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NIGHTSHIFT

Oxford's Music Magazine

Free every
month.
Issue 198
January
2012

CHECK *THIS* OUT!

Local promoters
tell us who *they*
think you should
see in 2012



Photo: Johnny Moto



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NEWS

Nightshift: PO Box 312, Kidlington, OX5 1ZU
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THE OXFORD PUNT is set to return in 2012. The annual showcase of new local music talent has been running since 1996 but was forced to take a year off in 2011 due to a lack of suitable venues in Oxford city centre.

This year's Oxford Punt will take place on **Wednesday 16th May**, featuring 20 acts playing across five venues. Participating venues are **The Cellar, The Purple Turtle, The Wheatsheaf, The Duke's Cut** and **The Junction**, the latter two venues situated across the road from each other in Park End Street.

The Punt has previously given early exposure to bands such as Young Knives, Stornoway, Fixers, Little Fish and Elizabeth, the band formed by Yannis and Jack before Foals.

Bands or solo acts wanting to play at the Punt can submit demos, either by emailing links to online music to nightshift@oxfordmusic.net, or sending CDs to **Nightshift, PO Box 312, Kidlington, OX5 1ZU**. In both cases please clearly mark your demo PUNT and include both phone and email contact details and a brief bio of the band. Only acts from Oxfordshire may apply, you can't apply if you've played the Punt before and, due to licensing conditions of the venues, only acts aged over 18 will be eligible. Deadline for demos is the 10th of March, with the line-up announced on the 15th.

As ever a limited number of all-venue Punt Passes will be on sale from the end of January.

THERE'S A WHOLE SLEW of new Oxford releases due in the next couple of months. As reported in last month's Nightshift, **Jonquil** release their new album, 'Point Of Go', on Blessing Force on 5th March. In the same month fast-rising local starlets **Spring Offensive** release a new single to coincide with a UK and European tour, while **Gunning For Tamar**, having recently signed to Alcopop! Records, release an EP, 'Time Trophies'. **The Long Insiders**, meanwhile, are set to release their debut album.

Richard Walters has a new five-song EP, 'Young Trees', out this month, produced by A Silent Film's Rob Stevenson. It's available online now at soundcloud.com/rswalters as well as iTunes and Bandcamp. February sees a new EP from **Charly Coombes & The New Breed**, entitled 'Noise Control', which follows the band's Brazilian tour. Finally electro-pop duo **Space Heroes Of The People** have a new video on Youtube for their song 'Kosmocerotops'.

VIXENS are the latest local band to announce a split. The gothic indie rockers announced their demise on the Nightshift forum in December, saying "There have been no big fall outs or drama, we just feel we've reached the end of this particular road as a band. We've had some great times, put out an EP and done gigs everywhere from Inverness to Brighton and no doubt some of us will resurface in future musical projects, so keep your eyes peeled for that."

As a parting gesture, the band have put a number of their recordings up online for free download at soundcloud.com/vixens.

NOVEMBER'S AUDIOSCOPE mini-festival raised over £1,000 for homeless charity Shelter. The all-day event at the Jericho Tavern, headlined by Karma To Burn, took the total amount raised by Audioscope in its eleven years, to £23,000.

On another charitable note, **The Cellar Family** and **We Aeronauts** play the 12 Bar in London on Wednesday 18th January in aid of MacMillan Cancer Research.

OXFORD MUSIC ROOMS are offering local bands the chance to win a free day's recording when they book a three-hour rehearsal slot. The newly-opened studio in Chalgrove features four rehearsal rooms, each with PA, drumkit, and guitar and bass amps and with the four rooms linked by audio and video feeds for recording purposes. To find out more about the offer, visit www.oxfordshiremusicrooms.co.uk.

AS EVER, don't forget to tune into **BBC Oxford Introducing** every Sunday night between 9-10pm on 95.2fm. The dedicated local music show plays the best Oxford releases and demos every week as well as featuring interviews and live sessions from Oxfordshire acts, gig reviews and a gig guide. The show is available to download as a podcast at bbc.co.uk/oxford.

Regularly updated local music news is available online at www.musicinoxford.co.uk. The site also features interactive reviews, interviews, podcasts, photo galleries and occasional live sessions. Nightshift's online forum, meanwhile, features local music news as well as the perfect place for a good row with fellow local music fans.

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Tipping Points

WHEN THE LEGENDARY POINT VENUE CLOSED DOWN in 2001 promoter Mac challenged everyone to “go and see at least one band you’ve never heard of before Christmas”. It’s exactly this sort of attitude that keeps the local live scene alive.

Here at Nightshift we’re forever ranting and raving about the new acts we love (or occasionally loathe) and hope folks will follow our advice and go and hear them for themselves.

January of course is a great time to start thinking about new acts and who is worthy of your time, money and effort. But, for a change, we thought we’d challenge those real champions of new music, the promoters, to pick the acts they reckon you should check out in 2012. Not necessarily acts they think are going to be household names come 2013, just bands, singers, MCs, producers or DJs they like and hope you will too. We asked a host of Oxford’s finest gig and club promoters to tip their favourites and below are the eye- and ear-opening results.

So off you toddle – go and see at least one of these before next Christmas. You’ll be glad you did.



Kill Murray

photo: Johnny Moto

JOAL SHEARING (The Wheatheaf)

“Dial-F for me were one of the best bands I had seen come out of Oxford in recent years. I’m thrilled that Gus and Scott from Dial-F have now joined forces with Aaron (Phantom Theory) & Chris (50ft Panda) to form **Kill Murray**. I have huge expectations for the band and cannot wait to see how they grow in 2012.”

soundcloud.com/kill-murray

SEBASTIAN REYNOLDS (Pindrop Performances)

“One of my hot tips are **The Yarns**: melodic acoustica at its very best. They’re literate, charming and maddeningly catchy. Their live show is going from strength to strength and I can’t see why they won’t do really well in 2012.

Also, born of the ashes of Winchell Riots, **Grudle Bay Riots** also deserve a mention as a great new band. Their unique brand of slick, spaced-out ambient drone-pop with some fantastic hooks is great on record and they put on an impressively large scale live show.”

www.myspace.com/theyarnsuk
www.myspace.com/grudlebayriots

EDDLEWINGTON (Bassmentality / Out To Graze)

“If you’re a fan of that slow-building, epic-styled deep house à la Pional and John Talabot, you might just like **Casino Times** (a new music project between Joe Spencer and Nick Church of Get Your Geek On). The comparison may seem a little strained: Casino Times’ productions distinctively owe a lot to old school house. And here it’s deep, soulful house, achingly wistful with those much-sampled Chaka Khan vocal snippets, but the light-footed beats and gently fluttering hats bring a modern, beautifully understated edge.”

Soundcloud.com/casino-times

MARC WEST (Yoof!)

“Wild Swim supported Trophy Wife at Yoof! on Bonfire Night and there were certainly fireworks. Their Cubiq DJ alter-ego are also making serious waves in the dance world, so watch this space.

I’d also recommend **Glass Animals**, who are currently holed up in the Beggars Group studios writing and recording and just biding their time. **Grudle Bay Riots** are getting better as their ideas expand, while DJ/producer Alfie MacGibbon is one of Yoof!’s favourites on the

decks and a hot young prospect on the electronic scene under his guise of **Graphics**.”

www.facebook.com/wildswim

www.myspace.com/glassanimalsband

www.facebook.com/thisisgraphics

SIMON MINTER (Musicinxford.com / Audioscope)

“**Listing Ships** will hopefully come into their own in 2012. After meandering around a slightly clichéd post-rock path in their early days, they’ve now collectively grown a pair and have started putting together strident, Krautrock-flavoured rock songs. **The Cellar Family** seem fractious enough to either do great things or fall apart completely: they’re utterly, compellingly weird, mixing up Sonic Youth with the Pixies to create an unnerving and confident new thing. **Nairobi**, on one level, seem beholden to their influences - generally centred around the Oxfordian Afro-tinged post-rock-pop of Foals etc - but they keep producing songs that are so memorably catchy to suggest hidden talents which are soon to flower.”

www.facebook.com/listingships

www.cellarfamily.co.uk

www.myspace.com/nairobiband

MATT SAGE (Catweazle Club)

“Over the past 17 years, it has been my privilege to witness so many artists take their first faltering steps in front of an audience, and go on to blossom into often extraordinary talents. Stornoway, who played their first gig here, and Yannis from Foals who used to break our hearts with his poetry while still at school. We get around 20 different performers every week, so that really is a huge amount of players passing through.

The ethos of Catweazle is that

everyone has something special worthy of sharing – it is not a competition and in naming a few I am forced to leave out all the others - but among the very many different musicians currently steaming up my radar, the ones that today spring to mind might be: **Luke Keegan**: great classic songwriting in the vein of Paul Simon, Tom Waits and Leonard Cohen; **Matt Chanarin**: a properly deep and soulful singer and songwriter who when I first saw him reminded me of Labi Siffre; **Laura Theis**: delicate, delightful songs from the piano; **Rory Evans**: a freakishly talented 15-year old guitar player who is not just technically astounding, but has depth of feeling in his playing that is unusual in itself; **Faceometer**: breakneck eccentric philosophical meanderer, and **Diite Goard**: Wheatley raised, now studying in Sunderland, she has that rare ability of stopping you from breathing while she is singing, just so you don’t miss anything. Dangerous, but worth it.”

www.myspace.com/lukekeeganmusic

www.faceometer.tk

ELLIOT & RYAN COLE (Buried In Smoke)

“Bands we’d recommend are **Blasted** – featuring members of Winnebago Deal – if you like your Black Flag and Winnebago Deal, make sure you check these guys out! Also **Black Sunrise** (Ex-Death Valley Riders): these fellas have moved away from the stoner rock sound a bit these days. They have taken more of a grunge approach on things now. **Refugees Of Culture**, who have a trippy, progressive, stoner sound that reminds me of Pink Floyd in places. They are currently instrumental, however they are seeking a vocalist. And **Overlord**, a young stoner/doom/metal band from Oxford.

Buried In Smoke also dig our hip hop, so we’d recommend **Ol-e Mac**: he’s only just come on to the local scene, but he’s already got a good following after the release of his LP



Document One

Shattered Dreams



'Shits & Giggles'. He also has a video on Youtube entitled 'Saddlebag of Piss'. The man has some serious skills, impressive lyrics and a good flow. He is set to release his LP entitled 'Corridors' in 2012. Also **Elliot Fresh** and Illgotitrecords; Elliot has been on the scene slightly longer than Ol-e Mac, performing with Livestock and running things at Phat Sessions. He also features on the 'Shit's & Giggles' LP with Ol-e Mac."

www.facebook.com/blastedband
www.myspace.com/refugeesofculture
soundcloud.com/ol-e-mac
soundcloud.com/elliottfresh

AIDAN LARKIN

(Skylarkin Soundsystem / The Big Ten Inch)

"**Debian Blak**: they're calling it post-dubstep. Older readers will note similarities with Autechre and Four Tet. Either way, Oxford-based drummer, percussionist and producer Rowan Perkins has put together some eerie and engaging electronic soundscapes here. Debut EP 'A Hint Of Menace' is out now on First Word Recordings and Rowan is currently touring Australia. Also, **Document One**: they make that bonkers sort of dubstep that pushes everything up to 111, thumps you soundly in the chest and makes your hair stand on end. While the rest of the scene heavyweights look towards America and the Top 40, this Oxford production duo are making uncompromising bangers to annihilate the dancefloors of sweaty basement clubs. A slew of releases are planned for 2012 on Buygore."

soundcloud.com/debian-blak
soundcloud.com/documentone_dubstep

KEVIN (Daisy Rodgers Music)

"I could quite happily recommend everyone that has played at one of our nights. However, if forced to pick my fav new discoveries I'd say **Deer Chicago**: great and epic live sound; **Go Romano**: every track a

fresh new sound, and **Real Fur**: afro, indie pop tunes that just make me wanna dance! A couple of new Oxfordshire bands I'm excited about and hope to check out in 2012 include **Pixel Fix**, **Dance a la Plage**, **My Other Life**, **Yellow Fever** and **Jessie Hall** and one request for 2012 is that **Limbo Kids** do more tracks please!"

www.deerchicago.co.uk
www.facebook.com/GoRomanoMusic

JOHN DANIEL

(Skeletor Promotions)

"**Save The Saviour** are a metalcore band who seem like a nice young bunch; they have a good recording on their Facebook page. They've got the right attitude and could go far. **Empire Divided** are a death metal band, extremely heavy! Again, they've got the right attitude, are competent musicians and seem very professional. **Eyes of Eve** are a groove metal band featuring ex-Crysis guitarist Josh O'Brien, although I am yet to hear them properly. **Overlord** are another band that could go really far, they're stoner metal and seem really keen to get to know all the bands and are networking like crazy. I've not heard them properly yet, only a shabby video recording on Youtube, but their vocalist/guitarist seems like he could become an important figure in the Oxford music scene: he's enthusiastic, articulate and eloquent."

www.facebook.com/overlordband

ISLAMISKELLY

(DHP Concerts)

"I vote **Lewis Watson**: over one million Youtube views and counting, and **Kill Murray** who are generally just very excellent."

levvis.tumblr.com
soundcloud.com/kill-murray

JAMES SERJEANT (Moshka)

"**K-Lacura** will never fit into the Oxford metal scene since they don't have the obligatory static lead

guitarist. This lot have imbibed a crateful of Red Bull and enough speed to kill a horse and are energised and bouncing off the ceiling. All of them, all the time. **Shattered Dreams** have got infinitely more enthusiasm and ambition than any other band I've met this year, and their sound has evolved from fizzy, yappy guitar to a much more rounded solid onslaught of noise. Well done them for realising that sound quality matters! **The Crushing**: they get it! They are probably the only Oxford metal band that actually *get it* - metal is pantomime. It is to be ridiculed, sent up and hyped beyond measure, because every metal guitarist ever wanted to grow up to be an Orc. Couple that with the fact that they're tighter than a shark's arse at 50 fathoms and it makes for a compulsive stage show."

k-lacura.co.uk

www.myspace.com/shattereddreams18
www.myspace.com/thecrushingband

AUTUMN NEAGLE

(Coo Promotions)

"Ex-Ute singer Olly Thomas is playing under the name **The Old Grinding Young** and has a remarkably unique voice and is a little star in the making. **Jess Hall** has a gorgeous voice and should be checked out for half an hour of loveliness. **Matt Winkworth** is one of my most favourite entertainment factor acts on the circuit: tongue in cheek intensity and comic musical timing. **The Yarns** and **Mustard and The Monocle** both have great potential and promise and work the room well, like bands such as Stormoway and The Epstein used to when they were starting out. With some more gigs and some fine-tuning they could get really good. That **Lewis Watson** seems to be creating a tidal wave for a very young man! **Robots With Souls** - the project of Phantom Theory drummer Steve - is a sound mentalist, and I like a bit of that!"

www.myspace.com/mustardandthemonocle
soundcloud.com/mattwinkworth
levvis.tumblr.com
www.robotswithsouls.com
www.myspace.com/theyarnsuk

RICHARD CATHERALL

(Gappy Tooth Industries)

"I'd say **Mustard & The Monocle**. **Gert Lassitude** does some nice laptop singer songwriter stuff, and **Tigerline** are a young band who manage to get away with merging post-rock instrumentals with widdly wanky prog jamming and emerge unpunished. And **Stem** are a very old band who have just re-emerged better than before, with some quality trip

hop (not that other local Stem that Nightshift reviewed earlier this year)."

www.myspace.com/mustardandthemonocle
soundcloud.com/gertlassitude
soundcloud.com/tigerline

ZAHRATEHRANI/ASHER DUST (Ark-T / BG Records)

N-zyme, a member of Blackbird Leys-based hip hop crew G Block, brings a quirky sense of humour to the crowded hip hop scene. His forthcoming single on BG Records 'Crow', along with a madcap video, displays this to the fullest. Dropping a flow that has tinges of Lil Wayne and UK hip hop stalwart Roots Manuva, 2012 will be the year that N-zyme fulfils his potential."

www.myspace.com/n-zyme

PHIL FREIZINGER

(Klub Kakofanny)

"Look out for **The New Moon** - revitalised by Toby their new drummer, they are hitting new levels; **Mini Ginge & The Dark Mops** - good vocals and simple fun; **The Beard of Destiny** - a quality solo act- and his Youtube vids are very entertaining; **Fuzzy Logic** - the ultimate party band; **Country For Old Men** - good old hoe-down music and rocks out too. The reborn **Mary's Garden** were so good at Klub Kak recently it was ridiculous."

www.myspace.com/country4oldmen
www.myspace.com/beardofdestiny
www.myspace.com/thenewmoonnews
www.myspace.com/marysgarden

CHERYL STRATTON

(Jambox)

"**Sky Sanctuary** is an instrumental solo project that collaborates progressive metal and 8-Bit/ electronica, founded by multi-instrumentalist Joey Cohen. He combines powerful grooves, melodic progressions and electronic undertones to create a unique atmosphere with a hint of nostalgia to bring people back to the days of Sonic The Hedgehog and Super Mario."

www.skysanctuary.co.uk



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VARIOUS ARTISTS

'City Of Screaming Spires Vol 1'

(Skeletor)

In the year or so since Nightshift's dedicated metal special, the local heavy scene has developed a more cohesive focal point for its multitude of bands, with Buried In Smoke and Skeletor providing regular opportunities for local metal acts to play together or support bigger name bands. This compilation of Oxford's up and coming metal bands is the next logical stage to bringing the scene into sharper focus, fourteen bands of varying degrees of ability and heaviness brought together, hopefully engaging with fans of other acts.

For the most part the quality is high and while there's a tendency towards the metalcore side of things, it's varied enough to avoid becoming a mush of noise.

Album openers **Aethara** are among the brightest of the bands on show, with their belligerent, belching, wave-riding riffage, blast beats and almost operatic interjections, while the late departed **Taste My Eyes** are similarly ferocious, Ben Hollyer's vein-popping rage dominating the band's hardcore chug.

Desert Storm take things down to a more



stately pace, and with an attention to texture that constantly marks them above most of the local competition, although Mat Ryan's lava-throated rasp is a thing of wonder all on its own.

While **K-Lacura** and **Crysis** put in solid performances, it's the bands that stray furthest from the standard thrash'n'growl formula who tend to leave the longest impression. **Mother Corona** produce a bass-heavy groove over which the singer's oddly adenoidal vocals stand apart from the typical Uru-kai massive, while **Sky Sanctuary**'s instrumental is like a metal take on some old end of the pier sideshow as performed by Mike Oldfield in a particularly

surly mood.

If there is a major disappointment it's **Unknown Flow**'s ten-minute epic, the band attempting some kind of pastoral prog epic and failing in a mess of bland, vaguely electro-tinged soft-rock ponderousness and you wish their lengthy slot could have been filled by Undersmile, particularly given the token female presence here is the Paramore-like **Ways Across**. Unknown Flow's lack of musical bite is thrown into starker contrast by preceding the fantastic **A Trust Unclean**, whose venomous death metal-cum-grindcore could power the national grid while simultaneously bringing about the end of days. They, along with **Dedlok**'s Killing Joke-meets-Boltthrower thrashcore and **Prospekt**'s extravagant, elegantly busy prog, provide the chief high points of the album, although **Mutagenocide**'s pummelling prog rides them close and **Elysium Waits** close proceedings in hellish new wave of thrash style.

Local band compilations these days generally only serve a purpose if they have a distinct angle to them and 'COSS' definitely has that, concentrating purely on metal. Whether it will do anything to expand local metal's appeal to other audiences is debatable; so often it feels like a separate musical party. But if it opens the sizeable existing crowd up to some of the lesser known new acts around, while raising the bar to which bands aspire, then its success is assured.

Ian Chesterton



TIGER MENDOZA

'LIBRE'

(Own label)

With singer Helena Markou off travelling, Ian De Quadros and Dan O'Driscoll have taken Tiger Mendoza down an even darker path with this mostly-instrumental new EP. Like Portishead and Salem, Tiger Mendoza embrace both electronica and rock fully but forever leave you unsure quite which side of the fence they fall.

'Intro', for example, pits restless, scattershot electronic beats and serrated synths against wired shards of guitar, the piece forever collapsing and coalescing again into a threatening fog of doomy hip hop that's

perfectly offset by a twinkling musical box. It's dour and ominous but oddly playful.

If 'Human Basics' adds little to the duo's musical palette, a simple synth riff repeated too long, 'Lucha' is a frenetic electro-beat-heavy antidote to ambient soundscaping. But it's the team up with Asher Dust for 'Lovesick Vandal' that reveals Tiger Mendoza's variety and ambition the most, a relentless thrum of old-school synths and tumultuous beats where Asher's abrasively soulful hectoring rubs up brilliantly against the harsh electronics, everything carried unstoppably onwards by a monster hook.

Victoria Waterfield

SECRET RIVALS

'Once More With Heart' / 'I Know Something'

(It's All Happening)

Secret Rivals sound more polished with every new set of songs. Happily what lies beneath the surface remains pure and unvarnished. This new double a-side (ah, such a quaint concept in this digital day and age, but this is timeless indie pop we're talking about here, old-fashioned terminology still means something) strips away some of the giddiness of the best bits of the band's recent debut album but it's still big-hearted pop with one eye already on next spring

'Once More With Feeling' is the livelier of the pair, singers Jamie and Clouds pitching their contrasting voices (she wide-eyed and sugar-sweet; he almost spitting the words out through gritted teeth at times) while beneath their sparring is synth-infused fuzz'n'chug that wouldn't sound out of place hanging out with The Cure circa-'In Between Days'.

'I Know Something' is more circumspect, a downbeat electro-jangle with Clouds taking the lead for the most part, apart from the odd yelped interjection from Jamie. While it's less of an instant fix than 'Once More...' it turns out to be the stronger song in the end, building to a deceptively powerful conclusion, with that big old heart worn proudly on its sleeve.

Dale Kattack





GREAT MEDICAL DISASTER

‘Die You Bitch, Cried Architect’

(Pronoia Records)

Instrumental rock certainly splits opinion, so whilst some might not fancy ‘Die, You Bitch, Cried Architect’, we’re all for its widescreen, menacing music that we feel increasingly uncomfortable calling post-rock with every passing year in which rock itself fails to dematerialise (we suppose we’re stuck with it, at least until Hanna Barbera re-brands *The All New Popeye Hour* as *Some Increasingly Outmoded Sub-Standard Animation*). ‘Lambs’ may be a delightfully greasy rock track

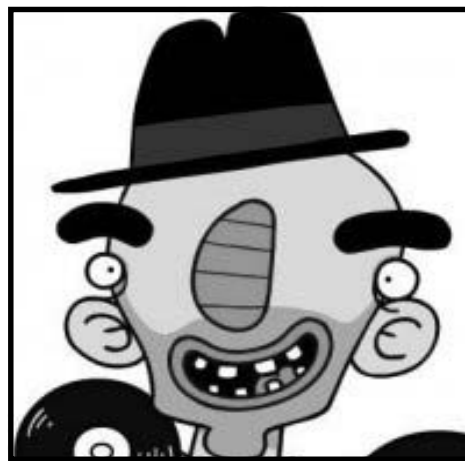
minus the hairy vocalist, but Great Medical Disaster’s best moments come when tracks are stretched and textural effects are liberally slathered: ‘Man United Killed Rod Hull’ is Mogwai with sickly synth washes, taking us to a cluttered office in which an 80s detective fingers blinds to watch a steamy neon night (warning: individual hallucinations may differ). ‘The Beatification Of Cardinal Newman’ reminds us of Oxford favourites Flies Are Spies From Hell with its tumbling piano climax, and it’s only when the tunes don’t seem to earn their dynamic flurries that things are unsatisfying – ‘Jesus Loved The Nun-Chucks’ has lovely glistening guitars, but the bursts of noise are safe and unthreatening. Think log flume, not rollercoaster. Sometimes Great Medical Disaster are too happy within the confines of their genre, then, but when a Badalamenti eeriness is injected, and the evocative atmospheres come together, this is a great little record. Hell, the track titles have more imagination than some bands’ entire careers.

David Murphy

Next month

**Richard Walters
Charly Coombes &
The New Breed
Shaker Heights...**

...and more



COUNT SKYLARKIN & HARVEY K-TEL

‘Dub Of A Preacherman’ *(Resense / Music For The People)*

A great, fun mash-up from genre-hopping producer K-Tel and local DJ and promoter Skyarkin here, reworking an old Trojan 7” by The Gaylettes – a 60s Jamaican vocal trio led by future Bob Marley backing singer Judy Mowatt. Adding a giddy, playful mix of dancehall, drum&bass and acid house to the original and setting it to an animation that looks like a 60s acid trip prototype for *Spongebob Squarepants*, it’s both clever and sublimely simple. And, most important, great fun. In fact, in a parallel, better, universe, this was the Christmas Number 1.

Dale Kattack

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3) FUCKED UP- DAVID COMES TO LIFE 4) EMA- PAST LIFE MARTYRED SAINTS 5) ZOMBY- DEDICATION

6) BEN HOWARD- EVERY KINGDOM 7) LANTERNS ON THE LAKE- GRACIOUS TIDE, TAKE ME HOME

8) JAMES VINCENT MACMORROW- EARLY IN THE MORNING 9) OTHER LIVES- TAMER ANIMALS

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GIG GUIDE

SUNDAY 1st

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Old Bookbinders

MONDAY 2nd

Thursday 19th

THE HORRORS:

O2 Academy

After the postponement of their show here in October, when Faris Badwan lost his voice, The Horrors hopefully make it back for good this time. Originally seeming to be little more than *NME*-hyped clothes horses kicking out a frenzied brand of garage-rock, The Horrors' second album, 'Primary Colours' saw them artistically and critically reborn. Updating classic 70s and 80s alt.rock in style and produced by Portishead's Geoff Barrow, the album fused the likes of Joy Division, The Chameleons, Psychedelic Furs and Sisters Of Mercy with Can's krautrock and PiL's post-punk, coated it all in pitch black clothing, drenched it in reverb and, hey presto, instant classic – one that was predictably robbed of a deserved Mercury Prize. Two years on and The Horrors' third opus, 'Skying', was greeted by critics and fans alike with almost religious anticipation. A difficult task to fulfil such expectation but while the new album was more restrained than its predecessor, it's an album that repays repeated listening, switching its gaze towards Simple Minds' early electro-heavy pop as well as early-90s shoegaze. Live they're as self-consciously enigmatic as you'd hope for, Badwan's wonderfully glowering baritone cutting through the storm of heavily treated guitars and scouring synths, a perfect blend of period cool performed with enthusiastic panache.



JANUARY

TUESDAY 3rd

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Port Mahon
SPARKY'S FLYING CIRCUS: James Street Tavern – Weekly open mic club with Sparky, Hugh McManners and guests.

WEDNESDAY 4th

EXIST MORTAL + SHAKE WELL BEFORE + AETHARA + A TRUST UNCLEAN: The Bullingdon – Buried In Smoke blow the New Year cobwebs clean away with a four-band metal bill that includes raging hardcore warriors Aethara and ferocious death-grind crew A Trust Unclean.
BANDS NIGHT: The Bullingdon – Local acts tbc.
WEDNESDAY BLUES: James Street Tavern – Weekly open blues jam.

THURSDAY 5th

CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre – The oldest and best open mic club in town, showcasing singers, musicians, poets and storytellers every Thursday.
DAEDALUS' RIGHT EYE + CIRCUIT CHASE + DIGGING FOR PEDRO: The Hobgoblin, Bicester – Jambox rock night with Bristol's epic, emotive rockers Daedalus' Right Eye.
JAMBOX ACOUSTIC & OPEN MIC SESSION: The Wheatsheaf, Banbury
OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon

FRIDAY 6th

KLUB KAKOFANNEY with SPACE HEROES OF THE PEOPLE + BLIN' JONNIE + MOON LEOPARD + FREIZINGER & CHRIS HILLS: The Wheatsheaf – Characteristically mixed bag of sounds and styles at the first Klub Kak of the year. Electro-pop duo Space Heroes Of The People mix up Kraftwerk and Numan-inspired synth sounds with 90s rave with highly entertaining results, utilising everything from electric upright bass to Wii remote control. There's blues from Blin' Jonnie in support alongside Jeremy Hughes' Moon Leopard and Klub Kak host Phil Freizinger.
SKYLARKIN SOUNDSYSTEM: The Cellar – Count Skylarkin, currently riding high on the back of his single 'Dub Of A

Preacherman', opens his 2012 account in the company of legendary Bristolian DJ Derek, together playing a party-friendly mix of ska, funk, hip hop and soul.

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

SATURDAY 7th

PROSPEKT + BELLIGERENCE + EYE FOR AN EYE + ANNERO: The Wheatsheaf – Elaborate prog-metal from local starlets Prospekt at tonight's Buried In Smoke show.
KATHERINE JENKINS: The New Theatre – Pop-opera crossover joy from the multi-million-selling, BRIT-winning Welsh mezzo-soprano.
PROPAGANDA + TRASHY + ROOM 101: O2 Academy – Classic and new indie sounds at Propaganda every Saturday, plus kitsch pop, glam, 80s and guilty pleasures at Trashy and metal, hardcore and alt.rock at Room 101
DAEDALUS' RIGHT EYE + ILLUSION + THE STEREOS: The Wheatsheaf, Banbury – Jambox rock night.
THE JUNCTION LIVE: The Junction – Live bands and DJs every Saturday night at Oxford's newest live music venue.
THE PETE FRYER BAND: The Dolphin, Wallingford – Eccentric electric blues from the local stalwart.

SUNDAY 8th

JACK LITTLE + MAPS & THE METHOD: The Hobgoblin, Bicester – Jambox acoustic and open mic session.
MOON LEOPARD + BEARD OF DESTINY + PENNY & PHIL + STEM: Donnington Community Centre (6pm) – An evening of acoustic music with Jeremy Hughes' Moon Leopard and chums.
OPEN MIC SESSION: The Old Bookbinders

MONDAY 9th

KING B: The Bullingdon – The veteran electric blues-rockers open the Famous Monday Blues' account for 2012.

TUESDAY 10th

JAZZ CLUB: The Bullingdon – Free live jazz every Tuesday, this week featuring funk-tinged local singer and pianist Alison Bentley performing jazz standards and original compositions.
OPEN MIC SESSION: The Port Mahon
SPARKY'S FLYING CIRCUS: James Street Tavern

WEDNESDAY 11th

WEDNESDAY BLUES: James Street Tavern

THURSDAY 12th

RKC + BLACK HATS: Fat Lil's, Witney – Former-Babyshambles drummer Adam Ficek brings his solo project to Witney, having just released a new album, 'British Plastic', and shortened his band's name from its former Roses King Castles. The new opus is an oddball mix of Nirvana-ish riffage and Depeche Mode-style electroncis which surround Ficek's plaintive voice but it's a pleasingly wonky strain of urban blues-pop. Support from local power-pop trio Black Hats.

CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford

Community Centre

ACTIONS + LIVEO: The Hobgoblin, Bicester – Jambox rock night.

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon

Saturday 21st

DOPEFIGHT / DESERT STORM / SEDULUS / XII BOAR: The Cellar

Any residual post-festive torpor should be well and truly blasted out of existence by tonight's Buried In Smoke bill. Topping it are Brighton's sludge-stoner-doom trio Dopefight, whose name pretty much gives the game away. Inspired by the likes of Electric Wizard and Bongzilla, they worship the bong with extreme prejudice, monstrous Sabbath-style riffs riding triumphantly over oceanic grooves, mostly instrumental but happy to accommodate screams and growls when duty calls. What makes them stand out from the pack is their inventive melodic edge, singer and guitarist Owen Karti never holding back with a catchy riff. Add this to a sense of brevity that's rare in this genre and odd reminders of their punk past, and you've got a band who, for the time being, are a cult, underground concern, but should hopefully break bigger this year or next. For now they've definitely got the chops to hold their own against the American giants of the genre. Great supporting cast from Oxford's own sludge champs Desert Storm, plus weighty stoner grooves and Mogwai-style noise from Harrow's Sedulus and southern stoner rock from Hampshire's XII Boar.



FRIDAY 13th

SECRET RIVALS + HOT HOOVES + JUNKIE BRUSH + MARY BENDYTOY:

The Wheatsheaf – Moshka club night with ebullient electro-indie tigers Secret Rivals, launching their new single 'Once More With Heart'. A strong supporting cast features fuzzed-up power-pop in the vein of Husker Du and Guided By Voices from Hot Hooves; virulent old-school punk from Junkie Brush and industrial rocking from Mary Bendy Toy.

LIVEO + AMONG HONOUR + LEST WE FORGET: The Wheatsheaf, Banbury – Jambox rock night.

THE MIGHTY REDOX: The James Street Tavern – Swamp blues, funk and psychedelia from the local veterans.

FUNKY FRIDAYS: The Bullingdon

SATURDAY 14th

PROPAGANDA + TRASHY + ROOM 101: O2 Academy

COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN: Cornerstone Arts Centre, Didcot – Classic country-folk and rootsy Americana.

THE JUNCTION LIVE: The Junction

SUNDAY 15th

ANT WHITEHEAD + MAEVE BAYTON & IAN + MARK ATHERTON + PHIL & JOE + SCOTT GORDON + HEADINGTON

HILLBILLIES: The Wheatsheaf (2.30pm) – An afternoon of free acoustic music courtesy of Klub Kakofanney, featuring a selection of local troubadours.

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Old Bookbinders

MONDAY 16th

BIG BOYS BLUES BAND + FLEXAMUSCLE: The Bullingdon – Electric blues-rocking from The Big Boys Blues Band, plus good-time rock'n'roll and funky soul from Flexamuscle at tonight's Famous Monday Blues session.

FRACTOFUSUS: St Michael's @ The Northgate (1pm) – A lunchtime performance by experimental, improvisational quartet Fractofusus, made up of vocalist Anne L Ryan, trombonist and pianist Camilla Cantata, fiddle player Jill Elliott and saxophonist Trish Elphinstone, playing together and individually.

TUESDAY 17th

JAZZ CLUB: The Bullingdon – Live jazz from The New Jazz Collective.

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Port Mahon
SPARKY'S FLYING CIRCUS: James Street Tavern

WEDNESDAY 18th

HENRY ROLLINS: O2 Academy – Strange that our 'Enry is now better known as a self-effacing, gently humorous raconteur than the



Tuesday 24th

M83: O2 Academy

Full of epic intent, Anthony Gonzalez, the French-born, LA-resident producer, multi-instrumentalist and singer who is, to all intents and purposes, M83, is one of those musicians seemingly driven to create the biggest music in the world, and if anyone scoffs at the bombast that comes out the other end, to hell with them. To this end M83's new album 'Hurry Up, We're Dreaming' – their sixth – was apparently inspired by Gonzalez's love for Smashing Pumpkins, although the expansive double album sounds more like an ambitiously sleek collision of Air, Sigur Ros, Pink Floyd and Peter Gabriel as it swoons from epic 80s synth-pop, through shoegaze and into chillwave, via a whole lotta stadium pop flag-waving. It's probably not quite up to the standard of its predecessor, 'Saturdays = Youth', the high water mark in M83's decade-long career, an album that often felt like the soundtrack to as-yet unmade American teenage melodrama from about 1983, but at its best, like the richly ambient single 'Midnight City', or the cutely euphoric 'Raconte-Mo Une Histoire' it feels like Gonzalez is always trying to lift himself and his music above pop mundanity and live he, and a band that features live drums and guitars alongside the elaborate electronics, pout on a show worthy of the biggest arenas.



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Friday 27th

MARIA & THE MIRRORS + LISTING SHIPS + MANACLES OF ACID + TIM FAIRPLAY: Modern Art

The reliably challenging Basement Sessions at Modern Art kick off in style this year with a debut Oxford show from London's Maria & The Mirrors. On paper they could be excruciating hipsters – a trio of fashionistas (two girls, one boy) turning their hand to confrontational electro-dance, with as much attention paid to their sartorial side as to the music – but a quick listen to their music reveals a fantastic collision of tribal rhythms, harsh electronics and primal chants. Two of the three are drummers and often the vocals sound like the possessed gabbling in tongues. They take their name from an old Andy Warhol quote and pay great attention to their garish visuals. Inspiration is taken from Yoko Ono, Factory Floor and Gang Gang Dance amongst others and at the requisite volume you feel it might just convert listeners to dangerous fringe religions. Excellent heavyweight post-rock and electronica from Listing Ships and period acid house squelches from Manacles of Acid, plus post-punk, coldwave and 80s synth-pop from DJ Tim Fairweather.

furious, self-loathing hardcore firebrand he made his name as. Still, spoken word he may be, he's still more punk rock than most would be rock and roll revolutionaries, even while he's recounting stories of going to football parties round at William Shatner's house. Such autobiographical anecdotes get mixed up with political observations and an amiable stream-of-consciousness with a man you once wouldn't have considered the height of good company. Tonight's show has moved venues from the Regal.

NOBLEMEN: The Wheatsheaf – Moshka club night.

WEDNESDAY BLUES: James Street Tavern

THURSDAY 19th

THE HORRORS: 02 Academy – Re-arranged show from the nouveau-gothic skinny-ribs – *see main preview*

RAFAEL & FRIENDS: Oxford Playhouse – The popular flamenco guitarist returns to the Playhouse with his Andalusian backing band, playing traditional and contemporary flamenco styles.

CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford

Community Centre

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon

FRIDAY 20th

THE BIG TEN INCH: The Cellar – Classic jump blues, swing and rockabilly from Count Skylarkin and Van Mule, tonight featuring a live set from The Severed Limb, fast-rising young rock'n'rollers who recently supported Imelda May.

NOVANA: 02 Academy – Nirvana tribute band.

THE SCARS REMAIN + HEADSTONE DAWN + HURTSEASON: The Wheatsheaf, Banbury – Jambox metal night with local melodic thrash merchants The Scars Remain.

FUNKY FRIDAYS: The Bullingdon

SATURDAY 21st

THE CELLAR FAMILY + AGNESS PIKE:

The Bullingdon – Last month's Nightshift cover stars officially launch their 'Flab' EP release, having proved to be one of the most exciting and invigorating new bands on the local scene over the past year, their fractious, angular sheet-metal mix of punk, hardcore and something nasty from under the floorboards recalls McLusky and Fugazi at times. Oddball thrash merchants Agness Pike are main support, coming on like a decidedly camp Christopher Lee fronting Metallica or Machine Head. More bands to be added, plus future drum&bass into the wee small hours.

DOPEFIGHT + DESERT STORM + SEDULUS + XII BOARD: The Cellar – Sludge'n'stoner metal grooving from Brighton's Dopefight at tonight's Buried In Smoke show – *see main preview*

KILL MURRAY + MAYORS OF MIYAZAKI + SONIC RISING: The Wheatsheaf – Widely tipped to be one of the new local bands to watch in 2012, Kill Murray mix up some of their members' previous bands' sounds – Dial F For Frankenstein, 50ft Panda and Phantom Theory – but tempered by a poppier, harmony-heavy sound. London's scrappy, spasmodic lo-fi hardcore types Mayors of Miyazaki support.

GUNNING FOR TAMAR + APOLLO'S ARROWS + THE OLD GRINDING YOUNG + LISTING SHIPS: The Port Mahon – Having recently signed to Alcopop! Records, Gunning For Tamar are set for an action-packed year, their angular, riff-heavy take on math-rock drawing admiring comparisons to Biffy Clyro, Youthmovies and Billy Mahonie. There's tightly-wound fight-pop riffage from Apollo's Arrows in support; former-Ute frontman Olly Thomas re-emerges with his new Old Grinding Young band,

while Listing Ships provide heavyweight electro-infused post-rock.

THE JUNCTION LIVE: The Junction PROPAGANDA + TRASHY + ROOM 101: 02 Academy
THE PETE FRYER BAND: The King & Queen, Wheatley

SUNDAY 22nd

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Old Bookbinders

MONDAY 23rd

THE MIGHTY REDOX: The Bullingdon – Swampy blues rocking, festival funk and witchy psychedelia from the perennial local faves at the Famous Monday Blues.

TUESDAY 24th

M83: 02 Academy – Anthony Gonzales returns to town for the first time in bloody yonks – *see main preview*

JAZZ CLUB: The Bullingdon – Free live jazz from The Hugh Turner Band.

Saturday 28th

LINDI ORTEGA: The Jericho Tavern

Despite hailing from Toronto (where she was once dubbed Toronto's Best Kept Secret and Indie Lindi, due to her DIY ethic), Lindi Ortega has Nashville written all over her. Often compared to Emmylou Harris and even Johnny Cash, she's possessed of a voice you might mistake for a young Dolly Parton at times – homely, playful and slightly brassy but capable of switching to ghostly and haunted at will. Having self-released a brace of albums early on – debut offering 'The taste Of Forbidden Fruit' came out back in 2001 – Lindi was briefly labelmates with Lady Gaga on Cherrytree before moving on to her new home at Last Gang Records who put out her latest opus, 'Little Red Boots' back in the summer. In between, she's toured with Keane and Noah & The Whale, as well as backing singer to The Killers' Brandon Flowers on his solo tour. Now, though, she's coming to Europe in her own right, hoping to make a mark in a crowded market for rootsy female singer-songwriters, but with enough of a solid, long-term cult status to carry her through.



OPEN MIC SESSION: The Port Mahon
SPARKY'S FLYING CIRCUS: James
Street Tavern

WEDNESDAY 25th

THE GRACEFUL SLICKS + SHATTERED DREAMS + BEN PHILLIPS: The Wheatsheaf – Moshka club night with psychedelic garage rockers The Graceful Slicks conjuring an authentic 60s sound that recalls The Sonics, Electric Prunes and Velvet Underground. Grungy pop-metallers Shattered Dreams support, leaning towards the L7 side of things, while SD guitarist Ben Phillips also plays a solo set.
WEDNESDAY BLUES: James Street Tavern

THURSDAY 26th

CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre
OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon

FRIDAY 27th

MOTHER CORONA + CARAVAN OF WHORES + REFUGEES OF CULTURE: The Cellar – Sludgy psychedelic metal in the vein of Sabbath, Hawkwind and Blue Cheer from Mother Corona at tonight's Buried In Smoke show. Support from blues-tinged psych-metal heavyweights Refugees Of Culture and stoner-thrash crew Caravan of Whores.
BASEMENT SESSIONS with MARIA & THE MIRRORS + LISTING SHIPS + MANACLES OF ACID + TIM FAIRPLAY: Modern Art Oxford – Headspinning tribal electro-pop from Maria & The Mirrors at tonight's Basement Session – *see main preview*
MIXTAPE: The Wheatsheaf – Pick'n'mix music policy from DJs Matt Paradise and Ashley Edana.
FUNKY FRIDAYS: The Bullingdon

SATURDAY 28th

LINDI ORTEGA: The Jericho Tavern – Roots country rocking from the Toronto indie queen – *see main preview*
GZA: O2 Academy – Wu Tang Clan's lyrical maestro, born Gary Grice, comes to town as part of a European tour, regularly rated ahead of his more high-profile Clan associates Ghostface Killah, ODB and RZA, both for his

lyricism and production skills. His best solo work was undoubtedly 'Liquid Swords', although a sequel is planned for later this year.
ALIASES + AETHARA + WAYS ACROSS + CRYISIS + SAVE THE SAVIOUR: O2 Academy – The first Skeletor / Room 101 team-up of the year finds Manchester's Aliases coming to town, featuring ex-Sikh guitarist Pin and exploring metal's prog edges. A strong local supporting cast includes molten metalcore types Aethara; melodic pop-metallers Ways Across; thrash crew Crysis and new young metalcore outfit Save The Saviour.
GAPPY TOOTH INDUSTRIES with ABANDON + THE JON COHEN EXPERIMENTAL + MUSTARD & THE MONOCLE: The Wheatsheaf – Former-Xmas Lights electro mangler Umair Chaudhry makes his live debut in his Abandon guise at tonight's opening GTI of 2012. Mixing dense guitar textures with industrial ambience, he evokes elements of Joy Division, Michael Gira, Jesu and Red House Painters. Joining Umair is former-Dears chap Jon Cohen over from Canada for a series of live dates with his new loop-based solo material. Punky local folksters Mustard & The Monocle provide a feisty trad opening set.
THE REAPER + SHATTERED DREAMS + NUCLEAR SKYLINE: The Wheatsheaf, Banbury – Jambox rock night with young teenage metallers The Reaper kicking out some enthusiastic thrash and classic metal alongside effusive melodic pop-metal and grunge rockers Shattered Dreams.
FISHWIFE'S BROADSIDE: The Chester Arms – Punky folk from the Milton Keynes ensemble.
PROPAGANDA + TRASHY + ROOM 101: O2 Academy
UNHINGED: The Bullingdon – Drum&bass club night.
COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN: The Talbot Inn, Eynsham
THE JUNCTION LIVE: The Junction

SUNDAY 29th

BABYBIRD: O2 Academy – Caustic, romantic pop from the 'You're Gorgeous' hitmaker – *see main preview*
OPEN MIC SESSION: The Old Bookbinders

MONDAY 30th

PETE BOSS & THE BLUEHEARTS: The Bullingdon – Clapton-esque blues from Oxford's veteran guitarist.



Sunday 29th

BABYBIRD:

O2 Academy

Stephen Jones seems set to live his musical life under the shadow of 'You're Gorgeous', his 1996 global hit that's come to define the name Babybird but was never a great representation of Jones' often caustic and abrasive songwriting style. Having recorded a slew of demos in his native Sheffield in the early-90s 'You're Gorgeous', and its attendant album, 'Ugly Beautiful', fitted in well with Britpop and acts like The Divine Comedy and Space – carrying a dishevelled sense of elegance, with wry, literate lyrics and a definite air of Englishness – but listen back to the likes of 'Bad Shave' and you'll discover a far more off-kilter pop mind at work, one more in tune with Beck or Eels. Still, having had his big hit, and a few more minor successes in its wake, Babybird slipped back into cult concern territory until Jones split the band in 2000 to concentrate on his writing. He returned in 2006 with new backing musicians and the patronage of long-term fan Johnny Depp, who graced one of the new songs with his presence as well as directing the video. Following on from 2010's 'Ex Maniac', comes new album 'The Pleasure Of Self-Destruction', Jones still playing the sometimes curmudgeonly romantic and poet. It shouldn't alienate fans of that hit too much, although the likes of 'The Jesus Stag Night Club' and 'I'm Not A Killer' are reminders that he's far from the comfortable crooner of popular image.

TUESDAY 31st

JAZZ CLUB: The Bullingdon – Live jazz from The New Jazz Collective.
OPEN MIC SESSION: The Port Mahon
SPARKY'S FLYING CIRCUS: James Street Tavern

LIVE

photo: Johnny Moro



GAZ COOMBES / LITTLE FISH / THE YARNS

The Rotunda

Gaz Coombes could have picked any venue in town to play his first post-Supergrass show. That he chose such an intimate arena makes tonight's gig that much more special.

Before his revelatory performance, though, The Yarns display a set of warm, semi-acoustic pop jangle that, replete with a trumpeter who swells the band's sound, reminds us a little of 80s indie heroes The June Brides, as well as Hefner at times. Occasionally they're one step removed from college revue pastiche, but mostly their songs are pretty and awash with delicate texture.

After a tumultuous year in which they lost their record deal and drummer Nez, Little Fish could be forgiven for lacking a little magic in their set. Nothing could be further from the truth. As Ben coaxes a gentle hum from his keyboard, Juju wander around the Rotunda's mezzanine and ground floor room intoning 'Heroin Dance' unamplified. It is simply stunning. Even for seasoned Little Fish fans the power and emotion in her voice is just staggering, putting to shame the legion of wannabe singing starlets cluttering up weekend TV. Later in the set, either due to nerves or the

arid warmth of the room, her voice dries up slightly but it barely impacts on the performance, the duo's *tour de force* 'Only A Game' and almost honky tonk blues piece 'The Umbilical Cord' chief highlights alongside Juju's sweet, rambling anecdotes.

Anyone hoping for Supergrass Mk.II from Gaz Coombes' new solo career would be disappointed tonight. Everyone else, waiting to see what one of the most unassumingly engaging rock stars of the past 20 years would do next, would have come away enthused by a performance completely at odds with his old band as he debuts songs from next year's 'Here Come The Bombs' album, co-written and recorded with 'I Should Coco' producer Sam Williams.

Aside from opening number 'White Noise', where the voice at least is unmistakably Gaz, tonight's set reveals a completely new side to him, the swaggering old school rock frontman replaced with a sometimes feverishly busy knob twiddler and button pusher, myriad effects pedals and electronic drum pads played wholly live alongside a battered acoustic guitar.

An aggressive, spasming electro-heavy number, with hints of Bowie's 'Hunky Dory', leads into a softer piece, discordant piano and murmured vocals closer to Radiohead's most recent work. 'Simulator' finds Gaz building up a full head of steam, highly-strung, bolshy and decidedly dirty in sound, voice and guitar distorted like something unearthed from grunge's fiery early days.

'Hot Fruit' is dense and urgent at first, billowing into a turbulent storm of chattering beats, looming electronics and snarled vocals, but it's 'Sleeping Giant' that is tonight's real highlight, throbbing and twinkling ominously behind Gaz's airy croon.

In keeping with the spirit of the evening, Gaz invites Little Fish to join him for an autumnal cover of The Velvet Underground's 'Candy Says', one of those unique moments that no-one here tonight will forget in a hurry. But the overriding impression we're left with is of a musician seemingly reborn. Like Scott Walker and Alex Chilton before him, Gaz sounds like he's willing and able to leave his pop past fully behind him and seek out pastures fresher and wilder. Risky perhaps, but infinitely more rewarding and a step forward that will, without doubt, prove to be the remaking of the man.

Dale Kattack

RICHARD WALTERS / MESSAGE TO BEARS / THE OLD GRINDING YOUNG

The Rotunda

The Rotunda, a former dolls house museum nestled behind an eco house in Iffley Village, is possibly the venue Richard Walters has been waiting for his entire career. As intimate as a small pub venue but with the stately ambience of a classical concert hall, here, before a rapt and respectful audience, his songs, so fragile and delicate, can emerge without being drowned out by chatter or lost amid expansive surroundings. Strings of fairy lights and the aroma of mulled wine add a wintry warmth to the whole evening, adding a gently magical pre-Christmas air to proceedings.

Before Richard's set, we catch a glimpse of former-Ute frontman Ollie Thomas' new project, The Old Grinding Young, thus far only a two-piece and set to expand, but who display, on the two songs we hear, a stormy form of acoustic rock, Ollie's rich, tautly-strung voice possessed of a tightly-reined in intensity that reminds us of The Veils. Two gigs old they're already ones to watch.

Message To Bears similarly benefit from tonight's surroundings, Jerome Alexander's chamber pop quintet matching intimate composition with sometimes epic intent, sea air folk washing against the lush textures of pastoral classical music, picked guitar, minimalist percussion and wavering violin backing hushed, mostly wordless vocal harmonies,

combining to create seductively hypnotic lullabies and reveries.

The living embodiment of the maxim less is more, Richard Walters is tonight at his stripped-down best, backed by A Silent Film's Rob Stephenson on piano and cellist Martin. It's all his voice needs to weave its magic. Even songs from his last album 'Pacing' are tonight stripped back down to basics, allowed to breathe, revealing them to be as every bit as strong as the likes of 'Elephant In The Room', which opens the set in devastatingly emotive style.

Songs from Richard's forthcoming EP, recorded with Rob, reveal equally rich treasures: 'Young Trees' in particular and the comparatively full-bodied 'Tomorrow Begins Today', with its sombre piano lead.

Far from being a precious prima donna, Richard is possessed of an understated, earthy sense of humour, but jokes about back doors suddenly make way for a song like 'The Animal', which drags beauty and grace from horrific subject matter.

Just as Stornoway did at the Sheldonian two years ago, Richard Walters almost merges with the venue to perform a show that transcends the normal gig experience. For a singer who seems relentlessly cast adrift on a sea of turbulent emotions, he has never sounded more at home.

Dale Kattack

HOT HOOVES / NINE STONE COWBOY / SPINNER FALL

The Cellar

Dubbing this gig 'Veterans' Night' does a disservice to the freshness and vitality of the bands involved but there's no denying every act comes with some serious history.

Openers Spinner Fall feature former members of local hardcore pioneers Skydrive and Callous as well as post-rockers From Light To Sound but bear only a passing resemblance to any of those, opting instead for an intensely turbulent noise that somehow marries shoegaze glissando with a post-punk brittleness and a throat-shreddingly hectoring vocal delivery that can variously remind you of Ride, Husker Du and The Fall, all at the same time. One slower, almost robotic number skirts close to Comsat Angels' 'Independence Day' but it's when they stamp on their myriad pedals and just let the guitar soar that they really envelope you.

Nine Stone Cowboy are, of course, led by ex-Candyskins guitarist Mark Cope, but the rest of the band have served serious time on the local scene, notably Easy Tiger frontman Ady Davey, and the tone of the songs reflects a sardonic, world-weariness that suits Mark's cynical lyricism, particularly when he gently croons, "Jesus H Christ, I fucked up my life" at one point. 'Lack Of Hope & Glory' is simultaneously a sweet, doe-eyed pop gem, a wistfully romantic desire for an older England and a bitter rumination on life. Nine Stone Cowboy's glass isn't half

empty, it's drained to the dregs and some bastard's stubbed a fag out in it. It does, though, makes for some wonderfully sobering pop poetry.

If NSC are staring into the abyss, Hot Hooves are raging against the dying of the light. Their pedigree is well documented – Jericho Tavern and Point promoter Mac and Talulah Gosh and Heavenly guitarist Peter Momtchiloff sharing lead roles; The Hulas' Welsh Mike on bass and Les Clochards' Gary Neville on drums. 'This Is It, This Is The Scene' sets, well, the scene: raucous but deceptively refined power pop cut through with a punky vim and lyrics that would floor you with a pithy put down as soon as look at you. From the glitterstomping 'Ladies Of Our Species', a lyrical descendant of Ivor Cutler's 'Women Of The World', to the frenetic buzzsaw pop of debut album highlight 'The Sparks Up Agenda', they wage a scathing war against the world and its wife – Knights of Sardonica, if you will.

Anyone who's watched cult Korean revenge flick *Oldboy* will remember the scene where the aging protagonist takes on and defeats an army of thugs with sheer pathological determination. Tonight, you're reminded why anyone who'd write a band off based on their age is a fool and deserves the beating each of these acts is more than capable of dishing out.

Ian Chesterton

YOUNG KNIVES / CAT MATADOR / THE FAMILY MACHINE

The Rotunda

Intimate is a word often used to describe a gig, but it really fits here: The Rotunda is small, and the atmosphere friendly, warm and respectful, and there's a seasonal whiff of mulled wine in the air.

On this, the first of the Rotunda events, three bands strike a good balance between fun and emotion. Family Machine, up first, reaffirm their place as heroes of Oxford music. Jamie Hyatt's strong voice blends well with that of the other band members, who all contribute to some great harmonies over a set of songs that are country-tinged, but in a non-mawkish, slyly inventive way. Their songs, a combination of traditional structures, touches of odd synthesised sounds and side-roads of experiment, are sad at their core, but delivered in a positive, bracing fashion. It's clear that this is a band who have honed their craft; they offer up catchy, memorable songs with a relaxed performance that's almost flawless.

Cat Matador present an almost equally polished set, with their combination of delicate lead vocal, subtle violin melodies and hushed guitar tones sitting comfortably within the environment.

They tell us that they're normally much noisier, but this apparently stripped-back musical approach is seductive and enjoyable. The songs, which recall a combination of Fleet Foxes and perhaps Jonquil, seem a little exposed by the clarity of such simple instrumentation. Whilst it's a relaxed and confident performance, a certain amount of repetition steps in from song to song, and sees them duplicating not so much melodies or patterns as the 'feel' of their work, which tends perhaps too much towards a surprise- and challenge-free state of (admittedly often lovely) pleasantness.

Similarly to Family Machine, Young Knives have a tendency towards the melancholic in their

songs, even if they are often packaged up as comedic and light-hearted confections. Even though they, as is usual, joke around with self-deprecating humour between songs, the touching and personal core to much of their work - tonight a showcase of tracks from 'Voices Of Animals And Men' onwards - is especially marked in this stripped-down performance. It's easy to forget, until the workings of their songwriting is exposed, that this band really do write excellent, memorable music. It takes a poppy indie rock core and turns it into something slightly leftfield and unique. Their ability to switch from joking around into an effortless, tight performance shouldn't be underestimated, and even when they're at their most absurd - straining on high vocals during a cover of Kraftwerk's 'The Model', for example - they're utterly charming and engaging.

So there you have it - three courses of delectable fare, showcasing not only the strong tradition of quality songwriting from Oxford, but a tendency toward experiment that's difficult not to warm to.

Simon Minter



BARNEY MORSE-BROWN / JESS HALL / MATT CHANARIN

The Bullingdon

A little bit of effort makes all the difference. The customary Bullingdon backdrop has been covered with a fine choice of wallpaper, there's a dummy window providing a view of snowfall (we might have imagined that) and there's a finely decorated Christmas Tree and an

assortment of candles gracing the stage. Even before anyone's played a note, the set dressing makes for a comfortable festive atmosphere. Local singer Matt Chanarin is joined tonight by Jo Clarke and together they make their way through a series of acoustic ballads that are

quite beautiful. On his own Chanarin sounds not unlike a particularly maudlin Paulo Nutini or even Jack Johnson, but with Clarke's delicate vocals interweaving with his own, there's a similarity to the wonderful harmonies of Trevor Moss and Hannah Lou.

Tonight is doubling up as a single launch for Jess Hall, and it's clear to see why the majority of the audience is here to see her tonight. Even in their most stripped back and naked form, her songs are positively bulging with emotion. Initially she injects an off-kilter kookiness into her performance, calling to mind a young Kate Bush, but as she goes on (with Barney Morse-Brown providing immaculate cello accompaniment) things settle down and she focuses on pulling at the heart strings. Her "old people" songs tread the line between the utterly beautiful and the calculatingly emotional. There's a melody steal from Abba's 'I Have A Dream' in their somewhere, but she injects enough pathos into the main hook of 'Let's Dance The Waltz' that it's easy to imagine a bunch of teary-eyed coffin dodgers slow-dancing to the melancholic chimes of a music box. Her last tune, 'Red Jumper', is easily her best moment, with the cello twisting around her vocals beautifully, encouraging her to push her impressive vocal range, which she does with some style. An encore of 'In The Bleak Midwinter' is as impressive as it is gloomy, but Jess Hall has impressed enough with her own material to make this little more than a nod to the festive season.

Barney Morse-Brown rounds things off in his own singular style. Using an array of pedals, he builds up layers of guitar and cello creating a full band sound. Initially it's mightily impressive, but the time it takes to build the structures and the fact that he's very much tied to a single idea mean that his songs suffer somewhat and are at times in need of serious pruning. Nevertheless, he's an incredibly talented musician and delivers an impassioned set that culminates in some rather heavy-handed cello abuse, which is always a fine way to end an evening.

Sam Shepherd

KVELERTAK / TOXIC HOLOCAUST / THE SECRET / WOLVES LIKE US

O2 Academy

Metal will never die. Occasionally it seems like it's about to flatline (the early 90s or the emergence of nu-metal for example), and then, energised by a thunderous punch to the heart, it kicks back into life and becomes relevant and exciting again. Tonight's bill of relentless metal shows that this is a genre currently in particularly rude health.

Wolves Like Us are, on record at least, the most lightweight of tonight's bands, as they flit around the edges of emo. In a live setting there's a lot more muscle to their sound and somehow they sound less like Samiam and more like Tad fisting Mastodon.

It's a thrilling start, and one which The Secret struggle to top. The Italian Southern Lord signings start their set with a bone-rattling

drone, which is what you'd expect from a band signed to Greg Anderson of SunnO)))'s label. From there they launch into a set that is a blitzkrieg of lightning riffing and gargled vocals. Equal parts grind, hardcore and death metal make for an unforgiving half an hour, which is impressive in its brutality but which is, for the most part, somewhat uninspired.

What with the Big Four playing for at Sonisphere this year, it's hardly unsurprising that thrash is being revisited by a number of bands at the moment. Toxic Holocaust have the look of early Slayer (when they toyed with make up and Motley Crue hair) and have the sound of any number of thrash bands from 1986 but most specifically they borrow heavily from Nuclear Assault and Kreator. Slayer's 'War

Ensemble' is referenced in their riffs at least three times in their short set but they stop just short of being an outright parody. Did they just say "Hail Satan"? Yes, they did.

Kvelertak are probably the most exciting metal band on the planet at the moment. Their debut album is far and away the best thing we've heard from any metal band in the last five years, and live they don't disappoint. Ramming black metal full of Motorhead's supercharged rock and roll they rip the roof off from start to finish. Vocalist Erlend Hjelvik (a part troll, part Viking blob of a man) wastes no time in whipping the crowd into a vicious, beer-soaked moshpit. Flanked by three guitarists Kvelertak are as much a visual spectacle as a sonic one and with an impossibly strong set of songs containing the likes of 'Mjød' and 'Fossegrim' it's clear they're the real, life-affirming deal.

Sam Shepherd

HAROLD BUDD / THE NECKS

Holywell Music Room

An Oxford event of this stature could only happen here in the oldest custom-built concert hall in Europe and, as luck would have it, home to a rather fine grand piano. Harold Budd may well be tired of seeing his name inevitably mentioned next to Brian Eno's, as they only ever made two albums together. Less well known are his collaborations with U2, The Cocteau Twins, Andy Partridge and John Foxx, not that you'll find these recordings in many shops. The 75-year-old improviser, composer and pianist is not renowned for touring so expectations are high for this sold-out show, with the added bonus of visuals specially created by Russell Mills.

Accompanist Werner Dafeldecker contributes some low-end electronic soundscapes as Budd picks out gentle motifs on the piano, recurring but never repeating in a style as complex as it is unmistakable: If anyone can lay claim to be the master of understatement this is surely the prime candidate, the term ambient ultimately a misnomer as music like this is impossible to ignore; it's as insistent as Slayer, just a whole lot

quieter. The single 34-minute piece is neither a second too long or short.

The Necks are an Australian three-piece band with roots in jazz and improvisation, but keen to escape the orbit of such labels, their long list of collaborators also including Eno, on 'This Is Pure Scenius', his 2010 series of musical events. Tonight bassist Lloyd Swanton begins proceedings with a short theme played then repeated after a long pause. Drummer Tony Buck joins in with waves of metallic chiming and pianist Chris Abrahams plays low, rhythmic patterns as they set off on a 35-minute journey into territory unknown even to themselves. There's something filmic here, and maybe allusions to storms at sea, but each listener is ultimately left to make their own sense of it. As with Budd a cynic could carelessly dismiss this as self-indulgent meandering but to the careful listener the raw talent is plain to see and richly rewarding. Both of these performances are master classes in the use of texture and subtlety, in a world too much in debt to the obvious.

Art Lagun

MARCUS BONFANTI

The Bullingdon

What drew me to the stage this evening were the pre-gig blurbs suggesting that Marcus Bonfanti is spearheading a British blues revival. With Seasick Steve kicking down the doors between clubs and Festival-sized gigs, bringing the whole genre to a more youthful consciousness, there's certainly a new platform for someone like Marcus, who had his Crossroads moment while attending the Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts.

Tonight, in his two forty-five minutes sets, Marcus, along with Scott Wiber on bass and Alex Reeves on drums, wrong foots us about any preconceptions we might have, from the way his pretty and tame-looking Dean Electric Resonator becomes a screeching rock axe on the Red House-like '(Is Your Life Better) Now That I'm Gone', to finding out the smouldering leonine posters of him mask a cheery, affable Essex boy demeanour, which in turn hides – in recession-defining songs like 'Hard Times' – a simply

gargantuan blues baritone voice, pitched neatly between the shale and grit of Joe Cocker and the polite, honeyed tones of Chris Rea.

In short, Marcus Bonfanti has it all. Tick those boxes and you have someone who can turn a maestro hand to all the myriad facets of the blues, while penning what must be a full range of instantly classic songs: the Delta blues of 'Going Down'; the rocktastic, driving blues of 'My Baby Don't Dance', right on to the slow-hand of 'Devil Girl'.

It might be argued that with his ballsy gruff voice, Marcus isn't exactly moving the stereo-typical blues sound on into the 21st Century. Possibly not, but what he does do is bring it all alive again and shows that root blues is not all about being downbeat and dreams crushed, but about wry humour, about surviving the obstacles life throws in your way, and most of all, that it's no longer just a country for old men.

Paul Carrera



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DR SHOTOVER Seasonal Jollies

Avast there, me hearties! Line up some tots of rum, Beddingfield! The early 80s are back at the O2 Laughing Academy, with an appearance by the reformed BOW WOW WOW scheduled for the New Year. (Cue some general nonce-ing about in pirate costumes and a brief return to "Cassette Chic"). Personally I cannot wait for the arrival of the *French Bow Wow Wow* tribute act known as OUAH OUAH OUAH, (still with me, Tintin fans?)... Their lovely singer Annabelle Louis-Quatorze (pictured below) will doubtless set pulses racing on both sides of the Channel, as will their reading of the notorious home-taping anthem *C-30, C-60, C-90 Allez!* Oh what larks. As you may have noticed, I am back on tip-top form after the trials and depredations of the build-up to the festive season... Christmas decorations going up in shops before Halloween, carol-singers ducking bucket-loads of piss outside Shotover Towers, the usual parade of no-hopers wheeled out for the Downright Shabby Christmas Special. How do I get through it? Why, nasty 70s drugs of course. Happy Mandrax-mas! Now, let's give that port and stilton hamper a thoroughly seasonal Jolly-Rogering, shipmates!



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INTRODUCING....

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

Tiger mendoza

Who are they?

Electro rock-dance crossover act Tiger Mendoza are Ian De Quadros (buttons, breaks, beats, stuff); Dan O'Driscoll (guitars) and Helena Markou (vocals and sparkly outfits). Originally Tiger Mendoza started out as Ian's one man band. He would record bits and pieces, do remixes and after spending lots of time making music, never play it to anyone. After hearing Helena sing at a party Ian thought it would be a good idea to make music together. In the end they recorded their first bunch of songs and 'The Hope Sick EP' was released. After their band Toy #1 dissolved, Ian played Dan some demos for songs to go on the next release and he was sold the idea of joining Tiger Mendoza as guitarist, making everything louder. An album, 'Aim For The Head', was released last year. When Helena went travelling, Ian and Dan recorded some darker, more electronic tracks, released this month as the 'LIBRE' EP and featuring Asher Dust on guest vocals. With the return of Helena they recently supported DJ Shadow at the O2.

What do they sound like?

A neat balancing act between electronica and guitar-based songwriting, Tiger Mendoza's strength lies in their willingness to take detours from their base camp of hip hop rhythms, fuzzed-up guitars, gothic tribal ambience, scattershot drum&bass, punked-up electroclash and subterranean blues. Helena and Ian's alternating vocal leads, plus guest appearances from the likes of Lee Smilex and Asher Dust augment the stylistic flits, so it's pleasingly hard to pin the band down too firmly. They are, in their own words, "dark industrial-ish breakbeat synth pop. With vocals. And guitars."

What inspires them?

"Hearing good music and striving to make better music."



Their career highlight so far is:

"Supporting DJ Shadow at the O2 and him chatting to us afterwards."

And the lowlight:

"The last gig we played at The Jericho. Disappointing for all involved."

Their favourite other Oxfordshire act is:

"The Half Rabbits. Good mates, great music."

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

"UNKLE - 'Psyence Fiction'."

When is their next gig and what can newcomers expect?

"Currently looking into gigs for the new year. There will be more new music, better masks and less *Top Gun* light-up t-shirts."

Their favourite and least favourite things about Oxford music are:

"Good: The fact it has a music scene and the sheer amount of variation within it. None of us were born in Oxford, but no Oxford, no Tiger Mendoza. Bad: The lack of live electronic nights (although that could be slowly changing...)"

People might love them if you love:

Tricky; Nine Inch Nails; Portishead; 65daysofstatic; DJ Shadow; Salem.

Hear them here:

soundcloud.com/tigermendoza

ALL OUR YESTERDAYS THIS MONTH IN OXFORD MUSIC HISTORY

20 YEARS AGO

The cover of January 1992's issue of Curfew magazine was graced by the enigmatic L.O.A.F. which stood of Loins Of Arthur Fowler, *Eastenders'* relentlessly put-upon staple character of the time. The band were obsessed by the drudgery and cruelty of life, claiming to hate everything "except cats, curry and chocolate," blaming their misanthropy on the moment "they killed off Kerry Bishop in *Neighbours*" and believing "all music is crap, with the exception of the Dr Who theme." The band's drummer and samplist claimed his samples were deliberately pitched to make listeners soil themselves.

Elsewhere this month a tribute album to local singer and promoter Sandi Connell-Hinks was released, featuring contributions from Frank Fish & The Fins, Ed Alleyne-Johnson and Johnny Connell-Hinks.

Ride played a semi-secret show at the Jericho Tavern to celebrate promoter Mac's 1,000th gig at the venue, while over in the demo pages a young band called On A Friday followed up their previous month's front cover feature with an enthusiastic four-star review, pipped only by a five-star offering from the legendary Anyways.

Gig highlights for the traditionally quiet month included shows at the Tavern from Chelsea Drug Store and Sun Carriage; To Hell With Burgundy at the Oxford Venue and Death By Crimpers supported by Human Torches at The Dolly, as well as about a dozen local shows by blues rockers Pickitupandkickit.

10 YEARS AGO

"Dig the new breed!" proclaimed the cover piece of Nightshift's January 2002 issue, heralding a look at some of the local acts to look out for that year. Amongst the acts tipped by Nightshift's own writers were Winnebago Deal; Southsea Company Prospectus; Marconi's Voodoo; Mindsurfer and Smilex as well as a band called Ponyclub, who were soon to change their name to Young Knives. Other local acts and promoters also picked their favourites with The Club That Cannot Be Named's Alan Day stating that "Shouting Myke will rule the world!" His opinion was echoed by Hal Stokes from Vade Mecum. Southsea Company Prospectus were a popular choice, picking up endorsements from Mac at the Point, Joal Shearing at the Wheatsheaf, Mark Sergeant at the Kooler Club and Ollie Cluet from Meanwhile, Back In Communist Russia.

Coming to town this month were hotly-tipped BMG signings The Cooper Temple Claus at the Zodiac as well as ska-punk faves King Prawn. Local bands gracing the local venue circuit were Sexy Breakfast (supported by Reuben); Dustball; Caliber: The Four Storeys and Suriki. On the demo pages sleaze-rockers Die Pretty were hailed for their "seedy and downright dirty fusion of New York Dolls, Jesus & Mary Chain and Sisters Of Mercy," while at the other end of the pile Trashboy were dismissed as "Apocalyptically awful pub rock of the type that made you wish all pubs would be closed down."

5 YEARS AGO

"Part dog's dinner, part the dog's bollocks, a sound engineer's nightmare," was how Nightshift described this month's cover stars Baby Gravy, a band still in the mid-teens but set to release their first single, 'I Hate Your Girlfriend' and having wowed us with their "wobbly-headed, lopsided brilliance," which sounded a bit like "X-Ray Spex jamming with Hawkwind or Here & Now". The band who were later to cohere into a feisty electro-punk quartet were here six-strong and determined that music should be "more gangsta rap and techno and less emo".

Since this was January we were doing our normal tipping thing with Jonquil, Borderville and Space Heroes Of The People standing out from a dozen-strong list that also featured The Delta Frequency, Mondo Cada, Mary's Garden and Brickwork Lizards.

In local music news Dive Dive announced the release of their second album, 'Revenge Of The Mechanical Dog', while the future of music at the Wheatsheaf was seemingly in safe hands with the purchase of the pub by Admiral Taverns that month. Sadly Cowley Road lost Polar Bear Records, which meant their was no dedicated record store on the road until the Truck Store arrived last year.

Coming to town this month were Imogen Heap at the New Theatre and ex-Velvet Underground legend John Cale at the Zodiac, while Nightshift's lead live review was of the mighty Melvins.

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DEMO OF THE MONTH

ASHER DUST

Dressed in garish green and red garb, holding a rainbow-coloured lollipop while sat in front of racks of old-fashioned sweetie jars, Asher Dust looks like some psychedelic re-imagining of The Childcatcher from *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* in his publicity shot. The image suits these new recording, by some distance Asher's strongest set of songs in a musical career stretching back almost two decades. From 'Politricks's thumping bashment with its grating, dirty production pitched up against Asher's conscious rapping, through the more soulful 'Monster Love', which sounds like the musical equivalent of trying to walk across a strobe-lit dancefloor while tripping, to the dark, dense drifting fog of sound that marks out the suitably-titled 'Wasteland', with its grimly determined beats, Asher – wonderfully produced here by Baby Gravy's Zahra Tehrani – magpie picks from dubstep to grime to breakbeat, eventually lifting the mood with the lighter-toned 'Space In Your Heart' and the positively funky electro buzz of 'Dream Fabulous'. Best of the bunch though is 'You Can't Stop Me', with its inventive use of electronics, recalling Ryuichi Sakamoto at times, Asher showing off a voice that's capable of equalling Seal or Terence Trent D'Arby in its rich soulfulness. On his myriad previous offerings, Asher has sometimes missed a trick on the production front, or simply gone too far down some mad experimental path, but this EP, entitled 'Maverick Trick', pumps up the former, reins in the latter just enough and allows everything to revolve around that great voice of his.

THE TROPHY CABINET

Like they have in soaps, shouldn't there be a rule that you can't have two local bands with similar names? When we first opened this up we got all confused and a bit excited, thinking it was a new offering from Trophy Wife. Not a good start. Any disappointment is short lived, however, as Abingdon's The Trophy Cabinet reveal themselves to be a band of no little class and gently understated grandeur. Opener 'Cutting Tree' is a loping, almost folksy indie jangle, pitched somewhere between The Go-Betweens and Lloyd Cole in its wilted, wide-eyed sense of

wonder. Better still is Lullaby', which recalls The Jesus & Mary Chain's most sleepily pensive moments, mellow with just the merest hint of a darker underbelly, while 'It's A Business' shows off the singer's powerfully plaintive voice with its air of cynical melancholy, touching on, in those moments when it momentarily cracks slightly, Ian McCulloch's 40-a-day croon. To their credit The Trophy Cabinet never elect to explode in some imagined celestial fireball of guitar noise, always keeping a tight rein on the sweetly glowering mood of the songs. Fine, fine stuff then, but we must insist that from now on they rename themselves The Toffee Cabinet. A far more appetising prospect, we're sure you'll agree.

FACEOMETER

We haven't heard from Faceometer, the singing and strumming *nom de plume* of Will Tattersdill, for a while, probably because he never seems to settle anywhere for long before he's hitting the road once again like a proper troubadour. This new five-song demo suggests he might have spent at least some of that time in Spain or eastern Europe, soaking up a bit of local folk culture. 'The Haunting Of El Miedo' has a bit of Flamenco flair about it, a frantic, adenoidal rant that confirms those old comparisons to that other wordy, not-really-folk songsmith Jeffrey Lewis. 'The Gallop Of The Monkey Horse', meanwhile is infused with a gypsy dance feel, a similarly hectic barrel through finger-picking polka, verging on Jello Biafra-like punk cabaret. 'The Witches' Lament', is far more autumnal and emotionally intense, an almost baroque slice of acoustic pop that doesn't suit Will's wordy style so well. Such wordiness hits its peak with the title of 'Sentiments Expressed By Dr Klaus Diemler, Mad Scientist', Upon Seeing His Hideous New Creation', which in itself contains more words than the typical pop verse. It's a love song from said mad scientist to his monster as a mob of pitchfork-wielding villagers gathers at the castle gates. Not something your average Little Mix song tends to deal with. More's the pity.

MIND THE WHITE LINES

Last month's Nightshift feature on The Cellar Family made mention of how few supposed punk bands seem to have anything other than a passing acquaintance with the idea of punk. Here's a case in point. Mind The White Lines might be young and wild and angry but instead of sounding like they're about to tear the front door off their

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nearest Barclays bank, while simultaneously shitting down Simon Cowell's severed neck, merely give you the impression they didn't get quite what they'd hoped for for Christmas. Initially they seem to adhere to The Adverts' one-chord-wonders manifesto, all rudimentary fuzz, determinedly rumbling bass and shouting, but while the fuzzing and rumbling is passable, the shouting is too sullen to pass muster. Come on boys, where's the sneering and snarling? Where's the *rage*? Gusto levels are set to medium when switching to maximum might have carried them at least partway through: 'Romance & Comedy' and 'Just Because It's Over' are passably punky, but 'Blacklist' features a genuinely godawful gravelly drone of a voice and sounds what we imagine a Hale & Pace skit on Devo might have sounded like. 'Ghosts' features probably the band's strongest tune but feels like a clumsy exercise in home counties angst, a post-rugby match bray-along that ends up on the verge of tears, and by the time they hit 'Let's Go Home', the formula sounds tired and we too feel like heading back home to bed.

GROVER

One day, hopefully before the sun explodes and turns planet earth into a cinder, someone will take Young People aside and gently mention that perhaps it's time to stop believing Green Day and the vast legion of generic, whiny dronebot overpriced t-shirt vendors that came after them, were in any way, shape or form, a progressive step for that wee beast we call punk rock. Not that we particularly dislike Green Day. On the contrary, they knocked out the odd corker or five, but, y'know, Blink 182, Good Charlotte, 30 Seconds to Mars... shall we go on? And bleedin' on? Like this lot do? Pretending they're from Orange County when really they're from Chipping Norton and probably live next door to Jeremy Clarkson and... hmm, hang on, that's a distinct possibility. In which case they deserve our eternal sympathy, not more critical brickbats. Then again, if you live next door to Jeremy Clarkson and haven't emigrated, pausing only to fire an industrial flame thrower at his face while his entire family – conveniently roped to the nearest tree – look on, then you deserve everything that's coming to you. So, anyway, where were we? Oh yes. Grover. From Chipping Norton. Sound like every other fucking whiny Californian pop-punk band you have ever heard ever. Not sure there's much else we can add to that really. Safe to say we're not overly keen.

DAN OCTAGON

That's a bloody great name that. Dan Octagon. Sounds like he should be playing synthesizer in an obscure early-80s band like The Berlin Blondes. Or possibly plotting to

destroy Spiderman using some devious mathematical trickery. Or maybe teaching 3D Design in a shiny new academy school. Anything, really, than reading his Year 10 creative writing essays over a handful of preset beats and generic electro squiggles that the aforementioned Berlin Blondes might have cast aside for being a bit dated back in 1980. While Asher Dust above is mixing and matching – or even deliberately mismatching – styles with soulful ease, Dan here – or should we call him Mr Octagon like his mum probably has to – is stuck in a rut so deep and so dull, the sun no longer penetrates and he's grown a film of moss on his head. "On days like these the sun don't shine / Guess I'm never gonna make her mine," he mutter darkly, and while we feel for the poor lad in his unrequited love trip, we're a tad busy calling Jay-Z to let him know his career is safe for now to extend any genuine sympathy. Still, Dan Octagon. Great name. Wonder if he could get a part in Spongebob Squarepants, maybe as a piece of depressed coral or something.

THE DEMO DUMPER

SKY BY BULL

Sky By Bull describe themselves as "instrumental / concept", which might seem profound but actually makes no sense. What sort of concept? Perhaps a clue can emerge from the music? Ah yes, 'Your World', the opening track. The concept here is to explore what might happen if an orphaned snare drum were to be trapped inside an old biscuit tin for all eternity with only a moody jazz bass line for company, the pair circling round each other with no sense of where they've come from or where they're going, until five minutes later they simply give up. It's a fascinating musical exploration of the nature of being, an existential journey into the unknown. Or maybe just a pointless heap of frustrated jazz muso onanism. It doesn't get much better from here, though at least the track titles give us some idea of the evolving concepts: 'Not Like It Used To Be' (damn right, used to be musicians wrote fucking tunes); 'What Happened' (not much, bordering on fuck all); 'Dreams' (we can but dream this aural tossage will one day stop and leave us in peace to stuff our stupid fat faces with chocolate and brandy and dance idiotically round the room to Jessie J or The Saturdays or...) oh God, what are we saying? Not the fucking Saturdays, please. Now do you see what you've done to us Sky By Bull? You've lowered our standards to critical levels. Is that the concept you had in mind? Yeah, well you can stick it where the sun don't shine, and we don't mean inside an old biscuit tin.

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

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



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