from her almost ghostly harmonies. When she’s not there, you feel there’s something vital missing from the tapestry. Perhaps that’s because Cat Matador tend towards mood pieces and building musical atmospheres rather than strong melodies – and nothing wrong with that, as the fragile, spectral ‘When Did You Go Blind?’ ably demonstrates – but such a delicate touch still needs something solid to hang itself on, else songs simply slip through your consciousness like sand through fingers.

There’s rich texture to be found on ‘The Address’, with its shoe-gazing guitar and urgently chattering snare-rim rhythm, but as soon as Sian’s voice starts to overlap Liam’s soft croon, the song feels ten times larger and more splendid. The band dip yet deeper into that cool, calm pool of contemplation on EP closer ‘We Can Change’, but ironically it’s Sian’s ghostly coo that stops them from drowning before they rouse themselves for something approaching a heroic finale.

Dale Kattack

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GIG GUIDE

TUESDAY 1st

GLAMOUR OF THE KILL + SHADOWS CHASING GHOSTS: O2 Academy – York's melodic post-hardcore and metalcore warriors return to town after their show here exactly a year ago, releasing 'The Summoning', their debut album proper following on from

Friday 4th

EXAMPLE / STARSMITH / NEON HITCH: O2 Academy

A night for pure chart pop indulgence tonight as rapper Example – aka Elliot Gleave – brings his occasionally cheesy, sometimes harder-edged electro-pop, hip hop and urban pop to town on the back of recent album 'I Won't Go Quietly'. At his most commercial he can come over as a cross between Mike Skinner (whose Beats label he was briefly signed to) and Calvin Harris (who has produced him), and his choice of Brian Rawliss as producer has brought a little of the Kylie and Britney magic with it; on the other end of the scale Chase & Status sometimes lend him a grimmer edge, and Gleave, who has also made documentaries and done stand-up comedy, for all his slight cheesiness, is a talented pop maker. Starsmith – aka Fin Dow-Smith – is little known for his own work but has produced Ellie Goulding, Kylie and Diana Vickers, as well as remixing Lady Gaga, Little Boots and Katy Perry, so knows more than a little about what makes a pop song tick. Potential highlight of the night, though, is Neon Hitch (her real name – her parents were travelling hippies, she was raised on a bus and worked as a trapeze artist in her youth), who started off doing session work for the likes of Imogen Heap, Ke\$ha and Bruno Mars before her vocal talents were recognised in their own right. Her fluffy, lightweight electro-pop is sweet enough but her alternatively cutesy and shrill vocal style might yet see her classed as a latter-day Cyndi Lauper.

MARCH

acclaimed mini-album 'Through The Darkness They March' and supports to Avenged Sevenfold and Bullet For My Valentine.

TROPHY WIFE + PET MOON: The Cellar – Sweetly feather-light math-pop from former-Jonquil trio Trophy Wife, plus serene electro-pop and r'n'b from Andrew Mears' post-Youthmovies project, Pet Moon – *see Trophy Wife Introducing piece*

JAZZ CLUB: The Bullingdon

SEMI-ACOUSTIC NIGHT: Café Tarifa

OPEN MIC SESSION: James Street Tavern

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Port Mahon

WEDNESDAY 2nd

FICTION + BEATY HEART + GUNNING

FOR TAMAR: The Jericho Tavern – Yoof! takes an excursion to the Tavern for a show with London's sprightly, tropical-flavoured new wave outfit Fiction, adding bits of airy, early-80s art-pop into their moody, rhythmic party music, recalling the likes of The Cure, The Passions and The Associates. Fellow Londoners Beaty Heart bring a darker, more off-kilter post-punk style of electronica along in support, while rising local post-rockers Gunning For Tamar open the show.

ACOUSTIC LOUNGE: Fat Lil's, Witney – Weekly open mic session.

PHAT SESSIONS: The Cellar – Fortnightly open jam with house band the Phat Sessions Collective playing anything from hip-hop, Latin and ska to drum&bass, reggae and funk. Plus resident DJ Fu.

TONY BATEY & FRIENDS: The Cricketers Arms – Weekly blues jam.

THURSDAY 3rd

REEL BIG FISH + THE SKINTS: O2

Academy – Stomping ska-punk from California's ever-touring party rockers Reel Big Fish, with support from London's punk-reggae outfit The Skints.

DAISY E & THE UNSTEADIES + HALF DECENT + PEPPERMINT VANDALS: The Bullingdon – Zombie ska-punk from Daisy E, with lo-fi skunk-ska from Peppermint Vandals.

MIDNIGHT RAMBLER + ELLIOT VANDERHYDE: The Port Mahon – Soulful electronica in the vein of DJ Shadow from Reading's Midnight Rambler, with support from maudlin local acoustic singer-songwriter Elliot Vanderhyde.

SKYLARKIN with DAWN PENN: The Cellar – Jamaican reggae and rocksteady singer Dawn Penn plays the first of a two-night stint at the Cellar courtesy of Skylarkin, best known for her much-sampled 90s hit 'You Don't Love Me (No No No)', but with a sporadic musical career going back to the 60s when she worked

with Prince Buster amongst others.

SPIN JAZZ CLUB: The Wheatsheaf – With Israeli-born drummer and composer Asaf Sirkis' Quartet.

RED KYTE + EVA ROSE + KYOTO DRIVE + STATIC ACTION: Fat Lil's, Witney – Indie power-pop from Red Kyte at tonight's local bands showcase.

CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre – Singers, musicians, poets, storytellers and performance artists at the long-running open-mic club every Thursday.

RELOAD THE RADIO + HIGH JINKS + WE'RE NOT MEXICANS: The Hobgoblin, Bicester – Jambox rock and punk night.

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon

BLUES JAM: The Jack Russell, Marston

FRIDAY 4th

PROHIBITION SMOKERS CLUB + HOT HOOVES + PLAYER2: The Bullingdon –

Debut gig from the new band Hot Hooves, formed by legendary Jericho Tavern and Point promoter and Arthur Turner's Lovechild frontman Mac and one-time Talulah Gosh and Heavenly guitarist Pete Momtchiloff. Lee Smilex's expansive and eclectic electro-acoustic outfit Prohibition Smokers Club headline.

THE SMYTHS: O2 Academy – Tribute to The Smiths.

EXAMPLE + STARSMITH + NEON HITCH: O2 Academy – Cheesetastic night of electro, pop and hip hop – *see main preview*
KLUB KAKOFANNEY with BARRY & THE BEACHCOMBERS + SMALL MACHINE + STEM: The Wheatsheaf – Another mixed bag of goodies at Klub Kak, including eccentric punk types Barry & Co, plus grungy rockers Small Machine.

DEER CHICAGO + WHITE NOISE SOUND + GRACEFUL SLICKS: The Jericho Tavern – Back & To The Left present promising new epic pop types Deer Chicago, with excellent support from psych-drone rockers WNS, recalling Spacemen 3, Loop and Silver Apples. 60s-styled psych-pop outfit Graceful Slicks open.

SKYLARKIN: The Cellar – A night of reggae, dancehall, rocksteady and more with DJs Wrongtom, Count Skylarkin, Aim and Shaun Ryder collaborator Kwasi.

OZZIE: Fat Lil's, Witney – Tribute to Ozzy Osbourne and Black Sabbath.

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

SATURDAY 5th

OBIAT + DESERT STORM + KOMRAD + ALUNAH: The Wheatsheaf – Reading-based multinational metallers Obiat headline tonight's Buried In Smoke show, their epic blend of doom, psychedelia, prog and thrash having earned them supports to Pelican, Orange Goblin and Testament among others. Their third album, 'Eye Tree Pi', is just released. Support comes



from local masters of psychedelic sludge and bluesy hardcore, Desert Storm, plus tech-core beasts Komrad.

YOOF! with EXLOVERS + PUSHING

HANDS + GLASS ANIMALS: The Cellar – Second Yoof! gig of the month, tonight featuring London's shoegaze/dreampop outfit Exlovers alongside local atmospheric electro band Glass Animals. Followed by DJ sets from Radio Clubfoot's Will Gilgrass and Rockfeedback.com's Mike Harounoff.

W.A.M: Fat Lil's, Witney – Ska-punk party tunes.

THE REAL THING: The Regal – The 70s and 80s soul and disco hitmakers return, taking a trip back in time to hits like 'You To Me Are Everything', 'Can't Get By Without You' and 'Can You Feel The Force'.

BRICKWORK LIZARDS + HUFF'N'PUFF + BEN MELLOR: East Oxford Community Centre – Arabic-flavoured jazz and hip hop from local stalwarts Brickwork Lizards, plus live music and poetry in support.

THE CAPER + DYING BREED + SIXTY FORTY + CAMPBELL JUSTIN QUINN: The Wheatsheaf, Banbury – Jambox rock night.

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

HONEYTHIEF: Baby Simple – Indie, pop and electro in aid of Amnesty International.

SUNDAY 6th

PAOLO FRESU & RALPH TOWNER: The Northwall, Summertown – Oxford Contemporary Music presents Italian trumpeter and flugelhorn player Fresu and American classical and jazz guitarist Towner together, the pair having released a collaborative album, 'Chiaroscuro', last year, Towner best known for his work with Oregon as well as a stint with Weather Report.

THE LIGHTHOUSE FAMILY: The New Theatre – Smooth soul-pop from the resurrected 90s duo, best known for their hits, 'Ocean Drive', 'High' and 'I'm A Rock'n'Roll Gypsy Muthafucker'.

RIVERSIDE VOICES + MOON LEOPARD + BEARD OF DESTINY + PENNY & PHIL: Donnington Community Centre – Free acoustic music evening.

STEVE COOPER + AURORA YOUNG + CHARLIE GANNON & ZENA + PHIL & AMANDA: The Hobgoblin, Bicester – Acoustic and open mic night.

MONDAY 7th

FLATS + PHANTOM THEORY + DEAD JERICHO: The Jericho Tavern – Like punk never happened? Flats prove it's still alive and never even grew up – *see main preview*

BOMBAY BICYCLE CLUB: O2 Academy – The north London indie rockers play their first gig of the year before setting to work on their third album.

THE ERJA LYYTINEN BAND: The Bullingdon – A swift return to the Famous Monday Blues for young Finnish guitarist Erja, who has earned an enviable reputation as a rising blues star in her homeland and has previously worked with UK blues faves Ian Parker and Aynsley Lister.

BEARDYMAN: O2 Academy – Inventive human beatboxing from the undisputed UK champ, using vocal loops to augment his virtuoso beatmaking skills.

TUESDAY 8th

CAITLIN ROSE + TREETOP FLYERS + MONUMENT VALLEY: The Jericho Tavern – Honky-tonk country, yee-hah hoe-down and pedal steel-led balladry from the Nashville songstress, drawing comparisons to Patsy Cline, Loretta Lynn and Emmylou Harris.

JAZZ CLUB: The Bullingdon

SEMI-ACOUSTIC NIGHT: Café Tarifa

OPEN MIC SESSION: James Street Tavern

INTRUSION: The Cellar – Monthly goth, industrial, darkwave and EBM club night.

THE MIGHTY REDOX: The Prince Of Wales, Iffley

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Port Mahon

WEDNESDAY 9th

BENJAMIN FRANCIS LEFTWICH: The Jericho Tavern – Wistful, melancholic acoustic pop from the York singer-songwriter, in the vein of Eliot Smith and Jose Gonzales.

KING OF CATS + VIXENS + VERY NICE

HARRY: The Wheatsheaf – Moshka club night with wordy acoustic popster King Of Cats, gothic post-punk types Vixens and bluesy rockers VNH.

ACOUSTIC LOUNGE: Fat Lil's, Witney
TONY BATEY & FRIENDS: The Cricketers Arms

THURSDAY 10th

KING CHARLES: The Jericho Tavern – Wry, rootsy acoustic psychedelia and electro-pop from the west London dandy, inspired by Donovan, Syd Barrett and Marc Bolan and fresh from a tour support to Mumford & Sons.

SPIN JAZZ CLUB: The Wheatsheaf – With

tenor saxophonist Frank Sebastian.
THE TIME OF OUR LIVES with SMILEX: Pegasus Theatre – Local rock faves Smilex play their last shows of the year, with bassist Jen and guitarist Tom relocating to the States for a year, playing a two-night stint with specially choreographed contemporary dance and visual art shows.

CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon

BLUES JAM: The Jack Russell, Marston

HURT SEASON + FALL AGAINST FATE: The Hobgoblin, Bicester – Jambox rock night.

FRIDAY 11th

JOANNA MacGREGOR: The Jacqueline du Pre Building – OCM presents internationally-renowned jazz and classical pianist MacGregor, best known for her interpretations of Debussy, Satie, Ravel and more, having played with the New York Philharmonic and London Symphony orchestras.

TRADEMARK: O2 Academy – Launch night for a new grime club, with sets tonight from Iogen Sama, Rude Kid, Blacks, Kozzie, Vectra and Ctrl. Alt. Crash.

TOO REX: Fat Lil's, Witney – T-Rex tribute.

THE TIME OF OUR LIVES with SMILEX: Pegasus Theatre – Second night of dance, art and live music.

FUNKY FRIDAY: The Bullingdon



Monday 7th

FLATS / PHANTOM THEORY / DEAD JERICHO: The Jericho Tavern

Any band that quotes Crass, Discharge, Chron Gen and Rudimentary Peni as primary influences, hate mods and have a song whose chorus is merely "Paul Weller is a cunt" repeated over and over again have got to be worth watching. The London quartet sound like the last 25 years of punk evolution never happened, but given that evolution led to most so-called punk bands these days being little more than walking advertising hoardings for sportswear companies, that's a good thing. In fact they sound like they could have been dragged off one of those old Bullshit Detector compilations that showcased up and coming anarcho-punk bands back in the early-80s. Songs clock in around the minute and a half mark and come full of shouting and things being hit very hard. Flats tend to make Gallows sound like My Chemical Romance in the slick production stakes. And since the country now has an old Etonian Tory PM, it's obviously time for old-fashioned punk rock to rear its gnarly old head again. Great local support from uptight post-punk starlets Dead Jerichos and riffastic hardcore duo Phantom Theory.

NIGEL BROWN & THE ULTRAMARINES + A PINT AND HALF OF BLUES + LAIMA BITE + MARK ATHERTON: The Hollybush, Osney – Free fundraiser for this summer's Wittstock festival – donations welcome on the door.

DESMOND CHANCER & THE LONG MEMORIES + BREATHING LIGHT: The Port Mahon – Gutter jazz in a Tom Waits vein from Mr Chancer and chums.

SATURDAY 12th

REHEATED: Café Tarifa (1pm) – Gappy Tooth Industry promotions re-light their Winter Warmer, which was snowed off last December. A full day and evening of free acoustic music includes live sets from Samuel Zasada, Huppenpuff, Anton Barbeau, Ally Craig, George Chopping, King of Cats, Jess Hall, Matt Winkworth, Ross Bennett, Prohibition Smokers Club, Midnight Boatman, D Gwalia, Helen Pearson and Trev Williams.

MONA: O2 Academy – Megastardom-bound Nashville rockers unleash their inner U2, with brass knobs on – *see main preview*



Saturday 12th

MONA: O2 Academy

Nothing at all wrong with aiming big, but there's a suspicion that Nashville's Mona have been almost laboratory created to fill stadiums and airwaves. With their chiming guitars, epic pop anthems and a singer with a messiah complex, the likelihood is Mona want to be U2. And they do sound a fair bit like arguably the biggest band in the world – recent single 'Listen To Your Love' sounded like 'I Will Follow' slightly rejigged by way of Rocket From The Crypt. There's also a slightly grizzled, rootsy underside to Mona that gets you to thinking of Kings Of Leon at times, with singer Nick Brown's gutsy delivery carrying all before it as the band tick every marketing box going, right down to looking a bit like a street gang from the 1950s. That Mona are currently managed by Saul Galpin, who oversaw Suede's success in the 90s, suggests that global success isn't such a wild pipe dream. Bands rarely fail when they provide big, uncomplicated singalong pop anthems to the masses, and if Brown seems set to be this year's most irritating rock rent-a-quote, Mona's music will likely eclipse anything he has to say.

SUNDAY 13th

THE BOOTLEG BEATLES: The New Theatre – Beatles tribute spectacular.

MONDAY 14th

ROADHOUSE: The Bullingdon – Rocking blues at the Famous Monday Blues.

TUESDAY 15th

THE STRANGLERS: O2 Academy – The Men In Black continue to get a grip on themselves – *see main preview*

JAZZ CLUB: The Bullingdon

SEMI-ACOUSTIC NIGHT: Café Tarifa

OPEN MIC SESSION: James Street Tavern

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Port Mahon

WEDNESDAY 16th

PHAT SESSIONS: The Cellar

LAST CHANCE + AGE OF MISRULE: The Chapel, Banbury

TONY BATEY & FRIENDS: The Cricketers Arms

THURSDAY 17th

JAGUAR SKILLS: O2 Academy – The ninja-obsessed hip hop DJ brings his eclectic mixing skills to town; altogether now: "HoooOOO!"

THE SPIN JAZZ CLUB: The Wheatsheaf – With saxophonist, bandleader and composer Adam Waldmann, who has worked with Clark Tracey, Steve Davis and Polar Bear, amongst others.

ANNERO + MARY BENDY TOY + UNDERSMILE + TRIDEM + NOT TOO SHABBY: The Bullingdon – Heavyweight noise from hardcore metallers Annero and Tridem tonight, alongside uber-sludge monsters Undersmile and industrial gothic rockers Mary Bendy Toy.

NEON VIOLETS + LISTING SHIPS: The Cellar – Psychedelic blues-rock from Neon Violets, the new two-piece band formed by Spiral 25 bassist Joe Chapman. Instrumental electro and post-rock from Listing Ships in support.

VERSES + ADELAIDE + THE FICTION + ELYSIUM WAITS: Fat Lil's, Witney

CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford

Community Centre

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon

BLUES JAM: The Jack Russell, Marston

FRIDAY 18th

JESSIE GRACE + ADAM BARNES + THE YARNS: The Jericho Tavern – Daisy Rodgers Music night, featuring local singer-songwriters Jessie Grace and Adam Barnes as well as Bristol's 80s-style jangle-pop outfit The Yarns. Anyone buying an advance ticket for the show gets to vote one of the acts playing an unusual cover version.

THE BIG 10 INCH: The Cellar – Count Skylarkin's bi-monthly celebration of jump blues, rockabilly and swing tonight hosts London's six-piece skiffle outfit Severed Limb, launching their debut EP, 'Woo Eee Ha Ha!'. Support from Oxford's own rockabilly, garage and surf heroes The Long Insiders, plus Count Skylarkin and Count Sizzle spinning classic vinyl and shellac.

SHAKER HEIGHTS + GERT LASSITUDE: The Wheatsheaf – Rootsy indie rocking and

Americana from Shaker Heights.

THE ANYDAYS + DEER CHICAGO + EVO SYLVIAN: The Chester Arms – 60s-style garage-pop in the vein of the Kinks, Sonics and Beatles from The Anydays, with support from epic indie rockers Deer Chicago and a debut gig from Evo Sylvian, the solo project from Dead Jerichos' Craig Evans.

FRED HOT CHILI PEPPERS + RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE TRIBUTE: Fat Lil's, Witney – Double dose of heavy rock tribute acts.

MANACLES OF ACID + SUBMENTAL + LEGOWEAPONRY: The Port Mahon – Heavy duty live techno and acid, with free glo-sticks on entry.

FUNKY FRIDAY: The Bullingdon

MOTHER CORONA + THIRD COMPANY + CABARET RAT + PAUL TAYLOR: The Wheatsheaf Banbury – Jambox rock night with super-heavyweight metal from Mother Corona and lo-fi one-man punk noise from Cabaret Rat.

SATURDAY 19th

THE HALF RABBITS: The Jericho Tavern – CD launch gig for the local gothic new wavers.

INTERNATIONAL JETSETTERS + THE RELATIONSHIPS + LES CLOCHARDS: The Port Mahon – Swoonsome local shoegazers International Jetsetters return to live action, sometime Jesus & Mary Chain bandmates Mark Crozer and Loz Colbert and crew kicking it out at the convergence of Ride, Magoo and The Stones. Stately, literate psychedelic pop from The Relationships in support, plus francophile rock'n'roll croonage from Les Clochars.

ONE LOVE FESTIVAL REUNION: The Regal – Ahead of this summer's main event, and as a reminder of last year's festival, One Love hosts a reunion party, bringing together a selection of reggae and dub soundsystems. Pick of the night is obviously dub legend Mad Professor, and he's joined by Saxon Sound System, Mungo's Hi-Fi, Aba Shanti, Channel One Sound System, Bush Chemist & King General, Unity Hi-Hi and Oxford's own Dope Ammo.

BOOT-LED ZEPPELIN: O2 Academy – Led Zep tribute.

FRESH OUT THE BOX: The Cellar

PROPAGANDA + TRASHY + ROOM 101: O2 Academy

THE PETE FRYER BAND: Prince Of Wales, Horspath

SUNDAY 20th

BEETROOT JAM & BANDS SESSION: The Port Mahon – Live bands followed by open jam session.

MONDAY 21st

PETE BOSS & THE BLUEHEARTS: The Bullingdon – Clapton-inspired electric blues from the local guitar stalwart.

EMMA'S IMAGINATION: O2 Academy – Throat-slashingly vapid acoustic pop mimsy from the Sky TV *Must Be The Music* winner, now signed to Gary Barlow's Excruciating Music label and all set to make you pray for all-out nuclear war in the next six months.

EMPTY VESSELS + MINOR COLES + THE INSULT: The Wheatsheaf – Psychedelic blues-rock in the vein of Blue Cheer and Led Zep from Empty Vessels, with support from skittish, mathsy indie rockers Minor Coles.

CHARLY COOMBES & THE NEW BREED + BLACK HATS + SPRING OFFENSIVE: The Jericho Tavern – Raw, soulful 70s-style rocking from singer and pianist Charly and his band, with support from moddish power-pop trio Black Hats and esoteric math-popsters Spring Offensive.

LANDSCAPE: The Bullingdon – New nu-skool dance club night with DJ Kieran, DJ Supermarket and Left Outer Join.

BREEZE + STEAMROLLER + FOUR MORE FACES: The Regal – Local bands night at the Regal with rejuvenated 70s blues-rock heavyweights Steamroller leaning towards the Cream and Hendrix side of things, plus moddish rocking from Four More Faces.

THE HAMSTERS: Fat Lil's, Witney – Classic electric blues-rocking and Hendrix and ZZ Top tributes from the enduring UK blues favourites.

MUNDANE SANDS: The Chequers, Headington Quarry – Folk rock in the vein of Dire Straits and Oyster Band.

PROPAGANDA + TRASHY + ROOM 101: O2 Academy

COLD STONE + MANTA + REFUGEES OF CULTURE: The Centurion, Bicester – Jambox rock night.

TUESDAY 22nd

STEPH WEST & GILES LEWIN: Warneford Chapel – Singer and harpist West and fiddle player Lewin (a founding member of Bellowhead) collaborate on a night of traditional folk-inspired music as part of Oxford Contemporary Music's spring season.

THE HEARTBREAKS: The Jericho Tavern – Indie of the old school from Morecambe's Heartbreaks, steeped in 80s jangle-pop nostalgia, 60s girl group euphoria, the derelict romance of abandoned seaside towns and a hefty smattering of surf-pop and rock'n'roll. 25 years ago they'd have been supporting The Smiths on tour; if he gets wind of them, they'll probably be Morrissey's favourite new band. Heroic stuff.

10CC: The New Theatre – Graham Gouldman brings the current version of the 70s soft-rock hitmakers back to town for a run-through the old favourites and songs from his own solo career

JAZZ CLUB: The Bullingdon

SEMI-ACOUSTIC NIGHT: Café Tarifa

OPEN MIC SESSION: James Street Tavern

Thursday 15th

THE STRANGLERS: O2 Academy

Now entering their sixth decade together and with drummer Jet Black approaching his 72nd birthday, The Stranglers are showing no sign of giving up any time soon. They've never done what's been expected of them anyway. Back in the mid-70s their aggressive form of pub rock saw them simultaneously adopted by the burgeoning punk movement and shunned by its prime movers, either for being too old or having a keyboard player or just being a bit too yobbish for the art set. Over the course of 20 or so Top 40 singles and 17 Top 40 albums, they've moved far and wide from those punk beginnings. While 'Get A Grip' and 'Peaches' confirmed their image as violent misanthropes, 'Golden Brown', 'Skin Deep' and 'Always The Sun' are among the most beautiful pop songs to grace the charts. Of course the current Stranglers line-up is hardly the classic incarnation, singer Hugh Cornwell having departed, amid scenes of characteristic violence, as far back as 1990 and things have never been quite the same, but with JJ Burnell, Jet Black and Dave Greenfield soldiering on with current frontman Baz Warne, plenty of old classics will get an airing and we'll not say anything disparaging about the band – journalists have found themselves tied to trees and abandoned in forests for less in the past.



OPEN MIC SESSION: The Port Mahon

WEDNESDAY 23rd

STIFF LITTLE FINGERS + SPEAR OF DESTINY: O2 Academy – Jake Burns and co. run through 'Suspect Device', 'Alternative Ulster' and more once again, while Kirk Brandon's post-punk gothabilly outfit S.O.D support.

SHATTERED DREAMS + ROB McLEAN: The Wheatsheaf – Moshka club night with old-school punk types Shattered Dreams and electro boffin Rob McLean.

ACOUSTIC LOUNGE: Fat Lil's, Witney
TONY BATEY & FRIENDS: The Cricketers Arms

THURSDAY 24th

THE UNTHANKS: The Regal – Ghostly trad folk from the Northumbrian sisters – *see main preview*

ZODIAC MINDWARP + DESERT STORM + KOMRAD: O2 Academy – Return of the self-proclaimed High Priest Of Love, aka graphic artist Mark Manning who, in the mid-80s decided to live the life of a debauched rock star and created the cartoonish persona of Zodiac Mindwarp, kicking out a deliberately outlandish form of sleazy biker rock that won him a chart hit with 'Prime Mover' before it all, inevitably, fell apart. He and the band, with myriad line-up changes, have continued to gig and release albums, including their most recent, 'We Are Volsung', and if Manning's clever, satirical humour bypassed too many people and saw him declaimed as a misogynist dolt, he remains an astute author, particularly his collaboration with Bill Drummond, 'Bad Wisdom. Top drawer local support from psychedelic stoner-metallars Desert Storm and prog-core outfit Komrad.

ERLAND & THE CARNIVAL: The Jericho Tavern – Return to town for the band formed by Verve guitarist Simon Tong and Orcadian singer Erland Cooper, mixing old traditional songs and ballads with psychedelia and analogue electro-pop to seductive effect, coming in somewhere between *The Wicker Man* soundtrack, Last Shadow Puppets and Crosby, Stills & Nash.

THE CELLAR FAMILY + ASHBIES + HALF NAKED + STEM: The Bullingdon – Great bolshy post-punk noise partway between Young Knives and Future Of The Left from local newcomers Cellar Family.

EVERYONE NEEDS A NEMESIS + SMALL MACHINE: The Port Mahon – Brooding power-pop from Everyone Needs A Nemesis, presumably named after the Fighting With Wire song, plus grungy rock from Small Machine.

CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon

BLUES JAM: The Jack Russell, Marston
PROGRAM INITIATIVE + A NINJA SLOB
DREW ME: The Hobgoblin, Bicester

FRIDAY 25th

PHANTOM THEORY + STRANGE NEWS FROM ANOTHER STAR + DESERT

STORM: The Bullingdon – EP launch gig for Phantom Theory, marrying classic rock riffage with a hardcore ferocity, plus psychedelic stoner-metal from Desert Storm and virulent



Thursday 24th

THE UNTHANKS: The Regal

Just as their popularity has grown and grown in recent years, so The Unthanks' sound has swelled to fill the bigger venues they now fill to capacity. Initially known as Rachel Unthank & The Winterset and raised on their native Northumbrian folk circuit, where dad George was well known as part of shanty singers The Keelers, The Unthanks signals the increased input of sister Becky, now an equal vocal partner to Rachel; the one raw and taut, the other ghostly and ethereal, together their close vocal harmonies, strongly accented, an astonishingly delicate and emotional combination. Rachel's partner, and band pianist, Adrian McNulty too has played an important role in brining The Unthanks to greater prominence with his bold arrangements of both traditional sea songs, murder ballads and love stories, as well as original compositions. In fact The Unthanks now number some ten musicians, mostly female, combining traditional acoustic with more modern instrumentation to create a sound that owes as much at times to Steve Reich or Penguin Café Orchestra as it does to the generations of singers who kept these songs alive over the centuries. The band's 'Bairns' album was piped to the Mercury Prize a couple of years back by Elbow's 'Seldom Seen Kid' and never felt like a token folk inclusion in the list and with recent concerts seeing the band extensively paying tribute to Robert Wyatt and Anthony Hegarty, they're a folk band that's breaking down new barriers while staying close to their roots.

punk and hardcore in the vein of McLusky and Blood Brothers from Cardiff's Strange News.
WE AERONAUTS + CAT MATADOR + THE GULLIVERS: The Cellar – Excellent trio of local talents with expansive alt.folkies We Aeronauts, ambient indie types Cat Matador and shimmering ethereal popsters The Gullivers.

GUNS 2 ROSES + FNM: Fat Lil's, Witney – Tributes to Guns'n'Roses and Faith No More.
THE MIGHTY REDOX: The Chester Arms
FUNKY FRIDAY: The Bullingdon
THE INSULT: The Port Mahon

SATURDAY 26th

RUMER: The New Theatre – The sweet-voiced songstress they're calling The New Karen Carpenter prepares for Duffy-style stardom – *see main preview*



Saturday 26th

RUMER:

The New Theatre

Big name fans don't always translate into mega-selling pop careers, but in Rumer's case it's already happened. The Anglo-Pakistani girl born Sarah Joyce has already been personally invited by Elton John to join him at the Electric Proms, toured with Jools Holland and appeared on his *Later...* show; Roger Daltrey is an avowed fan and she supported Jamie Cullum and Joshua Radin, but perhaps the biggest boost to her fledgling career was being invited to California by Burt Bacharach, who promptly wrote an EP's worth of songs for her, released last Christmas. Meanwhile Rumer's self-penned debut album, 'Seasons Of My Soul' is already a critics' favourite, drawing admiring comparisons to Dionne Warwick, Laura Nyro and particularly to Karen Carpenter and went platinum within two months of release. Raised on a steady diet of classic Hollywood films and musicals, Rumer's songs, gently meandering ballads or more lustrous jazz-style pieces, are characteristically timeless, appealing across the board from the Radio 2 massive to confirmed musos, but come packed with enough personal sorrow to make them entirely her own and chances are she'll spend 2011 eclipsing her already astonishingly rapid ascent to the top of the pop tree.

HOLY GRAIL + REVOKER: O2 Academy – Pasadena's old-school metallers come to the UK to promote new album, 'Crisis In Utopia', harking back to the classic NWOBHM sound of Iron Maiden, Judas Priest and Saxon.

CONGO NATTY aka REBEL MC: The Bullingdon – The seminal UK rapper-turned-junglist and dancehall fave comes to town – *see main preview*

GAPPY TOOTH INDUSTRY with AMY'S GHOST + THE CELLAR FAMILY + THE GRACEFUL SLICKS: The Wheatsheaf –

Haunted electronic pop and atmospheric acoustic balladry from Reading's Amy's Ghost, with hints of Kate Bush and Portishead in the mix at tonight's GTI. Support from promising local post-punk noisenicks The Cellar Family and 60s-styled psychedelic rockers The Graceful Slicks.

THE ROCK OF TRAVOLTA + CARETAKER + KOMRAD: The Cellar – Album launch gig for local electro-symphony collective The Rock Of Travolta, with support from arch noisenicks Caretaker and technical hardcore outfit Komrad.

WELCOME TO PEEPWORLD + STEM + SHIFTY CHICKEN SHED: The Stocks, Crown & Thistle, Abingdon – Skittle Alley bands night with sweet-natured acoustic outfit Welcome To Peepworld, plus steel guitar player Shifty Chicken Shed.

PROPAGANDA + TRASHY + ROOM 101: O2 Academy

SELECTA: The Regal – Drum&bass club night with DJ Hype, Twisted Individual, Jayden, Total Science, DJ Lee and Sinista.

THE PETE FRYER BAND: The Dolphin, Wallingford

THE LONGEST DAY: The Port Mahon

SUNDAY 27th

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

MONDAY 28th

KING B: The Bullingdon – Rocking blues from the UK circuit faves at the Famous Monday Blues.

TUESDAY 29th

THE BLACKOUT + THE SWELLERS + HYRO THE HERO: O2 Academy – Merthyr Tydfil's post-hardcore rockers The Blackout hit the road in support of new album, 'Hope', following tour supports to Lostprophets, Kids In Glass Houses and more.

JAZZ CLUB: The Bullingdon

SEMI-ACOUSTIC NIGHT: Café Tarifa

OPEN MIC SESSION: James Street Tavern

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Port Mahon

WEDNESDAY 30th

PHANTOM THEORY + SECRET RIVALS + TROPHY CABINET: The Wheatsheaf – EP launch gig for local riffastic duo Phantom Theory, mixing classic 70s rock with 80s-style hardcore and a lean post-punk edge.

ACOUSTIC LOUNGE: Fat Lil's, Witney

PHAT SESSIONS: The Cellar

TONY BATEY & FRIENDS: The Cricketers Arms

THURSDAY 31st

PROSPEKT + SLEEPWALKERS + UNKNOWN FLOW + IN DECADENCE:

The Bullingdon – EP launch gig from local technical metallers Prospekt at tonight's Skeletor show.

FIREWORKS + MAKE DO & MEND: O2

Academy – Yappy pop-punk from Detroit's Fireworks, plus melodic punk in the vein of Jimmy Eatworld from Make Do & Mend in support.

SPIN JAZZ CLUB: The Wheatsheaf – With Dylan Howe's Stravinsky Project.

MARA + JUJU FISH + SAMUEL ZASADA + BETHANY WEIMERS: The Cellar – Local songstress Tamara Parsons-Baker launches her new band Mara, with support from Little Fish's JuJu, playing solo and acoustic, atmospheric alt.folkies Samuel Zasada and gothic acoustic popsters Bethany Weimers.

PROHIBITION SMOKERS CLUB JAM: Fat Lil's, Witney – Open mic, jam session and full band show from the nebulous local supergroup.

CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon

BLUES JAM: The Jack Russell, Marston WE ARE REVIVAL + CRYISIS + DEAD LAY

WAITING: The Hobgoblin, Bicester – Jambox metal night.

Saturday 26th

CONGO NATTY aka REBEL MC:

The Bullingdon

As part of the build-up to this summer's Out To Graze festival, Bassmentality and Dub Politics team up tonight to present a genuine legend of UK hip hop, Congo Natty, aka Rebel MC. The north London rapper, born Michael West, emerged in the late-80s alongside fellow British rappers Blade and Credit To The Nation and hit the charts with the pop-friendly 'Street Tuff', simultaneously exposing homegrown hip hop to a wider audience while alienating himself from the underground rap scene. His debut album, 'Rebel Music' confirmed his pop credentials but he quickly started drawing on reggae, jungle, house, techno, ragga and electronica, collaborating with the likes of Barrington Levy and Dennis Brown along the way and releasing singles under the name Conquering Lion Tribes, among a host of other aliases. His career now extends beyond 20 years, in which time he's never stopped releasing music and is now credited as an influence by Dizzee Rascal and recognised as a precursor to grime. Tonight's gig sees him joined by Tenor Fly and Congo Dubz, mixing up reggae, dancehall, old-school jungle and drum&bass, with Dub Politics residents Physical, Shaggy Roots and Sam X on the decks.



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Includes entry to FUNKY FRIDAY afterwards

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5th **UNHINGED** with Logger, Gnetic and Hannibal Selector

12th **LANDSCAPE** – nu-skool with DJ Kieran / Supermarket

19th **SIMPLE** – house & techno. 10-4am

26th **CONGO NATTY** aka **REBEL MC** 10-3am; £10adv

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LIVE

BLESSING FORCE WEEKENDER

The Old Bookbinders

The Blessing Force is one of those things, like Atlantis or the Freemasons, which most people have spent more time talking about than experiencing first hand, so this weekend's show – a primer of Blessing Force and friends – offers a welcome chance to hear what all the fuss is about.

Despite the décor sometimes coming off like an episode of *Nathan Barley* and some teething problems with the PA on Saturday, the venue is a triumph. Two stages keep the changeovers tight and the music flowing, there's plenty to look at, and even a miniature vintage fashion fair by the door. If reports of the entire venue being floored in the summer to be replaced by flats are true, let the protests start now.

And the music? A mixed bag, predictably. There are weak points, for instance **Young Athletes League's** guileless aping of Alexander Tucker-style looping over agitated vocals and loose, clunky guitar lines, or **Labyrinth Ear's** enervating, uninspired Dalston electro-pop. Probably best to skip over that and focus on the highlights, because there's a huge musical palette on display, from **Coloureds'** pounding four-to-the-floor beats to **Rhosyn's** studied string quartet dramas.

The ODC Drumline, composed of four drummers, including Youthmovies and Hreda alumni, plus a guitarist and MC, are a thrilling, apparently semi-improvised tour of groovier, less confrontational Shit & Shine rhythmic mantras, and a genuine spectacle whose very presence makes this feel like a special event. Thrown together in just a few weeks before the event, they're also the most enduring memory of the entire show.

Jonquil, as one might expect from a band of such pedigree and longevity, are perhaps the strongest band on offer, all twisty, infectious



Jonquil photo: Stuart Fowkes

melodies and bright pop songs skinning a deceptively-complex core to the songs. **Pet Moon** are an interesting curio – at times, they're frustratingly gossamer, a swirl of ideas that cross in and out of each other's paths without forming anything more solid, but when they land a groove they're impressive, skittering vocal melodies over skeletal rhythms and a miasma of synth and effected guitar. Clearly still a band in development, but

developing towards something with exciting potential.

Ultimately though, this is about a weekend of varied music, put on in an excellent venue by the combined efforts of a whole bunch of Oxford musicians, promoters and artists who want to show off the best of what's coming out of OX4 right now – and that's something for us all to celebrate.

Stuart Fowkes

ILIKETRAINS / NAPOLEON III

The Jericho Tavern

Anyone can play guitar? Pppffft, that's so nineties. Now it's Anyone can play laptop, as gig going is increasingly becoming like *The Gadget Show*.

Napoleon 3rd is James Mabbett. James is from Yorkshire, the Zak Dingle flat cap he wears confirms it, something you only see Oop North or at traction engine rallies. When his first full band, Little Japanese Toy, ran out of batteries in 2004, James went DIY and decided he could get all the alt-dance vibes he wanted out of an Apple Mac, a vintage reel to reel and a distorted guitar. One acclaimed debut album later ('In Debt To') and an added human on snare drum, and he's ready to make my earplugs pop out with his cacophonous tribal loops and artful multiple layers, with typical track 'The

Unknown Unknown' bringing to mind Brian Wilson and Orbital chained to lampposts, performing outside at the height of the Queensland cyclone.

At the same time in Leeds as the above LJT's demise, ILikeTrains were being born, and the first place they chose to take baby steps and play outside of their native city was Oxford. Singer and still main songwriter, David Martin muses on this tonight, how before this gig the band had revisited The Cellar and reminisced and hoped there was a blue plaque to honour them on the alley wall.

I remember that gig well. The painfully slow-build elegies to historical failures, the youthful pedantic planning, right down to the British Rail uniforms, and being mighty impressed by a

song called 'Oh, The Humanity', where their trumpet player doubled up as 8mm film projectionist and synchronised a movie of the fiery death throes of the Hindenburg Airship onto the venue wall. Spool forward seven years, and now, *sans* trumpet player and film clips, they've kept their *basso profundo* vocal quirkiness, but instead of the old, waltz time-signatures, they've muscled up a more festival-friendly three guitar assault, like an out-of-body experience under Arctic moonlight. New album 'We Saw The Deep' (the alternative name of the Mesopotamian poem 'Epic of Gilgamesh') keeps with their intense philosophical academia, while their achingly stylish early singles 'Rook House For Bobby' (about chess master Bobby Fischer) and 'Terra Nova' (Captain Scott) still fit in with the fresher glacial sound.

Full grown. Full grown beards. Full grown sonics. ILikeTrains should really be taught in schools.

Paul Carrera

THE BAYOU BROTHERS

The Bullingdon

We've seen some outstanding performances at The Famous Monday Blues over the years, along with some of the worst gigs ever. In the former category, some spotless musicians have treated the blues form as a lingua franca, using it to communicate ideas and emotions of great subtlety with a deft touch and original variations; in the latter, we find hordes of denim zombies ploughing through the same clunky rhythms, the same threadbare lyrics and the same crass wailing axe solos. With bad blues guitarists, a few simple things are repeated over and over, and quality is judged solely on how swiftly they do so. Is this art, or a game of bloody Tetris?

Thankfully, tonight these po-faced pentatonic widdlers are far away, as a righteous zydeco party is whipped up by The Bayou Boys, a Louisiana Cajun band from San Diego (which is a little like a band from County Armagh called The Bleedin' Bow Bell Cockneys, but never mind). Cajun music is a rough melange of black blues and French song, typified by fluent accordion passages and clattering rhythms played on metal washboards, and is one of those genres that always works so long as it's played with enough conviction. And despite this being a Monday night with an average crowd that's slow to thaw, the Bayou Brothers certainly can't be criticised for a lack of

energy, grinning their way through two invigorating sets, and regularly doling out spare washboards to audience members of varying rhythmic ability.

At their best the band's evident enjoyment of the music is infectious, and their openness to random punters' interventions reveals a relaxed unpretentiousness that makes us feel like we're at a gig in some deep south commune. On the reverse, the band sadly has a taste in cheesy ersatz gestures, from the so-called "squeezebox", which is really a disguised Roland keyboard that needs nary a squeeze (basically the much maligned keytar resurrected for folkies), to the percussionist in the golden blouse who smiles manically throughout in a way that nobody does outside Disneyland without severe medication. Her "name our cute 'gator'" competition just about tips us over the edge. Do they have Butlins in California?

A straight cover of Ray Charles' 'Hallelujah I Love Her So' is generic, and perhaps without the zydeco sprit the band is no great shakes. But then again, who cares? For tonight, all too rarely at a blues gig, we're not here to polish the traditions or venerate technical musos, we're here to dance, drink and get lost in the clockwork hoedown of washboard blues...and on a cold Monday in the Bully, a little escapism is no bad thing.

David Murphy

MAPS AND ATLASES / GALLOPS

The Jericho Tavern

Stepping up on stage before a packed house, it becomes clear very quickly that Gallops are musically proficient, confident and well versed in playing live. However, and unfortunately, it's almost immediately evident that here is band a little *too* in thrall to Battles. That's very specific, and intentionally – they're not "a bit like Battles", or one of many bands that have taken the mathematically-precise template laid down by that band. They're either a gargantuan rip-off of, or a creepy musical replicant of Battles. How does this manifest itself? Dual guitar harmonies, intricate time signatures, odd keyboard melodies skipping over a not-quite-polyrhythmic core; a lot that was once vital, exciting and new. Gallops' reading of music that already exists is so accurate as to render it frustratingly clichéd and uninspiring. There are a couple of hints of a different direction that could emerge – some Goblin-esque synthesised lines that lead a couple of tracks into cinematic places – and it would be wonderful for these to be extended. Otherwise, all we're left with is an enviably talented group of players, but not yet a whole lot more than a tribute act. Maps And Atlases are a far lighter, poppier affair. They certainly seem like hip'n'happening scenesters, don't get me

wrong; their unkempt hair (both facial and on top), their plaid shirts, and their nu-folk toes-pointed-inwards self-deprecating ways place them squarely in a pigeonhole labelled *indieindieindie*. Not that there's anything necessarily wrong with that. They begin by kicking out some relatively fine jams, keeping an upbeat pace throughout and generating an air of light-hearted enjoyment. The music becomes an awkward combination, though, of indie-pop and – surprisingly – 1970s progressive rock. For some reason I hear Steve Winwood in the odd, whiney vocals; and hints of Traffic and a hipsterfied Allman Brothers in the rolling, groovy rhythms that keep unfurling song after song. That voice, though, is a sticking point for me. It drowns out much of the music with its mid-toned whine, making it difficult to appreciate – or even *hear*, at times – what else is going on, beyond some jaunty-sounding tunes. That renders things a little bland, a little boring, and it's hard to know exactly why.

Maps And Atlases *might* be great – but perhaps they could swap notes with Gallops to get their live show in shape, and really let us experience what they're capable of.

Simon Minter

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THE PHANTOM BAND

The Jericho Tavern

Tonight sees The Phantom Band's first date on an exhaustive tour that encompasses a number of places that apparently are off the radar of the band – bass player Gerry Hart can be heard enquiring about the legitimacy of Clitheroe.

Their singer is suffering from flu, and they've just made a lengthy and uncomfortable journey down from Scotland. The chances of a great gig are not particularly promising – flu-racked Rick Anthony apologises for his condition before the band have even played a note. He needn't have worried, The Phantom Band have two quite phenomenal albums ('Checkmate Savage' and 'The Wants') from which to pluck material and even if the band were operating at 50% they'd still sound amazing. To Anthony's credit he doesn't let his illness affect him too much and he's soon caught up in the emotional swells created by the rest of the band, his deep voice emanating from within the confines of his hooded top.

Trying to describe quite what The Phantom Band do is quite a task. It's fair to say that they're a folk band in essence but there's so much more going on that it's not possible to simply tar them with the beard

and acoustic guitar brush. Their songs are littered with electronic interjections, pounding drums and guitars so awash in effects that they're practically impressionistic. Then there's the simply beautiful vocal harmonies that manage to make words such as "Everyone I knew there was dead" sound like gleeful poetry.

In a live setting, these already stunning songs crackle with energy and the band takes them in different directions morphing them, extending some sections and clipping others.

There are times tonight when it feels like The Phantom Band have suddenly become a prog-rock outfit, such is they're apparent willingness to play with the structures of their songs, but their music never feels tired or bloated, just inventive. "That was a fast song and a slow song played at the same time," says Anthony at one point; it's this ability to create juxtapositions (melancholy and joy at the same time being another speciality) within their songs and the perfect melodies that graces each and every one that make The Phantom Band such a thrilling proposition.

Sam Shepherd

TEDDY THOMPSON / DAVID FORD

O2 Academy

When the support act hurls himself through his slot with a gusto and passion that sees his face turn scarlet, the headline is ultimately doomed. As David Ford jumps around, shouting his way through 'Nothing At All' before loop pedalling the subsequent 'Panic' and Margaret Thatcher tribute 'She's Not The One', Teddy Thompson's fate becomes sealed before he's even taken the stage. All it takes is a stamp on the piano in 'State Of The Union' and a heartfelt rendition of 'Song For The Road' and those that made the effort to come out early seem more than satisfied with their choice.

Teddy on the other hand seems static in comparison, whilst his set is heartfelt, his patter endearing and his songs sturdy, it simply doesn't measure with Ford.

Any other night I might have been giving Thompson wild acclaim but tonight he's been overshadowed, and for once not by his parents. Whilst his set is meaty, 'I Feel' opening with an up-tempo bang that leaves me begging for more of the same, only 'Delilah' seems to grant that wish. The rest of his set falls flat and

whilst his acoustic interlude, which includes 'Turning The Gun On Myself', sees the audience moved and forces them to clamour forward, five albums in, it's fair to say I'd expected more. Whilst his musical craftsmanship is strong, melodies fusing into rock beats with memorable refrains, his lyrics seems somewhat lacking, almost contrived.

Maybe the bigger issue is that it's a Friday night and Teddy is singing about suicide and love that won't survive. Maybe it's the addition of the violin, which though musically vital, is also equally guaranteed to keep things in subdued tone.

Or maybe it's simply that I'm 20 years younger than most of the crowd and expect an artist to do more than stand centre stage and sing. Though I'm relieved as the end of the set packs a bigger punch, 'Can't Sing Straight' and 'Looking For A Girl' forcing me to ponder my first reaction. Ultimately I'm still unconvinced and on a rare occasion I leave raving more about the support.

Lisa Ward



DOCTOR SHOTOVER: Love Generation

Il hate classical music. Hate it. All those smug prune-faced people gesticulating prettily along to cello sections, twitching like pixies as they head-bang to flute solos, their little bright eyes half-closed with joy as they play "air oboe"... The sort of people who say, "Bliss! Sheer bliss!" whilst discussing Mozart, and who love being put on hold while reporting a plumbing emergency... "Ah, Handel's *Water Music*, the *andante* movement!"... as floods swirl around their ankles from the broken U-bend in the khazi. Bah! It's enough to make a man turn to drink... Bedingfield? I say, BEDINGFIELD! Stop dilly-dallying over those dirty glasses and get me a large one... And put a coddled egg in it, will you? Bit short of breakfast this morning. Now, where was I? Oh yes, Valentine's Day. I *hate* Valentine's Day... "VD Day", I call it. No, not "VE Day", Cuthbertson... though, come to think of it, I had a time and a half *that* day, ha ha... Rather a nice little WAAF in the NAAFI *that* day, what? Ever so grateful for me, ahem, doing my bit for the war effort... Flaming Nora! What? Oh yes, that really was her name, or so she maintained [*a faraway look comes into Dr Shotover's eye*]. Ah well, can't be helped now. She liked classical music, of course... I enjoyed a few *nocturnes*, *fantasias* and *preludes* with her, I can tell you! Ha ha hargh harrgrhhh [*guffaws, then falls off barstool, coughing noisily*]... Bedingfield! A pick-me-up! No, really – a PICK-ME-UP... off the sodding floor, you dunderhead! **Next month: Rock me, Amadeus.**



"Oh, but Dr S... I LOVE classical music... don't YOU?"

INTRODUCING....

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

Trophy Wife

Who are they?

Trophy Wife are Jody Prewett (*guitar, vocals*); Kit Monteith (*drums, sampler*) and Ben Rimmer (*keyboards, sampler*). The trio originally met in the early noughties in Oxford amid the city's burgeoning post-rock/mathcore scene and went on to form one half of Jonquil; Trophy Wife grew out of late-night recording sessions. Late last year they released their debut single, 'Microlite', on uber-cool label Moshi Moshi and played shows with Foals and Bombay Bicycle Club. More recently they've toured with Esben and the Witch. They've been played and interviewed by Zane Lowe and Rob Da Bank, and were single of the week on Radcliffe & Maconie for forthcoming double a-side 'The Quiet Earth' / 'White Horses', out this month, again on Moshi Moshi.

What do they sound like?

Feather-light pop that sounds so fragile you worry it might turn to dust if you so much breathe on it. They're glitchy and spangly in a similar way to Foals' more tender moments, but carry an airy breathlessness about them that's more akin to previous tour-mates Toro Y Moi. Nightshift's review of 'Microlite' – one of the most startlingly accomplished debut singles we've heard in recent times – compared the band to "A baby unicorn blinking in the harsh morning sunlight, languorous in the extreme", which might sound a bit poncey and purple in its prose but pretty much sums up their delicate perfectionism.

What inspires them?

"Polmo Polpo, The Notwist circa-'Neon Golden', Metro Area, Factory Records, David Byrne, Hank Marvin, Ron Fricke's film *Baraka*, the silhouettes outside on night-time motorway drives."

Career highlight so far:

"Getting 'Microlite' released and holding the physical copy for the first time was something that felt really special to us. It never entered our heads that we might get something out so early on."

And the lowlight:

"Being unable to find a service station that has an M&S and having to settle for either WHSmith sandwiches or a Costa coffee panini."

Their favourite

Oxfordshire act is:

"Glass Animals. We only discovered they were from around here recently. Their reserved electro hits all of our buttons."

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

"Fleetwood Mac's 'Tango In The Night'.

It's something we always come back to and is a childhood

musical memory of long-distance car journeys. It has aged incredibly well and the songs are impeccably crafted."

When is their next gig and what can newcomers expect?

"We next play Oxford on 1st March at the Cellar. You can expect a throbbing light show, reverb guitars and a hand-built electronic drum-kit."

Their favourite and least favourite thing about Oxford music are:

"The sense of community is incredibly rare. Walking up Cowley Road or staggering around Truck Festival and bumping into countless old friends. On the flipside, it can become very claustrophobic and self-limiting if you don't peer over the wall to see what's on the other side."

You might love them if you love:

Toro Y Moi, Foals, The Notwist, The xx.

Hear them here: www.myspace.com/atrophywife



Whatever happened to... those heroes

Narco

WHO?

Formed in a bhangra nightclub in Nottingham by singer Cave and bassist Rich Aitken, Narco briefly became, in the late-90s and early-00s, Oxford's band most likely to. The pair relocated to Oxford and recruited keyboard player Dan Cummings and drummer Jason Wolsey. Playing at Radio 1 Sound City in 1997 and included on a CD of local acts to watch out for, they quickly became the subject of a furious record label bidding war. One gig at the Cellar that year had representatives from every major label in the country present. Eventually the band signed a deal with EMI, losing Jason and Danny along the way. Rich's brother Jonny then joined before going off to join Spiritualized. A new line-up featuring drummer Jamie Dawson and James Gellately-Smith toured extensively, helped pioneer music social network movement Peoplesound.com years before Myspace etc. and played V Festival along the way. Later recruits were Ed McClements on drums and guitarist Marc Canham.

WHAT?

Initially a drum&bass outfit with prog-rock overtones, Narco morphed first into a more focussed full-on band, less reliant on loops, and then into their final and most successful incarnation, electro-infused garage rock, at their best, as on 'Teen Suicide Explosion', fusing Suicide's seedy electro rockabilly with juggernaught rock somewhere between The Clash, early-period Ultravox and Six By Seven, Happy Monday's bummed-out dance-rock collision giving them a groove-based edge and always sounding thrillingly trashed and in need of the next fix.



WHEN?

Throughout their lifetime Narco went through myriad line-up changes, releasing four singles and EPs, including the critically-acclaimed 'Hanging From A High Point', and one album, 'Control Of The Stereo'. Although relatively successful in sales and publishing terms, the collapse of the record industry scuppered further advancement and although they never officially split, the band has been dormant for many years.

WHY?

While Narco's local profile was never huge, they were big news out of town for a while, the record label bidding war being part of a wider recognition of their talent. In Oxford itself they were amongst the vanguard of acts fusing electronics to rock music, alongside The Rock Of Travolta et al. as well as helping pioneer the music social network movement. 'Teen Suicide Explosion', which topped Nightshift's end of year Top 20 in 2000, remains a singular high point in local music in the late-90s/early-noughties.

WHERE?

Cave lives in Winchester and works in media; James GS lives in London and produced a number of dance singles in his own right as well as working in IT; Jamie Dawson joined Thieves and toured the States and is now a drum tutor; after Spiritualized Jonny was in psych-rockers Manatee and now lives in Brighton, while Rich, Marc and Ed still work together, operating a successful

music production company based near Oxford. They mainly focus on film and video game soundtracks – including the Driver and Singstar series and the award-winning Killzone2, as well as *The Disappearance of Alice Creed*. Their work is everywhere and they've regularly been nominated for major awards, including the BAFTAs. Rich also plays guitar in local stoner-rock outfit Domes of Silence.

HOW?

Album 'Control Of The Stereo' is still available, although the 7" of 'Evil Brother' is now a cult collectors' item.

DEMOS

much the same thing but at least we get our monthly dose of smashing our fist repeatedly into the nearest wall and chucking bits of furniture through the window

JAMES KUHT

James here has been to military school, which initially makes us worry that he could be another James Blunt, but also that he's some kind of rage-filled assassin who could slit our throats with the lid off a Marmite jar and not give it a second thought. That he informs us he wrote these four songs while sat in his bedroom for eight hours solid only furthers our fears that he's a brooding human time bomb. Turns out that initial worry about being James Blunt is probably closer to the mark. He's jaunty rather than sulky (could be a double bluff – beware the smiling assassin), although on 'Convinced' he has an annoying habit of elongated the last syllable of each line, so "That was the best moment of my life" becomes, "That was the best moment of my liiiiiiiiEEEEEEEF!". Mind you, the tune in question reminds us a bit of Suzanne Vega's 'Marlene On The Wall', so it's not all bad. It's not unpleasant stuff, alternately fulsome and winsome, avoiding the main pitfalls of self-pity and strumming too hard to express intense emotions, but we feel after all this time we're sort of numbed by so much acoustic balladry that we can't even think of anything rude to say about it. Hopefully we won't feel anything when James creeps into our room tonight to butcher us while we sleep.

A consistent theme of all the rest of this month's demos is vocalists who sound bored beyond the point of human endurance, or are simply incapable of holding anything resembling a tune. Here the singer sounds like he's either standing about a mile closer to the microphone than the rest of his band, or is simply indulging in some bedroom-based punk karaoke. 'One Of Those Days' sounds like a less camp Pete Shelley trying to summon the enthusiasm to say anything interesting over some rudimentary punk thrash, although when he does finally rouse himself for the song's climax he sounds like he's just experienced an embarrassing premature ejaculation. 'Sweet Insomnia' is ironically titled since everyone concerned sounds like they're half asleep, the band seemingly incapable of rousing itself into second gear, but with 'Jack's Broadcast' Mind The White Lines perhaps chance upon a more suitable style, a denser, slower, almost psychedelic drone rock that's still awkward but carries a bit of conviction and ends up

In a month where virtually every demo suggests it's National Tuneless Racket Month, at least Misconductors sound like you'd want them on your side when the barricades go up. This sounds like it was written and recorded on the spot while the band watched live footage of the riots in Cairo. Essentially it's standard punk thrash with a meaty metal edge and little by way of any tunage on show, lumbering thuggishly, all sinew and gristle, powerchords and shouting, every track an out-take from some long-lost politico-punk compilation, but unlike just about everything else here, it's got some vim and vigour about it, the rabble-rousing, sloganeering vocals holding a bit of conviction, the riotous mess of guitars and drums held together with spit and glue and a determination not to let the evil forces of the military-industrial complex win the day. That they've got a song called 'Sick Of Hearing Shit' also sums up our feelings about most of the demo pile. Not sure if we really need fourteen tracks of pretty

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sounding like one of those self-consciously dour post-punk bands who would rail against the monotony of industrial society in ironically detached fashion. Everyone should be in a band like this at some point in their life but hopefully grow out of it before they're 15. We're not sure, however, if MTWL have missed that particular deadline already.

THE 13D

13D's Myspace features an existential, stream-of-consciousness narrative about what he does with his days that reads like a failed first draft of the opening moments of *Withnail & I*, but what we suspect he really does with his time is sit down and listen to Bob Dylan and The Fall at the same time and then try and emulate what he's just heard. Thus, 'Filibustering' is 'Subterranean Homesick Blues' scrambled through 'Kicker Conspiracy', although not really anything like as good as that makes it sound. More like half a song falling down a flight of stairs while trying not to spill a cup of tea. It's engaging enough, though, and more original than 'On The Boulevard', which follows, sounding remarkably similar to Mind The White Lines. It's more cohesive than the first song but less fun and as far as punk rock goes it sounds like it'd struggle to arm-wrestle Alkaline Trio, never mind go fifteen rounds with Wattie from The Exploited. Thereon in, there seems to be an attempt to bring as many disparate influences to play as possible, while retaining that basic lo-fi punk feel. 'Listen Up' is part sea shanty, part hip hop monologue but still sounds like an old Anti-Pasti b-side and ends up a bit of a bolshy mess, while 'The Bear Went Over The Mountain' is a honky tonk musical hall piece. 'Machine Gun Dance' brings an accordion into the action for some gypsy punk fun but it's hardly Gogol Bordello, while '13 O'Clock Rock' could be Electro Hippies' kid brother after too much fizzy pop.

PAPER SUNS

More bored vocals; more randomly tuneless guitar chugging. Is this all part of some sinister experiment to confirm that old adage about giving a million typewriters to a million chimps to see if they'll accidentally recreate the works of Shakespeare, only with guitars and a misplaced sense of unfairness about the world? A sudden, disjointed funk interlude is the only notable feature of 'Generation E', while 'On The Dole' is painfully earnest and overwrought. Yeah! on the dole! Revolution! Daytime telly! Utter fucking blinding tedium! 'Fall', finds Paper Suns getting, like, a bit soppy and emotional, just to show that they're not all about macho shouting and mindless chugging. Which basically equates to them shouting and chugging a bit slower than

before. We guess it's progress of sorts. Who knows, by Christmas they might even have grown opposable thumbs.

KAKUZI

Another one-song demo, and this time it's got a video to go with it. Which is almost as exciting for us as getting a lyric sheet to point at and laugh about. It's very tastefully done, all soft focus shots of the band playing in a rehearsal room. The music's tasteful and soft-focus too in a mid-80s kind of way, like a more blokey Bronski Beat crossed with a half-cocked Tears For Fears. The singer even looks like Curt Smith after a three-month cake and croissant diet. He keeps doing sideways glances to camera, his facial expressions running the entire gamut of emotional drama, from constipated to angst-ridden, before he is filmed artfully picking up a tambourine, in soft focus, obviously. Clocking in well over the five-minute mark, the song seems unable to commit fully to jangly acoustic pop or shimmering synth-pop, settling instead for a vague middle ground where it muddles through in, oh yes, tasteful soft focus until your eyes and ears start bleeding from all the squinting they're being made to do.

THE DEMO DUMPER

REVOL

Cor, this lot sound like they could crush a grape, they're so up-for-it mad rock'n'roll crazy. Just when you think the depths of tune-free rudimentary thrash with monotone vocals cannot be plumped any deeper. Dear God, how can something as simple and fun and fast as rock and roll sound so completely bloody effing boring? By all the laws of nature it should be impossible to get something so easy so badly wrong. Rock music should be able to summon the downtrodden masses to rise up and crush the powers that be. How different the world would be if Winston Churchill, JF Kennedy and Martin Luther King had opined with such a lack of emotional conviction. We can at least comfort ourselves in knowing that Revol's press blurb is even less exciting than their music: "Revol are a brand new Rock band with catchy melodies, solid bass lines, lead licks, and a ginger afro banging drums! Revol bring to the stage a set of songs filled with emotion, energy and spirit and aim to create exciting live performances for a wide audience." It's thrill-a-minute stuff. Love the bit about the ginger afro banging drums. They're proper fucking mental, this lot. They've got a track called 'There's No Time' here. There's no fucking tunes, neither.

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

IMPORTANT: no review without a contact address and phone number. No more than four tracks on a demo. If you can't handle criticism, please don't send us your demo.



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