

NIGHTSHIFT

Oxford's Music Magazine

Free every
month
Issue 204
July
2012

Gunning For Tamar

Sonic firepower, wristwatches and
keeping it indie - *interview inside*

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NEWS

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CHARLBURY RIVERSIDE

FESTIVAL will take place over the final weekend of July after the original event in June was postponed due to the risk of flooding.

The annual two-day free festival, featuring a host of acts from across Oxfordshire, was due to take place on the 16th-17th June but days of heavy rain made the area alongside the Evenlode river unsafe and further rain threatened to flood the area.

The organisers moved quickly to rearrange the event, which will now take place on **Saturday 28th and Sunday 29th July**, featuring pretty much all of the original acts. Rockers Smilex top Saturday's main stage bill and are joined by Black Hats, The DB Band, Deer Chicago, Secret Rivals, Graceful Slicks and Tamara & The Martyrs, while the second stage is headed by Undersmile, along with Hot Hooves, Von Braun, The Hawkhurst and Listing Ships.

Sunday's main stage is headlined by Alphabet Backwards, with support from with The Epstein, Brickwork Lizards, The Mighty Redox, The Dirty Royals, The Inflatables and Byronics, while the second stage features Superloose, Count Drachma, Richard Walters and Flights of Helios.

Visit www.riversidefestival.charlbury.com for line-up news and hopefully a decent weather forecast.

THE FAMOUS MONDAY BLUES

has moved to The Jericho Tavern as of last month. The weekly local blues club, which has been running for 28 years, originally at the Red Lion in Gloucester Green and then Jongleurs, before moving to the Bullingdon ten years ago, will continue to showcase British, European and American blues acts each Monday. Promoter Philip Guy Davis explained the move on

the club's website, saying, he wanted to move closer to Oxford city centre.

July's line-up features Jim Suhler & Monkeybeat on the 2nd, Bayou Brothers on the 9th, The Larry Miller Band on the 16th and Marcus Bonfanti on the 23rd.

THE BULLINGDON will be continuing to showcase the best blues sounds on a Monday however, with local blues-rock stalwart Tony Jezzett from Reservoir Cats, Bully landlord Arron and gig regular Penny Lee planning regular shows at the venue's new **Haven club night**. The first of these is an appearance from rising UK singer and guitarist Chantel McGregor on Monday 9th July. As well as touring acts, the Haven Club is looking for local blues acts. Acts interested in playing should contact Arron at the Bully on 01865 244516.

TRUCK STORE hosts a weekend of live music as a warm-up to this month's Truck Festival over the weekend of the **7th-8th July**. Michelle Stodart of the Magic Numbers, Gunning For Tamar, Jess Hall and Very Nice Harry are the acts confirmed so far. There will be a licensed bar for the weekend. **Truck Festival** takes place on the **20th-21st July at Hill Farm in Steventon** – see main preview in this issue. Visit www.truckmusicstore.co.uk for more news of the instore weekender.

OXFORD CONTEMPORARY

MUSIC makes its first foray outside of Oxford this month with an interactive sculpture and sound exhibition by artists **Mira Calix** called **Nothing Is Set In Stone**, set in Fairlop Waters, a country park and nature reserve in the London borough of Redbridge.

Calix is an award-winning composer,



FIXERS have released their debut album **'We'll Be The Moon'** on indie label **Dolphin Love** after parting company with Mercury Records on the eve of its intended release date.

The band had cancelled all dates on their UK tour, apart from their Oxford show at the O2 Academy, ahead of the announcement that they had left Mercury, prompting speculation about their future, but speaking to Nightshift at the start of June, singer Jack Goldstein said, "The album is coming out on the 18th on Dolphin Love. We had a rocky journey with Mercury and it's only a good thing that it has come to an end; we need all of our friends and supporters to go out and smother themselves all over our album. That said, it's gonna blow the fucking people downtown! It's take no prisoners time; we are skipping on the second album and going straight to the tempestuous third. I want the next record to sound like Maggotron Crushing Crew meets Fleetwood Mac's 'Tusk'. Watch this space. Exciting times for real."

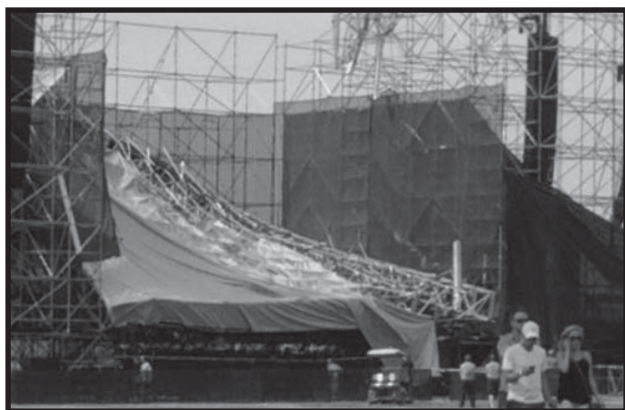
Since its release, 'We'll Be The Moon' has picked up rave reviews in *The Guardian*, *The Observer*, *The Independent*, and *Q*, as well as album of the week in *The Sunday Times*. Get your copy from Truck Store on Cowley Road and keep it local.

singer and performance artist known for her experimental music and performance works, including setting the words of William Shakespeare to music, as well as working with Malcolm Middleton and Radiohead. Nothing Is Set In Stone is part of Secrets: Hidden London, a series of cross-cultural events taking place in little-known spaces across London. Visit www.ocmevents.org.

TAD STUDIOS have opened a new rehearsal room at their studios near Kidlington. The room includes Fender, Marshall and Ashdown amplification, Mapex drums, a 1kw PA system and Shure mics. TAD offer a special 'Introduce A Friend' deal, whereby any local bands who introduce another band to the studio can earn themselves a free session. They also offer student daytime

discount and a free hour's rehearsal for bands booking a four-hour slot. Call Tom on 0788 256 9425 or email info@tadstudios.co.uk.

AUDIOSCOPE and PINDROP are organising a local bands, venues and promoters six-a-side football tournament this month to celebrate the end of the Euro 2012 tournament. The tournament, with the chance to be crowned footie champions of the Oxford music scene, takes place at Iffley Road Sport pitches on Saturday 7th July. Entry is £20 per team, with at least three members of each team having to be members of a local band, venue, promoters or record label. Contact james@pindroppublicity.com to get involved. All profits will go to homeless charities Shelter and The Gatehouse.



RADIOHEAD have paid tribute to their drum technician Scott Johnson, who was killed when the roof of the stage collapsed ahead of the band's final north American tour date in Toronto on 15th June.

Writing on the Radiohead website, drummer Phil Selway said, "We have all been shattered by the loss of Scott Johnson, our friend and colleague. He was a lovely man, always positive, supportive and funny; a highly skilled and valued member of our great road crew. We will miss him very much. Our thoughts and love are with Scott's family and all those close to him."

Three other crew members were injured in the incident, including the band's long-serving guitar technician Duncan Swift, from Oxford. Despite the tragic loss of life, it was only the fact that the band's full soundcheck was running late that prevented potentially greater tragedy.

Nightshift sends its sympathies to Scott's family and friends and to all of the Radiohead touring party, and wishes a full and speedy recovery to everyone hurt in the incident.



SPECTOR (pictured), **Jake Bugg**, **Bastille**, **Peace**, **Nina Nesbitt** and **Lewis Watson** are the latest acts to be confirmed for **Gathering** this autumn. London-based folk-rockers **Dry The River** have already been announced as headliners for the one-day live music event, which takes place along the Cowley Road on **Saturday 20th October**. Venues confirmed for **Gathering** include **The O2 Academy**, **The Bullingdon**, **East Oxford Community Centre**, **The Port Mahon** and **Cowley Road Methodist Church**. Tickets for the event are on sale now, priced £15, from wegottickets.com. Visit www.gatheringfestival.co.uk for more acts to be announced, including one headline act whose name we can't reveal at the time of going to press, but we'd be liars if we said we weren't very excited indeed.

ELLIOT FRESH releases his debut album this month. The local rapper and producer releases 'Now' on Oxford label **Illgotit**. You can download it for free here at illgotitrecords.bandcamp.com/album/now. Review in next month's **Nightshift**.

NIGHTSHIFT SCRIBE RUSSELL BARKER has self-published his debut novel this month. 'Disc-O' has a strong musical theme running through it and is on sale now from www.lulu.com as well as **Truck Store** and the **Albion Beatnik** in Jericho.

SONIC RISING have a new track, 'High Tide', released as part of the 'Summer Solstice' compilation for American radio show **Trip Under This House** this month. You can find it here: tripinsidethishouse.blogspot.com. The local psych-rockers released their debut single, 'Solar Eyes' in May as part of **National Record Store Day**. They play the **Wheatsheaf** on Saturday 28th July as part of **Gappy Tooth Industries'** monthly club night.

AS EVER, don't forget to tune into **BBC Oxford Introducing** every Sunday night at 9pm on 95.2fm. The dedicated local music show plays the best Oxford releases and demos as well as featuring interviews and live sessions with local bands. 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, a photo gallery and occasional live sessions. **Nightshift's** online forum also features breaking local news as well as the chance to chat to other Oxford musicians and gig-goers, advertise for bandmates or simply have a good old row about something and nothing. Visit **nightshift.oxfordmusic.net**.

SUPERNORMAL FESTIVAL returns to Oxfordshire next month. The three-day experimental music and arts festival takes place in the picturesque surroundings of eco-community **Braziers Park**, near Wallingford, over the weekend of **10th-12th August**.

The artist-curated festival features a host of leftfield music treats, including **Seefeel** (pictured), **The Telescopes**, **DJ Scotch Bonnet**, **Ramesses**, **James Blackshaw**, **Bilge Pump**, **Joeyfat**, **Mary Hampton**, **Cotillion**, **One Vague Signal**, **Kogumaza**, **Hey Colossus**, **Trojan Horse**, **Vents**, **Woolf**, **Stig Noise**, **Cosmic Dead** and Oxford's own **Undersmile**.

As well as the live music there are experimental pop parties, a retro-futuristic disco, music-themed cinema, art installations and myriad unusual goings-on. Tickets for the non-profit weekend are £65, on sale now from www.supernormalfestival.co.uk.



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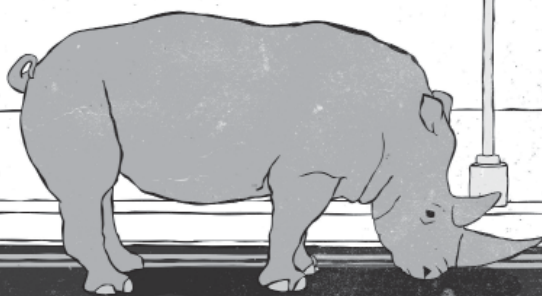
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a quiet word with

Gunning For Tamar



“WITHOUT WANTING TO BE negative about the UK, we do get treated better in Europe. For a band our size at least there is a noticeable difference. When you are in the UK there are so many bands who just want to play and are happy to do it for free or next to nothing, which is fair enough. In a way though it does devalue live music a bit and means that a touring band, who need to eat, put fuel in the van and find somewhere to sleep, seem demanding. In our experience, when you are in Europe all those things are seen as minimum requirements and when we get all English and say thank you all the time they think we’re weird.”

DAN POLLARD, GUITARIST, keyboard player and singer with Gunning For Tamar is reflecting on the way bands – specifically new, young, unsigned bands – are treated so much better on the continent than over here, where apathy bordering on contempt is not an uncommon attitude from promoters to bands.

Gunning For Tamar know all about the difference; Nightshift is talking to the quartet a week after they return from a tour of Germany – the band’s second jaunt there in the past year.

As well as the generous hospitality the tour afforded them, it also afforded

them some more worldly experiences, according to lead singer and guitarist Joe Wallis: “We went to a Nazi demonstration in Cologne, that was pretty weird... they were cordoned off down a little street, hundreds of policemen protecting them from all these other groups wanting to have it out with them. We had some pretty funny times in Kortrijk on the last night of tour, involving dice, alcohol, a bucket of piss, a ‘rearranged’ hotel room and a 5am bicycle ride.”

Regular gigging opportunities abroad such as these are part and parcel of a swift ascent up the local rock hierarchy for the bandsince their debut split-EP with fellow Oxford rockers Phantom Theory back in 2010. Since then they’ve been picked as one of *NME*’s Breakthrough bands; been acclaimed by *Rocksound*; played The Oxford Punt; released a series of singles and EPs, including their most recent ‘Time Trophies EP’ on renowned indie label Alcopop!, and this month they play the Barn stage at Truck Festival as part of Alcopop! and Big Scary Monsters Records Saturday takeover, with even bigger festival appearances rumoured for later in the summer.

GUNNING FOR TAMAR formed and made their reputation

on Oxford’s fertile music scene but the quartet were all individually drawn to the city by the promise and opportunities our scene offered. Drummer D’Arcy King came here to study at Uni, while the others – Joe, Dan and bassist Ben Green – moved here “purely to be in a band,” according to Joe. “It’s completely my home now, and I think the others feel that way too, but Dan and I are from Cornwall originally and used to play music together in college.”

After the usual round of local gigs Gunning For Tamar’s first big break came with the release of the song ‘The Organs. The Senses. The Muscles. The Memories’, which got picked up by *NME* as their breakthrough track of the week.

DAN: “We still don’t really know how that happened; an email arrived one day from *NME*’s reviews editor asking for a promo shot to be used the following week. We were pretty convinced they’d got the wrong band or were gonna slag us off until it came out. It definitely helped us get the attention of other national press and we had some gig offers off the back of it.”

Soon after *Rocksound* pitched the band as ones to watch in 2012.

DAN: My favourite part of that was getting our song ‘Chocolate Hooves’

on their cover mount CD. I’ve genuinely found some of my favourite bands listening to that CD, so it was a real fanboy moment. It was also funny to see a song we named after an in-joke on the same track list as Lamb Of God, Enter Shikari and Young Guns. It was great for raising awareness of the EP; we met quite a few people on our last UK tour who had only heard of us because of *Rock Sound*. One of them even let us stay at his house!

GUNNING FOR TAMAR’S growing reputation has been built on a style of music that fits, if at a suitably awkward tangent, alongside fellow local acts like Spring Offensive and This Town Needs Guns, exploring off-kilter song structures and time structures, mixing math-rock textures with a spangly pop sheen and moments of ferocious guitar riffage, with Joe’s strong, emotive voice giving the band a dynamic melodic kick. They once described themselves as “The sound of building something new and beautiful from the wreckage of a destroyed Lego model.”

Such an oblique approach to rock is something traceable locally back to Radiohead, via the likes of Youthmovies. Is there any feeling that Gunning For Tamar fit in to such a lineage, or if not, how, if at all, do they

feel the band fits into the local scene?

DAN: "What I love about Radiohead is how they are essentially a rock band but they are obviously influenced by so many other types of music than what is typically associated with guitar, drums, bass and vocals. I think we approach making music from a similar angle. [BBC Introducing DJ] Dave Gilyeat recently commented that the piano parts in some of our songs remind him of loops in electronic music. I was really pleased he picked up on that as I am a huge fan of people like DJ Shadow, Clint Mansell and Apparat and enjoy marrying that sort of songwriting with the type of raw and human performance that you can only get from a live band."

JOE: "I think we've found a circular hole on the scene for our square peg. Fits real nice now."

Beyond Oxford, though, bands like At The Drive-In, The Mars Volta or Biffy Clyro seem to approach rock in a similar fashion.

DAN: "Yeah, all those bands have had moments that inspired me at least. What really grabs me is when you can feel the band's personality bursting from within the songs. There's an honesty in the best work of the bands you've mentioned that you just can't fake."

D'ARCY: "The thing with The Mars Volta, Biffy and At The Drive-In is that no song sounds like another just played backwards but when you hear their tracks you know it's that band. That's what keeps me interested and what inspires me. To play something different and exciting every time and still be us."

INFLUENCES ASIDE,

Gunning For Tamar have become more assured – and noticeably more melodic – with each new release, while live they have developed a more dynamic, tightly structured sound that lifts them far above so many clever-for-the-sake-of-it band. Have they noticed the band becoming a more cohesive songwriting unit?

JOE: "It takes a while for a band to develop their songwriting and I think we're beginning to learn how we work best. We're suckers for melody, for better or worse. The more melodic we get, the more of a surprise it will be when we put in a metal breakdown into one of our songs..."

D'ARCY: "The truth is that we don't all sit down together and decide 'right, this time lets write a love ballad so the girls can swoon,' or, 'I think flamenco is in, let's give that a bash'. I think we're just getting more comfortable with each other and writing in a similar direction rather than against ourselves

Do you have a conscious idea of where, in purely musical terms, you see G4T going, or does it just take a natural path of evolution?

JOE: "We never fully know what the next song is going to sound like.

Dan or I will have the genesis of an idea and it'll develop with us two to a level we're happy with. Then we take it to the practice room and it gets ripped apart and put back together again as a full band for as many hours as it takes. It's a hugely democratic process, a song will shift and change over the course of its growth so much and sometimes the original idea you started with is long gone. But they all end up in their final form as something we all 100% love. There's no song map we follow."

AS WELL AS THEIR EVER-

evolving sound, Gunning For Tamar's fruitful partnership with local label Alcopop! has helped see the band's rise continue. The label's inventive approach to releases saw G4T's 'Time Trophies' released as a bright orange wristwatch which came with a download code for the EP's songs.

DAN: "Making physical releases interesting and tying in artwork for people that still care about that sort of thing is important. MP3s are amazing for sending music around the world in seconds but I love getting my hands on real things and collecting stuff so it's cool to cater for that. Music + things and stuff = happiness!"

JOE: "For 'Time Trophies', the watch made sense completely but we're not always going to be looking for the next 'crazy' way of releasing our music. We like to have different ideas available but only if they fit the release idea as a whole."

D'ARCY: "We're going to release a collection of tracks with spices. You know, basil, thyme, oregano. That way it would be like cooking with Gunning For Tamar."

Is the relationship with Alcopop! a long-term thing? In what way are they the best label for G4T to work with? Any plans for a full album?

JOE: "Everything about the way Jack runs Alcopop! just makes you want to work hard for him and the band really. He's the nicest, most hardworking man in music and I'm sure if you could measure that somehow, it'd be a certified fact. Plus he has a tremendous beard, the sign of a powerful man. Like Zeus. And we love being part of Alcopop! If we can take over the world together, all the better."

DAN: "We are currently working towards an album; I guess we always are but a lot of the pieces are falling into place now and it feels like a more realistic goal than it ever has. Hopefully it will surface at some point next year but it's a big project and we want to get it right."

Given what's just happened to Fixers and Vertigo, would you fancy signing to a bigger label if the chance ever arose?

DAN: "It's hard to answer that theoretically; it's very easy to get flattered when someone is interested in your music and wants to offer you

something. We try very hard to be realistic though and are aware that it can be harmful to work with anyone that doesn't 'get' our band or us as people."

JOE: "Completely agree with Dan to be honest. It's all about working with the right people and people who understand what you want. We'd be liars if we said we'd close the door on any opportunity that could lead somewhere potentially positive."

As part of Gunning For Tamar's ongoing relationship with Alcopop! they play Truck Festival this month – the band's second showing at the festival in a row. How do they think this year's event will pan out with the new organisers and the plan to take it back to its roots, and what particularly are they looking forward to from the BSM/Alcopop! takeover of the Barn?

DAN: "I'm massively excited to have the Barn back. I saw Future Of The Left in there a couple of years ago and it was one of the best things I witnessed anywhere that year. The BSM/Alcopop! takeover is gonna be insane; the same stage at the Great Escape this year was basically a musical riot in a pub and the fact that I get to play and then watch four of my favourite bands almost feels too good to be true."

BEN: "I'm going to be up the whole night before, like it's a Christmas in the summer."

Ever done anything particularly mad

or stupid at a festival, either as a band or a punter?

DAN: "Watched N-Dubz."

JOE: "I was there and yes, that was a mistake."

WITH THINGS BUILDING

so nicely for the band right now, Gunning For Tamar's immediate future looks extremely bright. Should things suddenly collapse around them though, perhaps they could go out in one final mad blaze of glory – a little something to remember them by forever. So, they've got their gun and they've dispensed with Tamar; one bullet left, who gets it?

BEN: "Jeremy Kyle would get it; he's a lovely chap I'm sure of it but I think he is single-handedly responsible for most things wrong with our country. That's quite bold and possibly unjustified, well actually pretty vicious, I take it back. Can someone else please answer?"

DAN: "The dickhead who stole my bike seat."

D'ARCY: "David Guetta: to stop him releasing the same bloody song over and over again. I think we're going to need more bullets..."

'Time Trophies' is out now on Alcopop! Records. Gunning For Tamar play Truck Festival on Saturday 21st July. Visit www.facebook.com/gunningfortamar for news and tour dates.



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(Own label)

Ah, the 1990s were a simpler time: no internet, no mobiles, and the 80s still fresh enough in the mind to remember what a truly hideous decade we'd just escaped from. Listening to The Cellar Family's latest, it's hard not to be reminded of that glorious period when the likes of Dischord and Touch And Go ruled the underground roost, pouring out a ceaseless procession of peerless angular guitar bands with an influence reaching far beyond DC and Chicago. The lineage that brought 'Jumbo' to the world, whether directly or indirectly, might be quite obvious, and The Cellar Family certainly aren't doing anything remotely new, but when everything sounds as big and evil as it does here, that criticism seems churlish.

What we have here is Oxford's masterpiece of clanging discord, staccato dynamism and outright Jesus Lizard filth. There's just enough sheen on the guitars and bass to make them sneer while retaining the economy they need to work properly, and everything is pieced together with a precision and focus not often seen on display in such outright thug rock.

At their most straightforward, the record's



hissing polemic brings up the acid snap of early McLusky, though lighter moments like the supreme jolt of 'Heaven' even sound like Oxford's pop heroes The Young Knives if they'd chosen to pursue the Dark Side instead of the Mercury Prize. Elsewhere, as on the almost ten-minute 'Leave The Light On, Mildred', they're closer to squeezing the muscle of Unsane into Unwound's colossal 'The Light At The End Of The Tunnel Is A Train'. If you like your music nasty, The Cellar Family have assembled the essential soundtrack to your next bad day.

Stuart Fowkes

VON BRAUN

`Cat Dog EP'

(Own label)

A swift follow-up to their excellent 'Folk Devil' EP, and recorded during the same sessions, 'Cat Dog' finds Von Braun continuing to impress, with a spindly, tightly-wound sort of ghost-grunge that tempers the explosive guitar maelstroms in favour of a more pensive mood throughout, the rage when it does come, channelled through the singer's hysterical vocal performances.

Such storms are rare though; mostly Von Braun hold themselves in with the studied concentration of middle-aged men in Speedos trying to impress the ladies poolside. Opener 'Black Saxon' is a case in point. Hints of Pixies and Nirvana abound but it's all a tease. The floodgates never open; cliché is avoided and an almost taut tension prevails.

'Melanoma Head' reminds us more of early Radiohead – spitefully glum, wandering in tight circles, contemplating its abhorrence of its fellow man, before lashing out with skinny elbows and bony fists. Von Braun have to avoid making listeners wait too long for these moments though and the best of the six songs here is title track 'Cat Dog', which retains the more agitated mood of their previous EP, an almost hymnal piece with a turbulently epic vocal and guitar lead, but for the most part Von Braun's handling of tension and release is patient and brooding and all the more compelling for that.

Dale Kattack

THE EMPTY VESSELS

`Waiting To Exhale'

(Stay In Touch)

The Empty Vessels' last offering was a monstrous rolling thundercloud of psychedelic blues that married Hendrix with Blue Cheer, all fronted by the towering vocal talents of Matt Greenham. It earned them a Demo of the Month and place on the 2010 Oxford Punt and they've been a fixture on local rock bills ever since.

This new release finds the band more considered, losing some of that wild edge in favour of more finely-tuned musicianship, but maybe they've lost a bit of that old spark along the way. EP opener 'Once A King' repays repeated listening and sounds oddly like Pearl Jam paying tribute to Roxy Music; it's almost jazzy at times and more at home in a lounge bar than a down-at-heel rock dive, while 'Consolers Of The Lonely Night' kicks in with some sky-searching riffage and tumbling drumming but never really lets its hair down fully, hard and steady instead of untamed. 'Aint Got The Time' too tends to tip-toe around you rather than stomp on your sensibilities, while bonus track 'Here Come The Empty Vessels' might well be – whisper it – a reincarnated Reef. All's not lost, though. 'Stand In Line' ups the ante several notches, a return to epic proportions and with hefty hints of Queens Of The Stone Age in its hook-laden chorus. It's what they do best. Sometimes band maybe need to remember where their strengths lie, forget about trying anything too clever and just, well, rocking like fuck.

Ian Chesterton

MR FOGG

`Eleven'

(Kicking Ink)

After the acclaim afforded his 2010 debut album, 'Moving Parts', Mr Fogg has kept a relatively low profile in recent times, emerging only for the occasionally gig, but 2012 has found him stepping up a couple of gears – a full UK tour followed in May by an extensive European tour and the release of this, his second full-length album.

While he exists predominantly in the electronic music world, it's really Mr Fogg's voice that is the heart and soul of 'Eleven'.

Opening the album with a tattoo of bolshy, distorted electronic drums, 'Make A Fuss' carries a sizeable punch, horns and accordion adding a more organic edge to the electronics, but you're immediately drawn to his voice, maintaining a delicate sense of detachment from the music.

And thus he continues through ten tracks that rarely edge above a gentle, almost somnambulating pace with Fogg's plaintive, almost keening voice forever at odds with the clinical mechanics around him. 'Headlock' is a hypnotic mantra, all synthetic wows and flutters, a clockwork toy in a factory playground, while 'Tightrope' feels like a robotic heartbeat as synths hum with idle precision around the rhythm.

Sometimes you feel it's all a bit too sleepy-headed, perfect soundtrack material for nature doc footage of flowers slowly blossoming, but then you find yourself immersed in an inescapably pretty melody like 'Black Eyes', while he can, very occasionally, up the pace, as on 'Plant No Seeds', with its light dusting of dubstep.

Best of the lot, though, is 'Sprint', which finds Mr Fogg at his most contemplative and emotive, closer to Elbow than to anything from the electro-pop oeuvre. Which kind of sums 'Eleven' up: it's intricately constructed and clinically clean with its silicon surfaces, but what really matters is the living, breathing humanity at its core.

Dale Kattack



KOMRAD

‘March Of The Robot Men’

(Own label)

The tricky, labyrinthine world of metal and hardcore’s micro-genre offshoots is a perilous, ever-changing place; stick around long enough in the same place and you’ll find yourself sitting in a whole new pigeonhole, while all around you others strive to escape yesterday’s favoured nesting place.

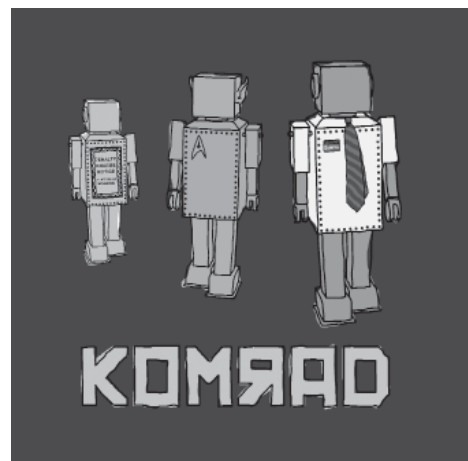
Quite where Komrad fit in with the scheme of all things heavy is wide open to debate as this, their full debut album, reveals by increments. Along the way they’ll swerve into prog before lurching into something that might once have been grunge, pausing briefly before hurtling further into post-punk industrial noise and back out again into some hybrid of everything and something else besides. They’re restless and seemingly hellbent on keeping themselves and the listener on their toes. Sometimes such an approach works, at others you wish they’d stop trying to be so damn clever and just kick off big time.

Album opener ‘Parking Restrictions’ steers in at an almost stately pace, Black Flag slowed down and mixing it with King Crimson, guitarist Jimmy Hetherington’s elaborate fretplay cloaking the old-school hardcore violence inherent in James Greene’s lyrics (“Find me a place, or I’ll smash

your face”). ‘Blowing Up A Rubber Doll Does Not Make You A Martyr’, by contrast, is frenetic and staccato, James increasingly bullish as the band up the ante, switching to Dillinger attack mode, the friction between vocals and guitar lead adding an interesting frisson to proceedings.

It’s in the middle section of the album that Komrad show glimpses of the limitations ironically brought on by trying perhaps too hard not to become formulaic – ‘Here Come The Robot Men’ comes in all hammer and tongs before shifting position frequently, like a fidgety child (albeit a hulking great brute of a fidgety child), the vocals verging on overwrought, at least until the almost Spinal Tap-like breakdown. And it’s between these disparate bases they keep switching over the next couple of tracks until you feel you’re running an abstract obstacle course while a sadistic drill sergeant barks conflicting orders at you.

Thankfully Komrad make the change before too much damage is done, slipping down a gear for ‘Staring Through Leonard Nmoj’s Eyes’, with its almost Killing Joke-like guitar intro, a wholly darker piece with James coming on like a dooier, more emotionally turbulent Eddie



Vedder, everything chugging sullenly before dipping into an almost Pink Floyd-like reverie that defies expectations by *not* exploding back into life, preferring a resigned submission to the void.

It all ends with the serrated but considered ‘Cowley Necktie’, the band again intent on switching tempos and scenery whenever the mood takes them. It’s their strength and their weakness all at once: their intricacy and inventiveness is beyond question, but sometimes we wish they’d give freer rein to the all-out ferocity they’re more than capable of.

Dale Kattack

MOIETY

‘The Waves’

(Own label)

Though Moiety remain a relatively unknown name on the Oxford scene, their members have comprised such influential Oxford bands as Here Comes Everybody and local legends The Anyways. Though they’ve been playing together since 2007, ‘The Waves’ is Moiety’s debut release.

In the letter that accompanies this album, frontman Pete Lock writes of the difficulty of categorising his band’s sound into a specific genre box, and indeed, slapping ‘indie folk’ on them feels rather inadequate a label. Certainly there are elements of traditional folk – pleasant, if at times rather uninteresting acoustic guitar provides the backbone of the album; intricate flute sections grace the hauntingly melodic ‘Never Believe’, while a harmonica weaves its way in and out of ‘City Fathers’. However, they appear to take influence from myriad genres – unsurprisingly given their collective amount of experience – and as a result, country-gothic is equally as accurate a description.

Lock’s vocals intertwine neatly with Deborah Glass-Woodin’s (Moiety’s other vocalist) ensuring that harmonies are a focal point of many of their songs, notably on ‘Arc Weld’; these juxtapose nicely with the Afrobeat-influenced rhythm section. ‘Fractions’ uses the vocal melody from Dean Martin’s ‘Sway’ to great effect, and when an accordion enters later in the song, the extent of their influences becomes even more evident.

Despite their vehement refusal to be categorised, Moiety aren’t attempting anything groundbreaking; their motivations fit firmly into having fun “making music with friends”, which is as admirable a sentiment as any, and something that they’ve evidently achieved with ‘The Waves’.

Caroline Corke

THE DREAMING SPIRES

‘Brothers In Brooklyn’

(Clubhouse)

After over a decade and a half playing in bands together, getting signed and tasting some commercial success, while running the pioneering Truck Festival, brothers Robin and Joe Bennett maybe find themselves at a strange crossroads. Goldrush has been and gone and the pair have been forced to relinquish control of the festival after last year’s financial tribulations. What’s left, though, is the brothers’ enduring love for Americana, and more than ever before you sense it’s where their hearts lie and wish to remain. Within the first minute of album opener ‘Singing Sin City’ they’ve lyrically referenced The Byrds and Teenage Fanclub. Two songs later they name check The Mamas & Papas, while the album’s title track mentions ‘The Last Waltz’, a reference to The Band’s legendary 1976 concert.

You suspect Robin and Joe, who are to all intents and purposes The Dreaming Spires – joined for this album by a cast of guests that includes local luminaries Loz Colbert and Sam Williams as well as Original Rabbit Foot Spasm band brass players Bunny and Westy – imagine themselves happily ensconced in Laurel Canyon at some timeless moment, life and music set never to change too much. Such desire infuses every track here, from the effusively rustic ‘Everything All The Time’, through the Dylan-gone-electric buzz of ‘Look At The Stars’ to the stripped-down, plaintive lament of ‘Woman That You Are’.

Album high points are the rocking ‘Just Can’t Keep This Feeling In’, the epic dreampop surge of ‘Strength Of Strings’, which rises over six minutes to an almost orchestral plateau, and in particular

‘Laughing & Dancing’, a sweet, intimate duet between Robin and guest vocalist Cat Martino that’s almost hymnal in its solemnity, showcasing both singers’ wonderfully pure voices as they wrap themselves around each other.

Less appealing is ‘Cathie (Carry On)’, which we think might be an attempt to emulate Springsteen’s way with a blue collar love story but just sounds all wrong in these hands, while ‘Brothers In Brooklyn’ itself just about manages to swagger along, hints even of Vampire Weekend in some cursory funkiness, but it’s really not what The Dreaming Spires do best.

What they do do best – and always have – is cast a romantic eye over the myth of 60s and 70s American country rock and folk music and transcribe the maize fields of south Oxfordshire to the Californian valleys and Catskill mountains, the duo completely immersed in that other world so the music they make is more than mere tribute. Perhaps that crossroads Robin and Joe Bennett find themselves at isn’t part of a further journey, simply a final resting place. Somewhere to call home.

Sue Foreman



G U I D E

SUNDAY 1st

CORNBURY FESTIVAL: Great Tew – Third and final day of the festival, with Jools Holland's Rhythm & Blues Orchestra rounding things up in big band style, joined for the occasion by Marc Almond and Ruby Turner. Also playing are Will Young, Seasick Steve, Katzenjammer, Nerina Pallot, Staxs and Nine Below Zero – *see June's Nightshift for full festival preview*

MONDAY 2nd

JIM SUHLER & THE MONKEY BEAT: The Jericho Tavern – The Famous Monday Blues relocates to the Jericho Tavern, tonight hosting Texan guitarist Jim Suhler, a veteran of the American blues scene and a member of George Thorogood's Destroyers since the 90s. He's also worked with Johnny Winter and Buddy Guy, while Joe Bonamassa and Buddy Whittington contributed to his recent albums, mixing elements of zydeco and classic rock'n'roll into his swampy

Thursday 5th

INTRODUCING with WE ARE AUGUSTINES: O2 Academy

The O2's monthly team-up with BBC Oxford Introducing takes a break from its traditional Saturday slot in order to bring Brooklyn's brilliant We Are Augustines to town. The trio, who have lately been on tour with Band Of Skulls in the US and played with Kaiser Chiefs, as well as appearing at Coachella earlier this year, released their startling debut album, 'Rise Ye Sunken Ships' in the UK earlier this year, a raw, emotionally wracked affair based on singer Billy McCarthy's tragic family history which saw first his mother, then his brother die from schizophrenia and drug abuse. The ghosts of both haunt every corner of the album, which, soundwise, channels Bruce Springsteen at his most emotive, through the epic, orchestral pop of Arcade Fire and The Gaslight Anthem. The result is quite brilliant and manages to conjure something uplifting out of highly personal grief. A stunning band. And since tonight is an Introducing show, there's a great local supporting cast, including epic indie rockers and recent Punt stars Deer Chicago, hi-life tinged indie-funksters Yellow Fever and eclectic newcomers Artclasssink.

JULY

blues mix. Interesting trivia: Suhler was married by The Rev Willy G – ZZ Top's Billy Gibbons, who became ordained specifically to conduct the ceremony.

TUESDAY 3rd

JAZZ CLUB: The Bullingdon – Free live jazz every Tuesday night at the Bully, tonight featuring club regulars The New Jazz Collective.

FUNK FEVER: The Cellar – New club night hosted by local funksters The Funk Jugglers, who also play live alongside Yellow Fever and Adogg and Bagul. Plus DJs playing indie, funk, house, hip hop and drum&bass.

MECHANIC ORGANIC: The Old Fire Station – Oxford Improvisers present a new piece composed by Dan Goren, also featuring John Grieve's music machine and a set by saxophonist and electronics wizard Jon Seagroatt from Red Square.

SPARKY'S FLYING CIRCUS: James Street Tavern – Weekly open mic session.

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Port Mahon

WEDNESDAY 4th

MOSHKA: The Wheatsheaf – Local bands showcase; acts to be confirmed.

ASTEROX: The Bullingdon – It's All About The Music local bands night.

JAWLESS & FRIENDS: The Cellar – Drum&bass, hip hop and funk club night, tonight with Chinchiller and Flawless, plus a competition for local D&B DJs

THURSDAY 5th

UPSTAIRS with WE ARE AUGUSTINES + DEER CHICAGO + HIGHWAY ALASKA + YELLOW FEVER + ARTCLASSSINK: O2 Academy – Epic soul-bearing rock from Brooklyn's We Are Augustines at tonight's Introducing showcase show – *see main preview*
CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre – Oxford's oldest and still best open-mic club night, showcasing local singers, musicians, poets, storytellers and performance artists every week.

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

FRIDAY 6th

SOULFLY: O2 Academy – Max Cavallera returns to town for more sweet-natured fluff-pop fannydangle – *see main preview*

KLUB KAKOFANNEY with THE CELLAR FAMILY + CREEPY UNCLE + RIGHT HOOK: The Wheatsheaf – More eclectic goings on at the long-running live music club night, tonight with a headline set from vicious hardcore crew The Cellar Family, recently declared "the most exciting band in town" by Nightshift after their set at the Punt.

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

SKYLARKIN SOUNDSYSTEM: The Cellar – Reggae, ska and dancehall from Count Skylarkin and Sensible Dancehall, plus a live set from Birmingham's fifteen-strong Alternative Dubstep Orchestra collective, bringing latter-day low-end bangers to life with horns, strings, percussion, turntablism and double bass.

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

MIDDLENAMEKILL: The Swan, Wantage

SATURDAY 7th

LET'S TALK DAGGERS + DARKSHAFT + LU BU: The Wheatsheaf – Melodic hardcore punk from Eastbourne's Let's Talk Daggers, out on tour.

THE DRIFTERS: The New Theatre – Doo-wop, r'n'b and soul from the legendary vocal group, who have employed some 65 different members in their near-70 year history.

TRANSFORMATION + TRASHY + ROOM 101: O2 Academy – Weekly three-clubs-in-one extravaganza with classic and contemporary indie at Transformation, kitsch pop, glam and 80s at Trashy and metal and alt.rock at Room 101.

THE MIGHTY REDOX + CREEPY UNCLE + BEARD OF DESTINY: James Street Tavern – Swampy blues-rocking and funky psychedelia from local stalwarts Mighty Redox and chums.

BIG SOCIETY + SUPERLOOSE + RECKLESS SLEEPERS + THE SCOTT GORDON BAND: The Hollybush, Osney – Free fundraising gig for Wittstock Festival, featuring political folk-punksters Big Society and laidback country-folksters Superloose.

EXTRA CURRICULAR: The Cellar – Weekly dose of electronic and bass-heavy dance.

BATTSTOCK: Batt School, Witney (1pm) – a full day of live music with sets from Navacross, The Lights, The Scholars, Sefton, Jess Hall and Phousa.

OLD SKOOL HOUSE & DRUM&BASS NIGHT: The Bullingdon

ELECTRICHEAD: The Swan, Wantage – Rock covers.

SUNDAY 8th

METRIC: O2 Academy – Toronto's Metric return to town to plug new album 'Synthetica', led by Emily Haines, a beautiful, intense and charismatic fizzing dynamo of enthusiasm, who can make even the most strident political clarion call sound seductive, a woman seemingly born to perform stadium-sized shows rather than the clubs Metric forever tour. They've supported The Rolling Stones in the past and tonight's show comes two nights after they play Wireless Festival in Hyde Park. 'Monster Hospital' was a deservedly huge hit, while subsequently 'Fantasies' and glammy new album 'Synthetica' have continued the formula of wholesome cheerleader pep and zeal, with rough edges inspired by Sonic Youth and riot grrl and shinier electro parts seemingly



influenced by Goldfrapp.

MONDAY 9th

CHANTEL MCGREGOR: The Bullingdon – Bradford's virtuoso blues guitarist launches the Bully's new Haven Blues Club – *see main preview*
THE BAYOU BROTHERS + LAZY LESTER JOHNSON: The Jericho Tavern – Foot-stomping Louisiana-style Cajun, zydeco and blues gumbo from San Diego's Bayou Brothers at tonight's Famous Monday Blues.
CAHALEN MORRISON & ELI WEST: The Three Horseshoes, Towersey – Old-time country folk from the Seattle duo.

TUESDAY 10th

JAZZ CLUB: The Bullingdon – Live jazz from Alvin Roy & Reeds Unlimited.
SPARKY'S FLYING CIRCUS: James Street Tavern
INTRUSION: The Cellar – Goth, industrial, darkwave and ebm club night.
OPEN MIC SESSION: The Port Mahon

Friday 6th

SOULFLY: O2 Academy

There can't be many people would argue that Max Cavalera isn't a modern-day metal legend, mainly due to his involvement with Brazilian death-thrash monsters Sepultura, but even the less inspired moments of certain subsequent Soulfly outings – notably 'III' – can't dim his star rating too much. And anyway, with the release of 2008's 'Conquer', and what we've heard of new album 'Enslaved', including the brutal 'World Scum' – the man, and the band, are very much on form, sounding as heavy and focussed as ever. The birth of Soulfly was a turbulent one. It followed Cavalera's acrimonious departure from Sepultura and the death of his stepson, at which point Max developed a more spiritual outlook and lyricism. This doesn't detract too much from his trademark guttural rasp and frenzied showmanship though and he remains a born rock and roll showman. For the first few Soulfly albums he maintained a revolving door policy to musicians that has seen members of bands like Machine Head, Fear Factory, Deftones, Dubwar, Slipknot and even Limp Bizkit, as well as Sean Lennon join Cavalera. More recently a core, including excellent young metal guitarist Marc Rizzo, has solidified and brought greater innovation and stability. Soulfly's stock in trade remains full-throttle metal, but elements of Brazilian tribal music as well as everything from reggae to Siberian folk music play a part. Max has been much imitated but rarely bettered and tonight should be a riot.



WEDNESDAY 11th

DENNY ILETT Snr: The Bullingdon – Live jazz from the local veteran.
FREE RANGE: The Cellar – Drum&bass, hip hop and dubstep from the club residents.
I SEE HAWKS: The Three Horseshoes, Towersey – Soulful roots music from the California outfit.

THURSDAY 12th

ED SCHLONG + MOTHER CORONA + REFUGEES OF CULTURE: The Cellar – Progressive, sometimes hymnal tech-metal from New Zealand-via-Berlin outfit Ed Schlong at tonight's Buried In Smoke show. Local support from riffastic groove-metallers Mother Corona, in the lineage of Black Sabbath and Electric Wizard.
NUCLEAR SKYLINE + BEAVER FUEL + MASIRO: The Bullingdon – Local rock at tonight's It's All About The Music promotion.
REIGN UPONUS + KIELAND RIDGE + GURP: The Bell, Bicester – Jambox rock and metal night with superheavyweights Reign UponUs mixing classic thrash with death-metal and industrial-duty punk.
OLIVER COATES + TOM MUDDLE + MIDNIGHT BLINK + ELLIE HANGER: The Wheatsheaf, Banbury – Jambox acoustic and open mic session.
CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre
OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon
BLUES JAM: The Jack Russell, Marston

FRIDAY 13th

EVE SELIS: The Bullingdon – Gutsy, fiery country and blues from San Diego's much-loved musical daughter Eve Selis, a powerful singer in the tradition of Bonnie Raitt, Emmylou Harris and Shawn Colvin for both her emotionally taught delivery and her ability to move between styles, from roadhouse blues and country twang to r'n'b and gospel. She's over in the UK to plug her latest album, the crowd-funded 'Family Tree', which features Albert Lee on guitar, while live she mixes her own songs with gutsy covers of acts as diverse as Leonard Cohen and Gram Parsons.
FUTURES + DONBROCO + NATIVES: O2 Academy – Rearranged from April, Buckinghamshire's Mercury-signed rockers return to town, mixing up lightweight punk-pop with sunshiney indie rock on debut album 'The Holiday'. Support from Bedford's soulless, polished power-rockers Donbroco.
THE OLD GRINDING YOUNG + TOLIESEL: The Wheatsheaf – Turbulently emotive indie-folk from TOG at tonight's Musicinxford show, plus epic indie rockers ToLiesel.
BOSSAPHONIK: The Cellar – Jazz dance, afrobeat, dancefloor Latin and Balkan beats at the monthly club night, tonight featuring a live set from Molotov Jukebox, self-styled gyp-step six-piece, taking influences from Balkan gypsy dance, ska, samba, swing and dubstep.
YELLOW FEVER: The Swan, Wantage – Funked-up indie-dance and hi-life-tinged pop from the local hopefuls.
FUNKY FRIDAY: The Bullingdon

SATURDAY 14th

ALAJANDRO ESCOVEDO: The Bullingdon – Intimate UK show for the cult Texan songsmith and chum of Springsteen – *see main preview*
PERFUME GENIUS: The Jericho Tavern –



Monday 9th

CHANTEL MCGREGOR: The Bullingdon

With The Famous Monday Blues decamped to the Jericho, the Bully launches its new blues night in style with the return to town of Bradford's fast-rising guitar virtuoso Chantel McGregor. Having played from the age of six, she went to Leeds College Of Music, becoming the first student to graduate from the world-renowned establishment with a 100% pass mark and 18 distinctions. Since then she's honed her skills, playing alongside Joe Bonnamassa as well as joining Jeff Beck, Keith Richards and Albert Lee for a 60th anniversary celebration of the Fender Telecaster. She won Best Newcomer at the 2011 British Blues Awards and was nominated for Best Female Singer at the 2012 awards. Musically she's inspired by everyone from Hendrix to Robin Trower and Walter Trout, while vocally she's drawn comparisons to both Stevie Nicks and Bonnie Raitt. Steeped in the blues tradition she even made it on to Universal's 'Hundred Years Of The Blues' compendium as well as the 'Blues Fury' showcase of the current swell of young British blues acts on the rise. Her self-released 'Like No Other' debut album has drawn universal praise from the blues press and right now it looks like the world is very much her oyster.

Frail, fractured chamber pop and piano ballads in the vein of Sufjan Stevens and Alex Chilton from Seattle's Mike Hadreas, over in the UK to plug his second album, 'Put Your Back N2 It', released on Matador Records, fresh from supporting Beirut on tour.

DEAD RAT ORCHESTRA: Modern Art Oxford – Atmospheric, semi-improvised orchestral folk music, recalling the timeless music of the Hebrides from the three-piece ensemble, who scored the BBC's recent *The Guga Hunters Of Ness* documentary, capturing much of the isolation and bleakness of those islands.
DESERT STORM + SONS OF MERRICK + STEAK + BEARD OF ZEUS + EMPTY VESSELS: The Wheatsheaf – Buried In Smoke



Friday 13th

CHARLOTTE CHURCH:

The Jericho Tavern

That's right, Charlotte Church. At the Jericho Tavern. We thought someone was having a laugh at our expense when the press release came in, but seems our chums at DHP have pulled of a bit of an A-List celeb coupe here. Fresh from giving evidence at the Leveson Inquiry, the former child star, who sold over 10 million albums and released a Best Of before her 16th birthday, a singer more used to performing at Cardiff Arms Park and The Royal Albert Hall, and who has sung for the Queen, the Pope and Bill Clinton, comes to the 160-capacity Tavern in front of a snug, select few. It's all part of her musical re-invention, though. Having left arias, sacred songs and Christmas carols behind back in the mid-Noughties, Church has firmly thrown her hat into the pop ring, with variable success. 'Tissues & Issues' did okay in the UK but failed to continue her global success, with 2010's 'Back To Scratch' moving further into confessional, autobiographical territory. Given her childhood success, and the attendant tabloid frenzy about her weight / marriage / cigarette smoking / occasional off-the-cuff proclamations on other celebs, it's understandable she might want to get a few things off her chest. Promotional blurb for tonight's show promises it will showcase Church's "bold and unique new sound, creating vast musical landscapes with big drums, big guitars, and a voice that sold over 10 million records." Whatever, it's gonna be a unique event. Next month: Aled Jones rocks the Port Mahon.

metal night with local stoner-metallars Desert Storm; London's groove-metallars Sons Of Merrick; stoner-rockers Steak, from London, plus local stoner-metal ogres Beard Of Zeuss and epic proto-metal heavyweights Empty Vessels, rocking it up big time in the spirit of Led Zep and Blue Cheer.

TRANSFORMATION + TRASHY + ROOM 101: O2 Academy

EXTRA CURRICULAR: The Cellar

THE PETE FRYER BAND: The Strickland Arms, Ducklington – Blues rocking.

WAM: The Swan, Wantage – Ska-punk covers.

SUNDAY 15th

DAWES: The Bullingdon – Authentically rustic Laurel Canyon-style country and folk-rocking in the style of Crosby, Stills & Nash and Neil Young from Los Angeles quartet Dawes, over in the UK to promote their second album, 'Nothing Is Wrong'.

GREEN CHILDREN OF THE WOLF PIT +

MISSING NOTES + MAVE & IAN + GLENDA HUIH: The Wheatsheaf – An afternoon of free acoustic music hosted by Klub Kakofanny's Phil & Sue, including classic olde world folk music from Green Children of the Wolf Pit.

MONDAY 16th

UNEVEN STRUCTURE + NO CONSEQUENCE + MUTAGENOCIDE + AETHARA: The Wheatsheaf – Double metal headline tour with France's Uneven Structure alongside atmospheric UK tech-metallars No Consequence, local support courtesy of Witney's technically-minded classic thrash crew Mutagenocide and death metallars Aethara.
THE LARRY MILLER BAND: The Jericho Tavern – Rocking blues from the UK guitarist, inspired by the likes of Stevie Ray Vaughan and Gary Moore.

TUESDAY 17th

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

WEDNESDAY 18th

IN ZANADU + PIONEER GIGIANT: The Bullingdon – It's All About The Music local bands showcase, with Banbury's soulful posters In Zanada.

THURSDAY 19th

DEAD GIRL PARK + THE WRECK SCENE: The Bullingdon – It's All About The Music night with grungy local faves Harry Angel reincarnated as Dead Girl Park, alongside Banbury's punk, ska and country outfit The Wreck Scene.
MOTHER CORONA + ZERO HOUR + BEAVER FUEL: The Bell, Bicester – Jambox rock night with groove-metallars Mother Corona and potty-mouthed indie-punks Beaver Fuel.
CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre
OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon
BLUES JAM: The Jack Russell, Marston

FRIDAY 20th

TRUCK FESTIVAL: Hill Farm, Steventon – It's zipping up its boots, going back to its roots. Truck returns under the stewardship of Derbyshire's Y Not Festival, with two days of national and local bands –and the return of the Barn! – *see main preview*
THE BIG TEN INCH with THE ORIGINAL RABBIT FOOT SPASM BAND: The Cellar – Count Skylark's monthly celebration of classic rockabilly, jump blues and swing, tonight featuring a live set from New Orleans-style hot jazz combo TORFSB.
REEDS + SHATTERED DREAMS + GREEN CHILDREN OF THE WOLF PIT: The Wheatsheaf – Moshka club night with local grungy punk-pop outfit Shattered Dreams returning to action, plus trad folkies Green Children Of The Wolfpit.
TRUCKER DIABLO + THE REAPER + CRYISIS + MUTAGENOCIDE: Fat Lil's, Witney – Northern Ireland's old school heavy rockers make it over to Witney ahead of a support slot with Foo Fighters in August. They've also played Download and supported Black Stone Cherry on tour. Witney's young teenage metallars The Reaper support, along with thrash merchants

Crysis and tech-metallars Mutagenocide.

FUNKY FRIDAY: The Bullingdon

THE RACKET: The Swan, Wantage

SATURDAY 21st

TRUCK FESTIVAL: Hill Farm, Steventon – More great stuff. In a field. Including Alcopop! and BSM Record's Barn takeover – *see main preview*

THE LONG INSIDERS: Head Of The River – Free riverside gig from the local rock'n'roll, garage rock and surf stars.

TRANSFORMATION + TRASHY + ROOM 101: O2 Academy

CAKEHOLE PRESLEY + SWINDLESTOCK: The Jericho Tavern – Rocking 60s-style blues from Cakehole Presley, alongside local Americana outfit Swindlestock.

MAN MAKE FIRE: The Swan, Wantage – Rock covers.

1980S BACK TO SCHOOL: The Bullingdon – Retro club night.

WHAT YOU CALL IT, GARAGE?: The Cellar – First birthday party from the UK garage, 2-step, grime and bassline club night, with Charris &

Saturday 14th

ALEJANDRO ESCOVEDO: The Bullingdon

The world of music is awash with "cult artists", the majority of whom are unlikely to, or simply undeserving of, selling more than a few hundred records in their time. But then there are the likes of San Antonio's Alejandro Escovedo, who, you feel, has forever been one big breakthrough single away from becoming a major-league rock star. If nothing else, judge his reputation by those who contributed to a benefit album for him when, in 2003, he nearly died from Hepatitis-C: Steve Earl, Son Volt, Lucinda Williams, John Cale, Ian Hunter and The Jayhawks. Or the fact that Bruce Springsteen was only too keen to join Escovedo onstage for a few numbers at the Austin Music Awards back in March this year. Like sometime co-writer Chuck Prophet, Escovedo, son of Mexican immigrants, started off playing in punk bands before moving into rootsier folk-rock and alt.country territory, starting with 1992's solo debut, 'Gravity', through to his recent eleventh studio album, 'Big Station'. He was named Artist Of The 90s' by alt.country bible No Depression and along the way has also worked with everyone from Tony Visconti to Whiskeytown without ever breaking through into the mainstream. It's unlikely that will ever happen now but as he passes his 60th birthday, Escovedo simply keeps on doing what he does best, rocking every bar that will host him, and living on the enduring love of that select group who recognise his talents.



B-III, DJ Risky, Naughty Nath, DJ Ramsay and hosted by MC Macular.

SUNDAY 22nd

MONDAY 23rd

MARCUS BONFANTI: The Jericho Tavern – Rearranged from June, the rising star of the UK blues scene returns to town, having been nominated for two British Blues Awards and drawing praise for his rich, earthy voice and versatile guitar playing that ranges from Jimmy Page-inspired electric riffery to more considered acoustic folk and country picking.

TUESDAY 24th

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

SPARKY'S FLYING CIRCUS: James Street Tavern

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Port Mahon

WEDNESDAY 25th

MOSHKA: The Wheatsheaf – Local bands showcase; acts to be confirmed.

FREE RANGE: The Cellar

THURSDAY 26th

MOOGIEMAN + LEWIS NEWCOMBE JONES: The Bullingdon – It's All About The Music acoustic night, including recent Nightshift Demo Of The Month winner Lewis Newcombe Jones with his starry-eyed rustic folk in the vein of Nick Drake, Bert Jansch and Ralph McTell.

GRACES COLLIDE + SWITCH ZERO HOUR + DELIVERENCE: The Bell, Bicester – Jambox rock night.

CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon

BLUES JAM: The Jack Russell, Marston

FRIDAY 27th

THE CHEESEGRATERS: The Wheatsheaf – The drunken funksters return to action after a two-year hiatus, armed with a new line-up and a fresh selection of tunes to butcher.

SWINDLESTOCK + AGS CONNOLLY: The Bullingdon – Good-time Americana from Swindlestock, plus campfire country vibes from Ags Connolly in support.

HQ: The Cellar – Cutting edge drum&bass.

FUNKY FRIDAY: The Bullingdon

SATURDAY 28th

BRUTAL PUNISHMENT FEST: The Bullingdon (2pm) – A full day and night of intense metal, with the emphasis on extreme death-metal and grindcore. Gore-obsessed, serial-killer-worshipping grindcore crew Basement Torture Killings headline and are joined by Newcastle's Today The Sun Dies; old-school thrashers Necrotize; Bristol's unrelenting grindcore types Merciless precision, plus a local cast that includes Zaos, Aethara, A Trust Unclean and Black Skies Burn. While this weekend's re-arranged Charlbury Riverside festival offers the chance of some family-friendly musical fun in the picturesque outdoors, Brutal Punishment does exactly what it says on the tin and creates its own corner of hell in a room where the sun don't dare show its face. Enjoy.

CHARLBURY RIVERSIDE FESTIVAL: Charlbury – The annual free festival moves back

a month after the forced cancellation of its original June date, because of flooding fears. The original line-up remains pretty much intact, with today's proceedings headed by the ever-entertaining Smilex, with their high-octane blend of punk, glam and hard rocking. They're joined by Black Hats, Mick Quinn's DB Band, Deer Chicago, Secret Rivals, Tamara & The Martyrs, Undersmile, Hot Hooves, Von Braun and Listing Ships.

D-FEST: The Red Lion, Drayton – The annual post-Truck mini-festival, hosted by Drayton's own Dead Jerichos. This year's event, across two stages in the Red Lion, features alt.country rockers The Dreaming Spires; effusive electro-popsters Alphabet Backwards; twisted hardcore punkers The Cellar Family; psychedelic garage rockers The Graceful Slicks; punky power-pop outfit Hot Hooves and plenty more.

SKELETOR presents FEI COMODO + WAYS ACROSS + DESERT STORM + EYES OF EVE + MOTHER CORONA: O2 Academy – Essex's metalcore cult heroes Fei Comodo bow out with a final farewell tour after a decade of high octane shows and a series of self-released EPs. Support for tonight's Skeletor and Room 101 team-up include Paramore-style rockers Ways Across; groove-heavy stoner-metallers Desert Storm; epic thrash merchants Eyes Of Eve and monstrous riffmongers Mother Corona.

GAPPY TOOTH INDUSTRIES with SONIC RISING + TURNPIKE GLOW + BETHANY WEIMERS: The Wheatsheaf – Characteristically mixed bill from the long-running GTI club night, tonight featuring Loop and Spacemen 3-inspired psych-rockers Sonic Rising, plus London's Pavement and Phoenix-influenced indie rockers Turnpike Glow and haunting, soulful acoustic songstress Bethany Weimers.

THAMESFEST: The Talbot Inn, Eynsham (3pm) – A full afternoon and evening of live music, including country-folksters Country For Old Men; surf-rockers Vicars Of Twiddly and heavyweight blues-rockers Steamroller, plus sets from Beard Of Detiny, The New Moon, Experimentals and Davey Johnson & Friends.

TRANSFORMATION + TRASHY + ROOM

101: O2 Academy

EXTRA CURRICULAR: The Cellar

VIENNA DITTO: The Port Mahon – EP launch show for the Oxford-Reading-London trio, conjuring a misty trip hop atmosphere with a delicate surf-pop edge.

SUNDAY 29th

CHARLBURY RIVERSIDE FESTIVAL: Charlbury – Alphabet Backwards top today's bill, alongside The Epstein, Brickwork Lizards, The Inflatables, Dirty Royals, Superloose, Count Drachma, Flights of Helios and more.

DEBBY McCLATCHY: The Three Horseshoes, Towersey – Original and old-time songs and banjo music with influences from the songs of Charlie Poole and the California gold rush era from the veteran performer.

MONDAY 30th

KING B + THE SHAPES: The Bullingdon –



Tuesday 31st

SAVAGES / PALMA VIOLETS: The Jericho Tavern

A joint headline tour from two bands formed less than a year ago, but potentially one of those gigs you'll swear you were at this time next year. London's Palma Violets have been soliciting excitable reviews for their warehouse and house party shows, counting Nick Cave, Bernard Butler and Geoff Travis amongst their fans, the latter signing the band to his Rough Trade label, reputedly after hearing one song. So furious has been the hype storm surrounding them one major label flew a scout up to Scotland to see them, only to realise it was the wrong (Parma) Palma Violets. Newly bastardised name aside, this Palma Violets' psychedelic take on classic garage rock follows in the lineage of The Doors, Velvet Underground, Bunnymen and Spiritualized but makes up in some sort of ragged glory what it currently lacks in finesse, and to their credit, they seem to be working hard to avoid all the over-excitement surrounding them. It's fellow Londoners Savages though who might be this year's most exciting new guitar band. The quartet's dark, urgent post-punk, with its gothic undertow, carries shades of Liars and The Slits, while singer Jehnny Beth has the compelling intensity of Ian Curtis. Whether either or both bands go the distance or burn out in a short, sharp blaze of glory, tonight should be a gig to remember.

The Bully's new Haven club night hosts two local acts – long-standing blues-rock, boogie and dance faves King B, plus folk-rock and pop combo The Shapes.

THE CLARE FREE BAND: The Jericho Tavern – Electric blue-rock in the vein of Bonnie Raitt from the local singer and guitarist.
OPEN MIC SESSION: The Swan, Wantage

TUESDAY 31st

SAVAGES + PALMA VIOLETS: The Jericho Tavern – Super-hot double headline tour from two of London's rising indie starlets – *see main preview*

JAZZ CLUB: The Bullingdon – With The New Jazz Collective.

SPARKY'S FLYING CIRCUS: James Street Tavern

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Port Mahon

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Friday 20th - Saturday 21st

TRUCK FESTIVAL

Hill Farm, Steventon

Having previously survived a mad cow disease scare and a devastating flood that wiped out the entire site, Truck looked like it had finally had its chips last year when the organisers went into administration.

But, like Gloria Gaynor, it has survived, and will do battle once again. Popping up to save the day are the organisers of Derbyshire's Y Not Festival, winners of Best Grassroots Festival at last year's UK Festival Awards. Their mission statement has been to take Truck back to its roots.

As such, the festival is back to two days, with a full Friday and Saturday of music giving everyone a chance to rest and recuperate on Sunday.

The ticket price, too, has been reduced, down to £69 this year, making it one of the most affordable of the summer's festivals.

It's the quality of the music on show, though, upon which any festival will be judged, and on this score, there should be few complaints, with a very decent mix of established indie names and local acts mixed up over three stages, including the rejuvenated barn stage.

Heading Friday's bill on the main stage are **MYSTERY JETS**, a band who have a bit of local history, Blaine Harrison having previously lived near Abingdon and Mystery Jets' first ever recordings being a Nightshift Demo Of The Month. The band made their name as part of the Eel Pie Island set, with a quirky, almost proggy take on harmony-heavy guitar pop, although they relocated to Texas to record new album 'Radlands' with a resulting more countrified sound.

Perhaps the biggest surprise – and biggest coupe – on the this year's bill is Anglo-Aussie musical comedian **TIM MINCHIN**, almost certainly the only Olivier Award winner ever to perform at Truck (he won it for his music for Matilda: The Musical). What his show on the main stage will entail isn't entirely certain – he's been on tour with the Heritage Orchestra recently – but a mix of oddball humour, poetry and songs should be the order of the day, with a sharply anti-religious core in evidence.

Elsewhere on the main stage on Friday are new wave folkster **VILLAGERS**; electro-popster Sam Duckworth's **GET CAPE, WEAR CAPE, FLY!** mixing the personal and political with genially effusive style, and of course **FIXERS**, whose performance at last year's Truck will go down in history as one of the great local festival sets – a full-on psychedelic rave, replete with daft fancy dress and cosmic showmanship. They may have had record label problems but live they are close to peerless.

Another band with a strong local connection are **GUILLEMOTS**, who top the bill on the second stage on Friday. Featuring Grieg Stewart, formerly of Suitable Case For Treatment, Fyfe Dangerfield's folk-rockers play it big and epic, which tends to work just right in a festival setting, the soaring harmonies and shimmering guitars of most recent album 'Walk The River'



THE TEMPER TRAP

seeing the band returning to the form that saw their 'Through The Windowpane' shortlisted for the Mercury Prize.

They're joined by **LITTLE COMETS**, Newcastle's guerrilla-gigging "kitchen sink indie" rockers and London's much-touted post-punk funk-rockers **THEME PARK**, while a strong local contingent on the second stage includes Robin and Joe Bennett's **THE DREAMING SPIRES**, which will at least keep the brothers, who started and ran Truck from 1998, involved in the event; grungy indie posters **KILL MURRAY**, emotionally turbulent alt.folksters **THE OLD GRINDING YOUNG** and sweet folk-pop songstress **JESS HALL**, all three acts having performed at this year's Oxford Punt.

Obviously we're chuffed to see the return of the barn stage, despite its characteristic odour, and even more chuffed to see that long-term friends of Truck **THE FUTURE OF THE LEFT** are playing here, the Welsh outfit's twisted, venomous mix of hardcore racket, caustic lyricism and general don't-give-a-shit brilliance always unmissable. Adrenalised psychedelic rock'n'roll monsters **TURBOWOLF** should give them a run for their money, while epic instrumental soundscapists **BRONTIDE** bring a bit of almost classical finesse to proceedings.

The barn's local contingent includes nimble-footed rockers **SPRING OFFENSIVE** and previous Nightshift Demo Of The Monthers **POLEDO**, but it'll be **DEAD JERICHO'S** farewell set that should bring the house down; maybe even literally if their last, riotous, Truck set is anything to go by.

Moving on to Saturday, and a main stage headline set from flowery, post-Coldplay soft-rockers **THE TEMPER TRAP**, who should get some serious lighters-aloft action going when they play 'Sweet Disposition', although if it's serious epic rock action you want then **BRITISH SEA POWER** are the masters of such shows of force, possessed of both an enchanting theatrical edge and an ability to squeeze some serious noise out of their amps when duty calls.

Power and noise aren't words you'd ever use to describe **THE LOW ANTHEM**, a band so delicately proportioned you worry a gentle breeze might carry them aloft, but a band capable of exquisite beauty, as their sublime 'Oh My God, Charlie Darwin' proved. Really, really lovely stuff.

As is folkstress **EMMY THE GREAT**, who,

along with The Low Anthem, sandwiches the mighty electro-noise beast that is **65DAYSOFTSTATIC** on the main stage.

Authentic bluesgrass rumblers **KILL IT KID** and rising local afrobeat-inspired indie rockers **YELLOW FEVER** are among the other main stage acts.

Glasgow's "celtic-emo" crew **FRIGHTENED RABBIT** top the second stage on Saturday, their blend of melancholic folk, bluegrass, indie and even grunge having drawn comparisons to REM, Arcade Fire and The Reindeer Section, while **KING CHARLES'** whimsical psychedelic root-pop is closer to Syd Barrett or Donovan. **TREVOR MOSS AND HANNAH LOU** will doubtless be getting all lovey-dovey over a single microphone, while perennial local Truck faves **THIS TOWN NEEDS GUNS** will bring the necessary all-action element.

Local labels **ALCOPOP!** and **BIG SCARY MONSTERS** are teaming up for a barn stage takeover on the Saturday, bringing with them the cream of their respective rosters, including Birmingham's dynamic fight-pop urchins **JOHNNY FOREIGNER**, Get Up Kids-style punk-pop sweeties **TELLISON**, off-kilter, soul-cleansing post-industrialist progsters **THREE TRAPPED TIGERS** and Brighton's **TALL SHIPS**, whose mix of mathsy rock and indie-funk pitches them somewhere between Foals, Battles and Futureheads.

And of course there's this month's Nightshift cover stars **GUNNING FOR TAMAR**, who add the necessary local quota alongside electro-psychedelic ensemble **FLIGHTS OF HELIOS**, dub and reggae veterans **DUBWISER** and 80s-styled indie rockers **VERY NICE HARRY**.

Of course, despite the change in organisational matters and the return to a more measured scale, much about Truck will remain reassuringly familiar, from the Rotary Club burger stall, to the organic brewery bar and the emphasis on local food and drink. Hopefully Truck can regain its reputation as one of the UK's best small-scale DIY festivals. Whatever the bad taste left in many people's mouths after last year, it remains at the very heart of Oxfordshire's music calendar; long may it keep on trucking.

Visit WWW.TRUCKFESTIVAL.COM for full line-up and ticket details

FRIDAY 24 AUGUST

SATURDAY 25 AUGUST

SUNDAY 26 AUGUST

THE CURE

paramore

BOMBAY BICYCLE CLUB
YOU ME AT SIX
CRYSTAL CASTLES
ANGELS AND AIRWAVES
COHEED AND CAMBRIA
CANCER BATS
DEAF HAVANA

KASABIAN

Florence
+ the Machine

THE VACCINES
ENTER SHIKARI
THE SHINS
OFWGKTA
MYSTERY JETS
BLOOD RED SHOES
LOS CAMPESINOS!

COMPERE/DJ: HUW STEPHENS

NME / 1 STAGE

FOO FIGHTERS

THE BLACK KEYS

KAISER CHIEFS
BULLET FOR MY VALENTINE
ALL TIME LOW
THE GASLIGHT ANTHEM
EAGLES OF DEATH METAL
BAND OF SKULLS
PULLED APART BY HORSES

MACCABEES

FOSTER THE PEOPLE
THE COURTEENERS
GRAHAM COXON • PASSION PIT
THE BLACKOUT • THE HIVES
SPECTOR • FRIENDS
CHIDDY BANG • HERE WE GO MAGIC

AT THE DRIVE-IN

THE CRIBS
MASTODON
BILLY TALENT • MIKE SNOW
SANTIGOLD
DRY THE RIVER • TWIN ATLANTIC
PURE LOVE

Justice

TWO DOOR CINEMA CLUB
THE HORRORS • SBTRKT
MARK LANEGAN BAND
THE JOY FORMIDABLE
TRIBES • DJANGO DJANGO
HOWLER • OF MONSTERS AND MEN

<DANCE
STAGE>
SATURDAY

METRONOMY

KATY B

Azealia BANKS

JAGUAR SKILLS • MODESTEP • FEED ME • GRIMES
THE JAPANESE POPSTARS • CLEMENT MARFO & THE FRONTLINE • JAGGA

DJ SET FROM:
ZINC

FRIDAY **LOCK UP STAGE** SUNDAY

SOCIAL DISTORTION • ANTI-FLAG

EVERY TIME I DIE • BOUNCING SOULS
SAVES THE DAY • TOUCHE AMORE
A WILHELM SCREAM • CEREMONY • RANDOM HAND
STAR FKING HIPSTERS • DEAD TO ME • PETTYBONE**

LESS THAN JAKE

ME FIRST AND THE GIMME GIMMES
GALLOWES • TURBONEGRO • TRASH TALK
GOOD RIDDANCE • THE SKINTS • POLAR BEAR CLUB
THIS IS HELL • THE FLATLINERS • APOLOGIES, I HAVE NONE • CROWNS

Festival
REPUBLIC
STAGE

SLEIGH BELLS

THE SUBWAYS
VERONICA FALLS

2:54 • ALBERTA CROSS • ALT J • BASTILLE • BLOOD OR WHISKY • CITIZENS! • DEAP VALLY • DOG IS DEAD • DON BROCO • DZ DEATHRAYS • FIDLAR • ICEAGE
JAKE BUGG • JEFF THE BROTHERHOOD • KING CHARLES • LA • LUCY ROSE • NIKI AND THE DOVE • O'BROTHER • OBERHOFER • RAMIRES • SAVAGES • S*C*U*M
THE CAST OF CHEERS • THE KNUX • THE MINUTES • THE PALMA VIOLETS • THEME PARK • TOY • WE ARE AUGUSTINES • WE ARE THE IN CROWD • ZULU WINTER

THE ALTERNATIVE STAGE

REGINALD D HUNTER • LEE NELSON'S WELL GOOD PARTY feat THE PETEBOX • **JASON BYRNE • STEPHEN K AMOS • SEANN WALSH**
KID KOALA • SCROOBIOUS PIP • GLENN WOOL • CHRIS RAMSEY • HOLLY WALSH • KATHERINE RYAN • DOC BROWN
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SPRING OFFENSIVE / COUNT DRACHMA / **ALL WE ARE**

St Barnabas Church

The priest at St Barnabas gets birthday cards made from cereal boxes. Not the sort of thing we find out at most gigs, but the parish magazine keeps us diverted in St Barnabas' whilst we wait for Liverpool's All We Are to locate the venue. Ironically for a band who aren't on time, they're painfully "now", laying well brought up Beach Boys vocal lines over quietly malleted toms and light guitar noise in an introverted indie style, like Fleet Foxes having a go at being Sigur Ros, or a grown up version of Fixers sipping carrot juice at a farmers' market, instead of a heady cocktail of LSD and reverb. All We

Are's sound fits a beautiful church; it's not just their sepulchral elegance, but because all these smiles and handclaps make them look like trendy 80s vicars.

Count Drachma, a Stornoway spin off, present their take on traditional Zulu songs. The fiddle licks and excellent cajon rhythms give the set a swinging zydeco air, whilst the vocal lines have the apparently effortless waft of much great folk music. Perhaps the band could do with more bite, and the vocals more authority, but for a recently formed, extra-curricular outfit, it's rather good. In fact, it's *precisely* rather good, and probably not destined to set anyone

afire.

Unlike Spring Offensive, whose music is as heart-wrangling and emotionally wrought as it is possible for pop music to be. Always an excellent band, in the past our criticism has been that they push their climaxes too hard, forcing their songs to one more crescendo. But not any more. Tonight, even in older songs, each sonic pinnacle is entirely earned, each huge chorus blossoming naturally. Part of this is down to the guitar parts, which now seem to owe more to Stars Of The Lid or Mogwai than Youthmovies, slowly burning, then crashing in fizzing waves. The drums, too, have a haunted

clockwork eeriness where once they thumped a bold tattoo. If evidence were needed that this is a band at the height of their powers, check the arrangements, subtle alterations to the songs that use the natural reverb of the church to magnify every facet. A band of vision and hard graft, Spring Offensive look as though they can achieve anything after tonight's celebration of beautifully controlled, twitchy romanticism. There are light boxes everywhere, broadcasting couplets like some Barbara Kruger rip off, but it's the piles of books on the floor that intrigue us. We pick one up, and out falls a newspaper clipping from 1825, which we slip into our pocket. That's Spring Offensive for you: they make big gestures, but it's the tiny surprises that you take away with you.
David Murphy

TENNIS / TRAPS

The Jericho Tavern

Tonight's gig gets off to an unexpected start; unexpected because support band Traps very quickly make it clear that their rock is as loud as it is epic and because the band that they are *supporting*, Tennis, could not be further away from loud and/or epic. In fact I'm not sure their twee surf-pop could even be classified as rock.

Despite playing to a crowd whose ears most likely aren't used to having such an amount of decibels thrown at them, there is no denying that Traps give it their all. Credit has got to be given where credit is due – the bassist does his thing, the drummer drums ferociously, the lead guitarist holds it all together and the frontwoman... well, with a voice as big as that they were always going to be producing loud, epic rock. It's just a real shame that their craft falls on, figuratively, deaf ears.

Given how cute and dainty Tennis' style is, tonight's never going to be an

evening of blood, sweat and tears, but you can't help but feel that it is all a little *too* cute and dainty. Of course the more popular numbers, such as 'Marathon' and 'Origins', are well received, but tonight it appears 'well received' amounts perhaps to the three crowd members at the front bobbing their heads maybe just a little more than they did previously and not a whole lot more. As a result the performance massively lacks any sort of atmosphere. What's worse is that the band seem to be in no hurry to do anything about this; sure, lead guitarist Patrick Riley is initially fairly energetic (or as energetic as one can be whilst playing surf pop) but even he starts to fade towards the latter stages of the set, be it out of boredom or because he realises he's singlehandedly used up the tiny amount of enthusiasm a band as seemingly cool as his are allowed to expend on a night's performance. It's telling that the biggest cheer of the night comes from drummer James Barone accidentally knocking over a bunch of beers upon exiting the stage.

Nick Beaver

TINDERBOX FESTIVAL

Cropredy Old Wharf

Tinderbox describes itself as “a celebration of the wired, the weird and the wonderful,” to which the organisers could add “anything goes, as long as it’s freeform.”

After only getting lost once, I arrive at the designated field, somewhere in northern-most Oxfordshire, in time to catch the last number from three students of composition at Birmingham Conservatoire, **Ostrich Box**. Their combination of folk banjo and ambient laptop electronica make for a sweetly gentle introduction to the day. **Lost Harbours**, a mainly guitar and reeds duo, continue in a similar gentle vein with a set of ambient electro-centric folk which just happens to fit perfectly with the bucolic surroundings.

With a band member in a wrestling mask and others dressed in kaftans, things take a turn for the weirder with the entry of **Bolide**, up from Brighton for their second Tinderbox. Their anarchic approach to music is exemplified by having so many hand percussion instruments you’d run out of fingers and toes attempting to count them. Their set turns out to be one long number, with somewhere in the middle a passage which features the mbira, the thumb piano from Zimbabwe said to have the sound of rain falling on rock, and my first personal highlight of the day

London duo **Temperatures** also return for a second visit to the mini-festival. With their drums again wired to a vintage synth and spiky electric bass guitar, theirs is an engrossing elemental sound akin to Japanese ceremonial drummers meeting rolling thunder, which has me searching the grey cold sky to see if a storm is coming.

It turns out there’s an Italian storm coming in the form of **Sylvia Kastel**’s piercing voice work and electronica and **Ninni Morgia**’s intense guitar. They’re all violence and pain, and not having earplugs I find they’re best experienced well to the rear of the field.

Tinderbox hosts and free form veterans **Red Square** play at such hyperfast speed it’s a marvel that they’re in synch throughout their set; this must be what decades of experience does for you. Today is their first gig with their new drummer, whom Red Square followers inform us is more rock influenced than his predecessor and that this is reflected in the band’s sound.

With the air turning even colder as night approaches, the John Zorn and Tim Berne-influenced **Shatner’s Bassoon**, a young five piece from Leeds, warm the gathered throng with a set that’s as absorbing to watch as to listen to, with the band showing how much they enjoy responding to each other. They play accessible, improvised free-form jazz, if there is such a genre, ranging from handing short fragments back and forth between their instruments to full-on freeform blasts, to echoes of the *Pink Panther* theme and calypso. Easily the best band of the day.

By the end of their set the cold has got too much even for a seasoned festival-goer like myself, which unfortunately means missing out on final band **Space Fight**. Tinderbox is small, very friendly, intimate and definitely different, and if you want to seek out something seriously different from the mainstream, both as an event and musically, mark next year’s event in your calendar now.
Colin May

HALF MAN HALF BISCUIT

O2 Academy

If you mentioned Half Man Half Biscuit not so long ago the average response would fall between two camps. The first would be “who?” and the second, “didn’t they do ‘Trumpton Riots?’” It seemed that HMHB would be forever tarred with the novelty brush thanks to their association with BBC children’s programming.

When they last played in Oxford some years ago (a Cornbury Festival appearance not withstanding) it was to a handful of obsessive fans in the backroom at The Bully, but since then quite a lot has changed. HMHB have undergone something of a renaissance.

With 2002’s ‘Cammell Laird Social Club’, the band started to attract new fans who appreciated Nigel Blackwell’s uncanny knack of splicing together popular culture, everyday life and biting sarcasm. When ‘Achtung Bono’ appeared in 2005 (complete with the majestic ‘Joy Division Oven Gloves’) the band leapt forward again in popularity and were seemingly rediscovered by the music press and consequently, a host of new fans.

Tonight finds HMHB playing to a packed O2 with a set that stretches to nearly 30 songs and each and every one of them is

testament to Blackwell’s sharpened wit and skill as a songwriter. It also points to the significant change in the band’s fortunes over the last ten years, suggesting that eventually, if you write enough quality songs, they will get noticed.

It’s pleasing that Nigel Blackwell’s genius is getting fully recognised, and it’s in considerable evidence tonight. There’s the rampant singalong folk of ‘When The Evening Sun Goes Down’, the brilliantly observed ‘Running Order Squabble Fest’ (with its classic line, “You’re going on after Crispy Ambulance”), the old classics of ‘All I Want For Christmas Is A Dukla Prague Away Kit’ and ‘99% Of Gargoyles Look Like Bob Todd’, plus a smattering of new tunes from ‘90 Bisodol (Crimond)’. Each one is finely honed, Blackwell’s ear for a melody matches his phenomenal command of language. Even when he’s in spoken word mode he’s in top form and tonight’s twisting version of ‘24 Hour Garage People’ is a particular highlight.

Tonight is proof, if any were needed, that Half Man, Half Biscuit are no longer a novelty band, but are slowly edging towards becoming a national institution.

Sam Shepherd

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DJANGO DJANGO

O2 Academy

With their rather good eponymous debut album, Django Django sound like they want to carve themselves a niche that sits somewhere between *Guardian*-reader-friendly pop-electro familiarity and the more *outré* work of acts like Black Dice or Hot Chip. Similarly to the painfully where-are-they-now CSS, although erring more on the side of moody early Human League-esque pieces, they sound constantly in thrall to rhythm, as if under the influence of unnamed (yet safely legal) psychoactive substances. It's this clash between danceable music and reassuring song-like structure that is perhaps key to their growing popularity, which manifests itself tonight with an eager and responsive full house.

It may also be their Achilles' heel, as tonight's set rapidly displays a repetitive approach to song construction and an inability - intentional or not - for the band to completely lose themselves in the music. Throughout their set, which wends through much of their album with the backing-tape accuracy it's sometimes hard to avoid when music is this heavily centred around keyboards and sequencers, Django Django are undeniably vibrant and entertaining. At their core, they seem to have a love of simple and honest pop music, and when this works (on higher-energy tracks like 'Default' and 'Zumm Zumm') it neatly skims the surface of Krautrock, with one eye on normality.

The cracks tend to expose themselves when what is, on record, a tidy interplay between synthesised and 'traditional' instrumentation slightly drifts apart: this results in what can seem like clunky transitions and changes that can't help but rein in the rhythmic abandon with a more pedestrian approach to songwriting. A reliance on echo all over the vocals wears thin, meaning that the times that it is actually effective - on more rockabilly-like songs such as 'Life's A Beach' - are subsumed into a homogenous overall sound.

Despite it being an attractive and, at times, enthralling sound - and certainly



photo: Harriet Lee

one that can keep an often-motionless Oxford crowd moving - it's not yet unique enough to mark out Django Django as something beyond a slightly awkward combination of genres.

Simon Minter

PETER HOOK & THE LIGHT

O2 Academy

Tonight's gig is billed as 'A Joy Division Celebration' and I suppose no-one deserves the opportunity to lead it more than their bass player and now ex-member of New Order, Peter Hook.

My own connection with the band goes back to October 1979 and a wander round town with their singer Ian Curtis, trying to get his guitar strap mended before a gig at the New Theatre. He was polite and shy, and nothing like the brooding, intense figure of legend.

Back in the present a resurgent New Order are spending the summer headlining festivals, and recently played two sold out nights at the Brixton Academy where they seemed relaxed and actually enjoying themselves, a world away from the bad-tempered gigs before the final split with Hooky in '06.

Tonight he greets a half-full Academy with a competent four-piece band and a well-constructed ninety-minute set. Where once he would cajole and wind up the audience he now thanks us with uncharacteristic humility. First come early numbers like 'Leaders Of Men' and 'Digital' before they tackle the whole of 'Unknown Pleasures'. But something so obvious is amiss that it takes a while to register; he's not actually playing his bass. The shiny red Gibson SG familiar to any New Order fan hangs around his neck but it's only during 'Insight', nine songs in, that he starts to actually engage with it. Most of the gig is spent with his right arm punching the air, his

playing kept in reserve for special effect while the hired bass player takes care of duties. This is not a minor gripe; his approach to playing the bass, part rhythm, part lead, is absolutely unique and peerless; only Lemmy has achieved something similar. As no effort is made to replicate the album's unusual treated drum sounds the gig starts to take on the air of a post-punk cabaret performance, everyone watching his hands to see when he's going to let loose some of the old magic. It also becomes clear that he's not a born singer, and seems to be missing more notes than he hits, fluffing the odd line despite cue sheets.

It's almost a relief to get 'Unknown Pleasures' over and interest picks up with three songs off 'Closer' played with increasing vigour and focus. 'Twenty Four Hours' sounds great and 'Isolation' remains a tantalising glimpse of where Joy Division were heading before Curtis' suicide threw the band into a forced reinvention. The predictable finale of singles does more to rescue what was threatening to become a disaster: 'Love Will Tear Us Apart' is a particular triumph and the only point when he beats New Order's version hands down. There's no real prospect of this gig failing to disappoint though; these songs are too good to leave untouched and we ought to admire Hooky's gall in even attempting it. But, though it hurts me to say it, the memory of Joy Division's music deserves a bit better than this.

Art Lagun

THE HANDSOME FAMILY

The Bullingdon

"Can you make this microphone a little brighter please," asks Brett Sparks of the Bully's sound engineer, "it's a little bit dark." With perfect comic timing and a look of almost childlike glee, his wife Rennie adds, "I'd like a kitten." Maybe you had to be there, but such an exchange is a big part of what makes The Handsome Family such a wonderfully engaging and inclusive experience. The couple (augmented by a discreet drummer) constantly trade gently barbed blows, Brett playing the perennially bemused teddy bear to Rennie's genially catty wit. ("I showed him the internet once," she chirps at one point, "he didn't sleep all night"). But when they get down to playing their songs, the mood shifts into far darker territory.

Set opener 'Weightless Again' is beautiful, sad and surreal, moving from a coffee stop at a backwoods diner through lost Indian tribes to a woozy meditation on love and death. Further in, 'The Bottomless Hole' is more whimsical but similarly bleak and existential, the story of a man who discovers a seemingly bottomless hole in his backyard into which he tips his rubbish for years until he's overcome with a desire to enter the hole himself. The story leaves him hanging, literally, an unresolved ending that typifies the mystery of The Handsome Family's best songs.

As Rennie switches between

banjo and miniature acoustic bass, a picture of sleepy-eyed serenity, Brett leads on guitar, his voice either an oddly adenoidal drawl or a bold baritone, an avuncular figure with an occasional look that suggests he'd kill you and skin you as soon as buy you a beer. Once in a while that baritone is overdone, to almost comic effect, and the band lose their edge, wallowing in that whimsy, or drifting into lackadaisical country-rock. But then they'll up the mood - an almost honky tonk number about an octopus, or an oblique story about an Illinois giant and a window-smashing widow. Tonight's highlight though, is 'My Sister's Tiny Hands', from their 1998 masterpiece 'Through The Trees', a soul-scouring story of a man haunted by the death of his twin sister from a snake bite, driven to drink and finally madness, who eventually sets light to the forest that reminds him of the happy childhood days he spent with her. Brett sings it with such understated emotion it's a particularly hard hearted person who isn't left struggling with a lump in their throat.

Comedy and tragedy then, uneasy twins themselves, but two themes that weave themselves through The Handsome Family's set tonight, to create something that is, like the subject of so many of their songs, quite magical.

Dale Kattack

DAVID THOMAS BROUGHTON/ RM HUBBERT

The Jericho Tavern

RM Hubbert is a beautifully understated and weighty soul, who, with his idiosyncratic acoustic guitar, has been collaborating with the cream of Scottish indie talent in his home town of Glasgow, since 1993. These days he's exploring music as a way of reacquainting himself with these old friends, as well as working out his long-term mental issues. So we get superbly executed, and anecdotal, classical and Spanish-tinged instrumentals inspired by his failed marriage 'For Maria', the loss of his beloved father-in-law 'For Joe', and documenting his dealings with his 20 years of depression, all without feeling sorry for himself, causing us in turn to reflect on our own passing years.

He's at his best though, when he covers Aiden Moffet's 'Cars', and if RM could add his own poetic musings to his guitar work in the same spoken way, it would make his set bloom and be quite something.

Talking of quite something, Otley's David Thomas Broughton is about as much of a one-off as you are going to get on this island. I'm talking Viv Stanshall one off. Think Noel Coward on lithium, or Jake Thackery with dementia, sitting a flashing, screeching,

rape alarm in his mouth as he puts the scratching of his beard as another found sound layer on his loop delay, or wanders off and on stage, setting up antiquated electronic gadgets during 'Onward We Trudge' and finger squeaking the cellophane wrapping on his rider of six spring water bottles to augment the ocean swell rhythm of 'The Weight Of Your Love'.

Ultimately, all this yawning, affecting ennui and inserting a stream of consciousness in place of his lyrics could quickly become irritating, but on this one evening it's coalesced magnificently by Oxford's own sonic wizard Seb Reynolds, who sits stage left of DTB and counterpoints and envelopes all this eccentricity in a stunningly adroit cocoon of spaciness, using nothing much more than his iPhone and a Thumbjam App.

This digital and analogue freeform circus is of course, compelling and a joy to watch, yet frustrating when it comes to thinking of buying EPs and albums. I look forward to the coming day when every gig we go to is filmed and recorded, and is instantly available to plug in and buy at the door as a downloadable file.

Paul Carrera

JONQUIL / BLEEDING HEART NARRATIVE

O2 Academy

Due to my excitement, I gallop up the stairs that take me to the Academy's upstairs venue. I enter the room and bang! something hits me. The venue is virtually empty.

Thankfully it appears someone forget to tell openers Bleeding Heart Narrative; the London six-piece open proceedings tonight as if they were playing to thousands in an arena, such is the evident confidence in their slightly experimental material. They very quickly make up for the lack of attendance with noise. Lots and lots of noise.

In no time at all the band have assigned three of their six to drumming duties and chaos unsurprisingly ensues. But this is *constructed* chaos and is utterly enthralling to witness. As if to prove they are not only merchants of noise, the band throw a few more intimate numbers into the mix – one revolves entirely around a menacing sounding cello, whilst another employs intricate fingerwork to recreate a sound not far off that which is prominent on fellow math-rockers Foals' 'Total Life Forever'. As their set comes to a close, it speaks volumes about BHN that although there might not have been much of


an audience, every single one of us is nonetheless hooked right until the last.

While their support opted for a deep, heavy, atmospheric sound, headliners Jonquil are quite the opposite. Their distinctive light, poppy brand of rock could not be more appropriate, given that the earlier afternoon was a real scorcher (no surprises that lead singer Hugo Manuel is gallivanting around the stage in shorts).

Whether it's because we've all finally got good reason to wear shorts ourselves or whether it's because Jonquil's tunes are ingrained with optimism (you would think covering a band as gloomy as The xx would dampen the spirit somewhat, wouldn't you?) is beside the point; the fact of the matter is Jonquil sound *great*. While Mr Manuel reaches notes that surely only he can reach, the one-man brass section occasionally flits in and out perfectly, making their sound that more richer.

As they finish with 'Mexico', a song which the audience rightly sees as perfect to have a bop around to, it's like we're at a fiesta all of our own.

Nick Beaver



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INTRODUCING....

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

Komrad

Who are they?

Technical/progressive hardcore outfit Komrad were originally formed by Jimmy 'Evil' Hetherington and Rex Diablo under the name Eduard SoundingBlock after the demise of Suitable Case For Treatment, with the idea of "creating something musically different and unfeasibly heavy". The pair were joined by James 'Mouth' Green, formerly of Underbelly and Mindsurfer, on vocals, Lance on drums, Jimmy 'Disco' on keys and Disasterrus on guitar. Over the course of the next couple of years they were joined by Dave 'Spanish' on bass and James 'Happy Jumper' on drums. They have played regularly in Oxford and London, released an eponymous EP, and this month release their debut album, 'March Of The Robot Men'.

What do they sound like?

On the one hand, raw, explosive and aggressive, on the other, convoluted, technically adept and contrary, fusing hardcore and extreme metal's ferocity with odd time signatures, post-rock ideas and full-on prog-rock expansiveness to create a hellish old racket that's equally visceral and cerebral. "If Jimmy's amp went up to 11, he'd find a way to get it up to 12," they say.

What inspires them?

"Music, in all its divergent shapes and forms. With Jimmy's 'odd' sense of timing and the differing influences of the band members it's enjoyable to write songs that are all so different and yet retain a certain 'Komradness' about them."

Career highlight so far:

"Playing Charlbury festival last summer and unleashing our brand of weirdness on an unsuspecting daytime audience."

And the lowlight:

"In the early days of Eduard SoundingBlock we played a small warehouse party in Tottenham. We turned up to find out we would be on after some dubstep DJs at around 2am. We started our show in front of 200 people but within the first song had whittled that down to approximately five. We learnt the importance of choosing the right gigs to play that night."



Their favourite other Oxfordshire act is:

"We had a few shows early on with the mighty Undersmile and have really enjoyed watching them destroy gigs since then."

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

"The soundtrack to *Clockwork Orange*, brings any occasion or get together to life. It also makes for some great gig intro music."

When is their next gig and what can newcomers expect?

"The Wheatshaf on August 4th and the O2 Academy on September 29th. Newcomers will be warmly welcomed and are advised to bring ear plugs. James will also probably buy them a Jagerbomb."

Their favourite and least favourite things about Oxford music are:

"Favourite thing has to be the diversity of the Oxford music scene. Every type of music is represented and it's a veritable melting pot of sound. Least Favourite would be the decline in attendance numbers at gigs but to be honest this has seen a noticeable improvement recently."

You might love them if you love:

Dillinger Escape Plan; King Crimson; Big Black; Mr Bungle; Killing Joke.

Hear the here:

www.facebook.com/komradband

ALL OUR YESTERDAYS

THIS MONTH IN OXFORD MUSIC HISTORY

20 YEARS AGO

Sevencrutch glowered moodily out from the front cover of July 1992's issue of *Curfew Magazine*, but then what else would you expect from a band whose only album, 'Bleak Insight', was hailed by *Terrorizer Magazine* as the third greatest doom-metal album of all time? Back then the quintet, fronted by Martin Spear, now of Agness Pike, were being raved about in *Metal Hammer* and *Metal Forces* for their debut demo, while being pursued by a dozen or so record labels (they eventually signed to Noise International). "I just want to make music that's as extreme as possible," stated guitarist and chief songwriter Dave Smart. And he did. "Since Martin joined, we seem to appeal to more weirdoes," he added. Martin, meanwhile, sang the praises of Morrissey, Howard Devoto and Scott Walker.

Violinist **Ed Alleyne-Johnson** was also interviewed, talking about the freedom of abandoning the rules of classical music, as well as being recruited by New Model Army.

Elsewhere this month, **Gaz Coombes and Danny Goffey's** first band **The Jennifers** released their debut EP, 'Just Got Back Today' on Nude Records, while Oxford scene godfathers **Heavenly** released their album 'Le Jardin de Heavenly' on Sarah Records. Coming to town this month were a sprightly young psychedelic indie band called **Verve**, yet to add a The to their name. Local bands treading the boards included **Fuzzgun**, **The Human Torches**, **Squid**, **Grey Lady Down** and **Bosley**, while over in the demo pages **Death By Crimpers** topped the pile: "the sound of thunder and lightning and even a rainbow to cheer us up when the storm is over".

10 YEARS AGO

Psychid were the featured band in Nightshift's July 2002 issue. The band, who had supported Radiohead in South Park the previous summer under their old name Hester Thrale had just finished recording their debut album, 'They Come Out At Night', with Chris Hughes (Merrick out of Adam & The Ants), were signed to db Records and looking set for bigger things. "Beck's girlfriend gave us a macrobiotic carrot!" they enthused, referring to their backstage adventures at the South Park show. They were less positive about Oxford University, where they were all studying: "The music scene there is very competitive – only the very fastest rugby players are permitted to do karaoke versions of 'Hotel California' in the college bars, before making women drink their piss."

In local music news **Seafood**, **The Handsome Family** and **McLusky** were added to the bill for Truck Festival; local rockers **Vade Mecum** returned from their Stateside exile to play a hometown show at the Zodiac. A typically quiet July gig guide was headed by Truck Festival, while **Bad Manners**, **The Tender Trap**, **The Icarus Line** and **Rival Schools** were all in town. Local names gigging in town included **Winnebago Deal**, **JOR**, **Sexy Breakfast**, **The Half Rabbits** and **Headcount**.

Halfmoon & Pig were Demo Of The Month, a lesson for all musicians that "you can rehearse as much as you like, but if you haven't got the imagination or hint of madness you'll never produce anything as much fun as this." At the other end, **Jamie Lawson** "exists in a world where David Gray is prime minister and king of the known universe."

5 YEARS AGO

A Silent Film were caught mid-leap on the cover of July 2007's Nightshift. They'd just played Glastonbury, handpicked by Emily Eavis and Radio 1's Steve Lamacq, and were set to perform at Truck Festival a year on from their set there being curtailed by a biblical downpour. ASF had recently signed to Xtra Mile Records and chose to launch their debut EP at the Ultimate Picture Palace.

Set to join ASF at Truck were **Idlewild**, **The Brian Jonestown Massacre**, **Glenn Tilbrook and Hot Club De Paris**; little did we know the deluge that would put paid to the event, flooding the Steventon site as well as much of the rest of Oxfordshire, and almost putting paid to Truck for good. In true blitz spirit the organisers (whose family house was also flooded) relocated as many of the main acts as possible to Brookes University Union for two nights of undercover fun with collection buckets passed round to try and ease the financial pain, while **Frank Turner** played an impromptu benefit show at the Port Mahon.

Cornbury Festival fared rather better with **Blondie**, **David Gray**, **Suzanne Vega**, **Echo & The Bunnymen** and **Seth Lakeman** all performing. Nightshift's reporter on site was slightly perturbed to find himself standing next to an as-yet not prime minister David Cameron for the Bunnymen's set and noted that he was actually dancing, albeit badly. A new young band in town **Little Fish** made themselves known with their Demo Of The Month debut ("a full-blooded balancing act between garage-rock aggression and meticulously-constructed melody").

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DEMO OF THE MONTH

LEFT OF MANILA

Even if summer has decided to stay in the pub for the duration, we can still dream we're sitting in a sundrenched beach-front bar in Ibiza while gazing at the small river flowing down what was once our street. And so Left Of Manila feel like an appropriate soundtrack to such reveries, super-chilled dreampop and ambient electro of a seductively melodic vintage. 'At Your Side' seems to go nowhere in particular and with precious little haste, but it looks very pretty while it's about it – like a baby koala sipping a cocktail up a eucalyptus tree – recalling some of Brian Eno's studio dabbling with Robert Fripp, or Orbital's most spaced-out trips. 'Asleep In Stone' is hypnotic and somnambulant, spacey and spacious, the distorted, clacking electro beats discreet enough for the drifting electronics to breathe, echoes of Boards of Canada beneath the singer's frankly gorgeous voice. Onward they roam, no reason to hurry; you're under their spell and, like finding yourself in the land of the lotus eaters, it's all too easy to stretch out, cast out all thoughts and simply while the rest of your life away. Oh dear, it's started to rain again. Never mind. Wake us up when tea's ready.

JESS AND NESS

Folk music of an almost timeless variety from the local female vocal duo, relying musically on nothing more than sparse piano, acoustic guitar and accordion backing to allow their voices to take centre stage. They do this best when they work together. On 'Shelter' Jess – or maybe Ness – plays lead, a hushed, lispy presence over the minimalist backing, before Ness – or maybe Jess; we guess such details are unimportant at this stage – joins her, the two weaving closely around each other to take the song to another level, much like The Unthanks, or even This Mortal Coil contributors Deirdrie and Louise Rutkowski. The leaning towards traditional northern English folk tradition continues on the accordion-led 'Heimweih', Jess (or Ness – sorry, stick with us, we're new to all this) possessed of a wonderfully pure voice that you feel could carry the piece a cappella if it wished. 'Blankets' is bolder and more abrasive but still a warm, sweet shanty, but the pair maybe lose their way

a little in the overlong, recorded live 'All At Sea', which feels hazy and disjointed, rambling and lacking the clarity of the other songs. Never mind, it's mostly lovely stuff and we look forward to catching them love sometime soon and maybe working out which one's which. Jess And Ness: they're a bit like Jedward, except not shit.

EMPTY WHITE CIRCLES

One-song demos can go one of two ways: either leaving you wanting to hear more, but worrying the band in question has no more to offer, or thanking the Lord above that the musical torture is over so soon. Empty White Circles, thankfully, fall into the former camp, but this is merely a snapshot of the band, giving us barely a chance to make our minds up fully as to their potential merits. 'Adventures' falls neatly into the post-Stornoway school of local bands, all hushed harmonies and a more modern electronic take on classic folk music, not far from King Creosote and John Hopkins' last album. It's a pleasant, well executed reverie, but whether this is all they can do, we'll have to wait to find out.

THE TROPHY CABINET

The Trophy Cabinet's demo comes steeped in the sounds of classic 1980s indie. Which turns out to be no surprise since the band originally formed at Uni back in the late-80s before taking a 20-year hiatus and reforming last year. Fans of Aztec Camera, Lloyd Cole and particularly The House Of Love will happily discover that they're not the only people for whom the unsullied spirit of jangly guitar pop music lives on. 'Great Escape' is almost stately in its approach, while 'Rant & Rave' is anything but – in fact it's positively coy, like the musical equivalent of a shy lad at a party gazing at a pretty girl from the safety of another room. 'Trust' is a gentle, romantic lilt, but the band finds its confidence growing with 'No Vote', the vocalist verging on hysteria in the mould of James' Tim Booth at its peak and really, if you unearthed this on an old 7" vinyl with the Postcard label stamped on it, you wouldn't be surprised or disappointed.

NEURAL GROOVE

Neural Groove inform us this demo is entitled 'The Embryonic Disc', which is apparently an embryology reference and

potentially a joke, though our meagre brains had already melted into a greyish puddle at the mere mention of a word like embryology. Something to do with the new Alien film, right? See what a month of watching Euro 2012 has done to us? We used to read books, goddamit. Anyway, here the duo run the gamut from growly club-friendly dubstep and soulful house ('Morphine') to lighter piano-led Italian-flavoured house, all twinkly piano and sultry vocals ('Mercury'). In between they get down and dark with a cover of Fever Ray's 'Triangle Walks', perhaps revealing their true musical love. They're best at the darker, heavier stuff, the lighter touch doesn't suit them, lacking either dancefloor oomph or sufficient chill factor, and with apparent influences from Royksopp, Basement Jaxx and Lady Gaga running through the demo as well as a keen ear for production, maybe they'll even get to ditch those wordy learnin' books and get themselves a few club smashes. Before giving it all up to present BBC programmes about the history of the universe or something, like Brian Cox.

SONUS

Sometimes we get a demo that we sit and play over and over again and still can't think of anything to write about. And then we realise there maybe isn't anything to write about in the first place. Didcot's Sonus seem to be a case in point. Initially they sound like the sort of vaguely contemporary Californian punk-pop band that seemed to sprout like an unstoppable fungus on labels like Victory a few years back, one eye on an old Husker Du album for a bit of credibility, the other on a multi-million dollar merchandising deal. It's reasonable if slightly bland stuff, but once they try and get a bit more considered they lose even that meagre element of vim and vigour, along with much semblance of character, attitude or anything resembling a tune. The longer they go on the more it feels like they want to be a rock band but are scared to play anything too hard or fast lest they wake up their parents in the next room. Sure there's the odd elongated guitar solo and a fair bit of bluster, even the occasional hint of a decent hook, but mostly they just chug along with scant conviction, you forget it even exists even as you're listening to it and... sorry, what's that you say? More rain? I think we've had quite enough wet, grey nothingness for now, thanks.

BURGUNDY

This month's obligatory metal demo. Burgundy aren't actually local but they

play regularly at the Jambox nights in Bicester and Banbury so we'll let them in this time. And like good first time visitors they're awfully polite. Too polite for the sort of metalcore they're pedalling. It's like they read the rulebook and promised not to deviate from it at any point, or use any bad language or leave a mess on the furniture. There are sheet metal guitars on tracks like 'The Depths' but the beat is pedestrian, the vocals sounding almost tutored into the ways of the genre. Even the breakdown comes exactly where and when you're expecting it. It's decent stuff but formulaic and overlong. 'A Great Many Of Things' (eh?) bustles in with a sizeable flourish but quickly sinks into gruffly generic chugging. 'Flies' beefs things up for a while but by the time they get to 'Previously Unknown' they've gone all nasally and half-arsed and sound like any one of a zillion Lostprophets tribute bands. Lads, you're welcome back any time, but remember: we have very high standards in this house, so next time at least try and vomit on the carpet, eh? For now, not so much Burgundy as beige.

THE DEMO DUMPER

THE SPITEFULS

One song into this demo The Spitefuls are looking like contenders for Demo Of The Month – opener 'Depot' is a yobbish tale of some crazed psycho chopping up bodies in the depot where he works, cranked out in the style of The Ramones, Johnny Thunders and Aussie punks The Saints. The singer is called Andi Social, the bassist Tommy Ignorant. It's like 1977 all over again. 15 tracks later they're stuck in the dumper. How did that happen? Well there's a clue in the track count. Instead of a short, sharp shock and awe assault, they end up trundling through two-chord chug and bluster with decreasing energy levels, their decidedly un-PC sense of humour reaping diminishing returns with each pastiche of punk (they doctor everything from 'All My Loving' to 'Roadrunner' and 'Should I Stay Or Should I Go', usually involving lyrics about anal sex). The first of those provokes guilty grins; by the time we get to the last, we're sat head in hands, wondering whatever happened to The Macc Lads. Soon we're simply fast forwarding through tracks hoping for a glimpse of that initial air of ham-fisted fun, to no avail. Seems The Spitefuls forgot the golden rule of punk: it can revolt, revolutionise, thrill or terrify. But it should never, ever be boring.

Send demos for review to: Nightshift, PO Box 312, Kidlington, OX5 1ZU, or email links to nightshift@oxfordmusic.net, clearly marked Demos. **IMPORTANT:** no review without a contact address and phone number; no more than four tracks on a demo please. If you can't handle criticism, please don't send us your demo.



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