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website: nightshift.oxfordmusic.net

NIGHTSHIFT

Oxford's Music Magazine

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month.
Issue 200
March
2012

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200th issue

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HELLO AND WELCOME TO THE 200th ISSUE OF NIGHTSHIFT

How we've made it this far is anyone's guess, but stubbornness, blind optimism, dedication to the cause and quite possibly being institutionalised and unemployable in the real world are all contributing factors.

In a way celebrating this 200th issue is slightly misleading. Nightshift may be 200 under its current name but in an earlier life and going under the name Curfew, we've been at it for 21 years and 245 issues. Never mind a card from the Queen, an OBE might well be in order.

So much has changed since the first issue of Nightshift hit the streets in July 1995. For starters there was no such thing as the internet as far as most people were concerned. Gig listings were harvested by phone, there was no way of simply logging on to one of any number of listings websites to find out what was happening and if you wanted your demo reviewed you sent us a cassette with a hand-written letter to explain yourself. Are we sounding suitably ancient yet?

To cover all the stuff that's happened over the past 200 issues we'd need a bumper issue as thick as an Argos catalogue, but the printing bill would bankrupt us. When Nightshift started out the two main venues in town were The Hobgoblin on The Plain (later renamed The Point; now The Cape Of Good Hope) and The Elm Tree on Cowley Road (now a Chinese restaurant). Soon after we started The Zodiac was opened and for a few years Oxford's music scene was solid and reasonably secure, regaining some of the ground lost in 1994 when The Jericho Tavern, The Oxford Venue and The Hollybush all closed. Of course The Point was to be closed down and the Zodiac is now an Academy but today the local venue scene is as secure as it's ever been.

Musically too Oxford has remained an incredibly vibrant city. Looking back on old issues we'd forgotten so many band names but the list of local success stories is quite staggering – from Foals, Stornoway, Dive Dive and Fixers to A Silent Film, The Rock Of Travolta, Youthmovies and Jonquil.

Something we've always been proud of at Nightshift is our unstinting support of new local acts, both through reviews in the magazine to putting on the Oxford Punt each year to showcase what's best among the new flock of talents coming through. The flipside is we sometimes deal out the occasional critical thick ear to those in need of a lesson in quality control or musical taste but there you go: you can't make an omelette without being a complete bastard sometimes.

A list of our personal highlights and lowlights over the past 200 issues might just go on forever so, to avoid wallowing too deeply in nostalgia, we've opted to pick our 20 favourite gigs by Oxford acts since 1995 – those shows that kept our enthusiasm at boiling point and set themselves in our memories, hopefully forever. Of course there will be ones we've missed, but again, short of compiling an exhaustive list, we simply couldn't fit everything in.

Anyway, short of sitting here blowing our own trumpet for all the magnificent things we've done over the years, we'll leave the nostalgia there. There's a whole month of great gigs out there to enjoy and new bands to discover. Which is where you come in: without people going out and seeing live music, all those great venues will cease to be and the next generation of musicians will have nowhere to learn their trade and become the next Ride, Radiohead, Supergrass or Foals. So do us a favour – go and see a couple of bands you've never heard of this month and give your ears a treat. In fact, go and get yourself an all-venue Punt pass for May 16th and you can tick off a dozen or so of those bands in a single night. Don't say we're not good to you.

And of course as long as there's great music going on in Oxford Nightshift will be here to write about it. Seriously, what else are we going to do? Get a proper job? No, we're here for the long run. Or at least until the men in white coats carry us away, or our bank manager finally runs out of patience.

Cheers

Ronan Munro - Nightshift editor

TRUCK FESTIVAL is set to return this year, despite going into administration in 2011.

As reported in the online version of last month's Nightshift, the running of Truck Festival has been taken over by the promoters of **Y Not Festival** in Derbyshire, which has run for six years and won Best Grassroots Festival at last year's UK Festival Awards. The new organisers hope to take Truck back to its roots as a local community festival.

In a statement on the Truck website, Joe and Robin announced, "We have always felt a great responsibility for the integrity and sustainability of Truck Festival, which grew so quickly and with such enthusiasm from very humble beginnings in 1998. Via Truck's unique catering arrangements with the Rotary Club, tens of thousands of pounds have been raised for charities and good causes every year, including last year, and many great bands have taken their first steps to international prominence.

"However, after a notoriously difficult summer of trading for Truck Festival, and festivals in general, we have decided it is time for us to step down from our role at the event.

"During the 14 years of its existence, since we started it round our kitchen table, the festival has suffered various threats and disasters and taken on a life of its own. We like to think it has brought joy to a lot of people. It's right for this tradition, with so many benefits to the community, to continue; a chance encounter with the organisers of Y-Not Festival in Derbyshire has given it the opportunity to do so.



Gruff Rys at Truck 2011

"We are glad to say that, rather than finish for good or be in corporate hands, the festival in 2012 will go back to basics under the management of the Y-Not team. We feel they are the right people to take on the event, give it a fresh start and rebuild it over the next few years, and we hope you'll give them your full support."

The dates for this year's Truck Festival have been announced as the **20th - 21st JULY** at Hill Farm in Steventon.

Speaking to Nightshift after the takeover, Y Not director Ralph Broadbent explained how he came to take over Truck and what local festival goers can expect this year.

"We heard about the struggle that Truck had gone through last year and then bumped into Robin at the UK Festival Awards. We were keen to see if there was anything we could do to get involved, so we sat down over breakfast the following day and got a feel for the situation. Y Not has been fortunate enough to have enjoyed a great couple of years and it seemed that we might be in a position to help.

"We're looking at a 'back to basics' approach. We're still working on stuff as it's early days but I think things will be more how they were in 2008: a great ticket price, a great site, great bands and a great festival. Truck built its reputation as a leading festival on these elements and that's what we want to see a return of. There'll only be three stages but they'll be packed with only the best music. One of the things that's gone down particularly well is the return of the barn.

"We're not trying to replicate Y Not, but there will no doubt be similar bookings in places. We'd love to get someone like Bombay Bicycle Club, but I guess we'll have to see how it goes. The first step is to drop ticket prices. I won't bore you with the back end stuff, but we'll make sure that the budget doesn't get squandered on planning inefficiencies. This means we can reinvest it into a line up, sound system and festival layout that gives the fans what they want."

Early Bird tickets for this year's Truck are on sale now, priced **£59**, from **www.truckfestival.com** and the **Truck Store** on Cowley Road. Thereafter tickets will revert to a standard £69 for the weekend.



GAZ COOMBES plays a special intimate show at **East Oxford Community Centre** on Saturday 24th March. Having made his solo debut in December with a brace of sold-out shows at The Rotunda in Iffley, Gaz has teamed up with Beard Museum and Oxford once again to present a full band show where he will play songs from his forthcoming debut album **'Here Come The Bombs'**, which he has been recording with 'I Should Coco' producer Sam Williams. The album is due for release in May.

Gaz's live band will feature his brother Charly, as well as former-Ride drummer Loz Colbert.

Support for the evening comes from **The Family Machine**, who release their new single, 'Quiet As A Mouse' as a download and as sheet music this month.

Tickets, if there are any left by now, are on sale, priced, £16, from

www.gottickets.com/oxford

ALL-VENUE PASSES FOR THIS YEAR'S OXFORD PUNT have gone on sale. 100 passes are available, priced £8, from oxfordmusic.net or **Truck Store** on Cowley Road.

This year's Oxford Punt takes place across the evening of **Wednesday 16th May** and showcases 20 of the best unsigned acts in Oxford across five venues in the city centre. Previous Punts have provided early exposure for the likes of Stornoway, Fixers, Young Knives, A Silent Film, Little Fish and Yannis Phillipakis and Jack Bevan from Foals' first band Elizabeth.

The passes allow access to all five venues on the Punt circuit: **The Purple Turtle, The Cellar, The Wheatsheaf, The Duke's Cut** and **The Junction**.

Local bands wanting to play at the Punt have until 10th March to submit demos, either by emailing online music links to nightshift@oxfordmusic.net or sending a CD to Nightshift at **PO Box 312, Kidlington, OX5 1ZU**. In both cases please clearly mark your entry PUNT and include both phone and email contact details. Only acts from Oxfordshire may apply and you can't play if you've played the Punt before.

This year's **Punt line-up** will be announced on the Nightshift forum on **15th March**.

THERE WILL BE NO COWLEY ROAD CARNIVAL THIS YEAR. Organisers took the decision to put off the event until 2013. In a statement at the beginning of February John Hole, chair of trustees of Cowley Road Works, explained: "There is a lot going on in Oxford this year, with many events around the Diamond Jubilee and the Olympics. We feel that by taking a break, the community can focus on all of these and we can benefit from a longer planning period to return in 2013 with the Schools and Community Procession, music performances and even more of the community-focused events that make Carnival so magical.

"We have consulted with many community groups and people connected to Carnival and have reached the conclusion that it makes a lot of sense to hold on until 2013.

"In addition, to make Carnival the best that it can be, we can use the 18 month lead time to attract help and participation from all parts of the community and to secure crucial funding and sponsorship."

THE OXFORD FOLK WEEKEND is set to step into the void left by the cancellation of The Oxford Folk Festival last year.

The folk weekend runs from **20th – 22nd April**, with a series of concerts, workshops, ceilidhs, dances and informal music sessions at **The Old Fire Station, the Ashmolean, The Wesley Memorial Church** and other venues to be announced.

Despite its growing reputation the Oxford Folk Festival was cancelled last year due to financial problems. The new weekend is the work of a number of local folk groups.

Acts already confirmed include Mawkin, Crucible Trio, Ian Giles, Boldwood, James Bell, Telling The Bees, Short Drag Roger, The Skeptics and Emily Spiers & The Tunesmiths.

Tickets for the weekend are on sale now, priced £46 (£40 concessions; £30 for under-18s) from www.folkweekendoxford.co.uk.

THE ORIGINAL RABBIT FOOT SPASM BAND release a new single as a wax cylinder next month. 'Greg's Greats Record Shop', produced by Winchell Riots' Phil McMinn, is released on 19th April as a limited run of 25 – the first time wax cylinders have been produced commercially for 90 years. A copy of what is likely to be one of the most unusual items of Oxford music memorabilia ever made, will set you back £25 and you'll need the original equipment to play it on.

The ORFSB play a special launch party at the Half Moon in Putney on 19th April, which will also feature the world's first Wax Cylinder DJ set from the Edison Brothers. Visit www.rabbitjazz.co.uk for more news on the band.

TRUCK STORE has teamed up with the producers of the *Anyone Can Play Guitar* documentary to launch a competition for local song-writers.

To celebrate the vibrancy and illustrious history of music in Oxford, Truck Store are challenging local bands and songwriters to write a song about the Oxford music scene, past or present, record a rough version of it and send it to Truck Store. Shop staff will then pick their favourite and the winning entry will win an exclusive ACPG Fender Telecaster guitar as well as the chance to perform their song live in-store as part of the Record Store Day celebrations on April 21st / 22nd. Email the shop at Truckstore@rapture-online.co.uk or

bring a CD into the shop! Deadline for entry is 1st April.

Truck Store also hosts a host of **instore shows** through March. On Thursday 1st, **Allo Darlin'** perform an acoustic set ahead of their show at The Cellar later in the evening. **Jonquil** launch their new album, 'Point Of Go' in the store on Saturday 3rd, while **Foxes!** play on Saturday 10th. Finally, **Robots With Soul** launches his debut single in the shop on Friday 16th. Check instore or online at www.raptureonline.co.uk for performance times.

THE HALF RABBITS will be giving away copies of a new remix album of their songs at a launch show at **The Cellar** on **Saturday 17th March**. Contributors to the album include Gunning For Tamar, New Rose Hotel, Listing Ships, Tiger Mendoza and Monday Morning Sun. Tickets for the show are £5 in advance; support on the night comes from Listing Ships and The Cellar Family. Visit www.half rabbits.co.uk for more news on the band.

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.

Meanwhile, Pindrop Performances host a weekly **Pindrop Music show** on Fake DIY Internet Radio. The local promoters' show airs every Wednesday night at 8pm via www.thisisfakediy.co.uk. Seb Reynolds and James Cuning play a mix of local, national and international acts, old and new, young and old, as well as live studio performances from guests. Follow them @pindropmusic on twitter for regular updates.

Regularly updated local music news is available online at www.musicinxford.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 music news as well as the chance to chat to other Oxford musicians and gig-goers, advertise for bandmates or simply have a bloody good row about something and nothing – visit nightshift.oxfordmusic.net.

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a quiet word with

Spring Offensive



“NOBODY WANTS TO MAKE forgettable music. One day we think ‘fuck it, we play straight-up indie pop’, the next we worry that we are working on something too dirty and self-involved. Maybe it’s that balancing act and that self-confusion that people like.”

SPRING OFFENSIVE GUITARIST

Matt Cooper is pondering the appeal of his band in response to Nightshift’s suggestion that it’s their fine balancing act between simple melody and exploring the musical path less travelled.

It’s a balancing act the local quintet have been negotiating with increasing returns, both creatively and in their popularity, for the past two years, since they hit the ground running with a debut demo that had 6Music’s Tom Robinson getting all frothy even before they’d played a proper local gig.

“Tom Robinson’s enthusiasm was pretty infectious, explains Lucas Whitworth, Spring Offensive’s startlingly talented, startlingly tall vocalist. “We’d been playing together in garages and at school for a couple of years, but never taking it seriously, so when we put out our first track, and Tom came on and said we’d restored his faith or something like that, we had this thought of, ‘yeah, people are going to love us!’ In reality it doesn’t work

quite like that. One person getting into your band, no matter how influential they are, probably isn’t enough, and it took another year before we were first played on Radio 1. Also, he can be a hard bastard; without going into too much detail, he sent us a furious missive that elicited a grovelling apology from us. Next time we were interviewed by him was a little cagey.”

WHETHER THAT EARLY RUN-IN

with Tom Robinson served as a lesson learned, Spring Offensive have never looked back since that opening salvo. Local gig-goers and fellow musicians were quickly rapt by their fleet-footed take on math-inflected rock, their experimental sense of adventure never allowed to dominate great tunes that stick around in your head, nagging away at you like the finest pure pop music. Tunes like ‘Every Coin’ and ‘I Found Myself Smiling’ from the band’s debut album, ‘Pull Us Apart’, which really stamped their presence on the local scene, earning them a place on the Oxford Punt in 2010, and prompting Nightshift to declare that “everything they do feels airy and alive.”

LUCAS: “We tend not to play any of the songs from that record live anymore, as they don’t fit with we’re doing right now or properly express who we are. There’s nothing

wrong with that, I guess. Moving on is always part of the process. It was right for us at the time though, and afforded us the chance to put serious thought into what we were doing. A song like ‘Every Coin’, for example, is not an ill-informed rant; Matt and I saw a dystopian play at Latitude that mentioned muggers actually forcing people to eat their wallets. It was a good idea, and with a good idea, writing a song can be quite easy.”

SPRING OFFENSIVE’S NEXT

move was as bold as it was unexpected: a fourteen-minute concept single, ‘The First Of Many Dreams About Monsters’, based on the idea of Swiss psychiatrist Elizabeth Kübler-Ross’ grief cycle in her 1969 treatise *On Death & Dying*.

Here in literary-minded Oxford we’re used to bands tackling recurring themes across an album (notably Borderville) but fitting such complex ideas into a single song was particularly ambitious.

MATT: “I remember reading about the grief cycle and just thinking that it could make a pretty interesting structure for a song. I started reading *On Death and Dying* and it just kind of spiralled from there. Without being melodramatic, it was probably a little unhealthy. I wanted to imagine what it was like to have lost

someone so close to me that my life had changed irreparably, and then imagine crawling out of that hole. It was only when we all started imagining together and started writing as a band that it felt like what we were doing was in some way wrong. Exploitative or something. I remember feeling a bit sick about it. We have never been so deep into a subject, and the fact that it ended up being 14 minutes long was just because we were writing so much. We all found a connection to the track. The song started to be about the writing process itself, and us imagining the Kubler-Ross tragedy. Not only the tragedy she writes about, but also the tragedies of her own life. I spoke to the Kubler-Ross Foundation a few times and asked them if what we were doing was okay. We became so wary about treading on someone else’s story. ‘Write what you know’ just felt so restrictive.”

PERHAPS AS A REACTION TO

such an elaborate project, subsequent Spring Offensive releases – last year’s ‘A Stutter & A Start’ and new single ‘Worry Fill My Heart’ – have seen a return to shorter, simpler but no less engaging songs; was ‘The First Of many Dreams About Monsters’ a one-off concept or can the band imagine tackling big ideas like that again?

MATT: “We didn’t know ‘Monsters’ was going to be such a strange beast. It changed us, but we were so worried that people thought we were pretentious or trying desperately to be different that we thought that we better do something a bit more straight up. Which I guess is what ‘A Stutter and A Start’ was, but it still tells a story. An honest and personal one too. Yes, it’s not 14 minutes long, but we have no intention of being pigeonholed by our own work. It’s a different, maybe even more difficult, challenge to condense a ‘big idea’ to just three minutes and it to not feel empty.”

The new single, ‘Worry Fill My Heart’, deals with dead-end jobs and the way life doesn’t always turn out how you had hoped; how much of that comes from personal experience and how do you tackle a subject like that with a fresh approach?

LUCAS: “We don’t want to appear ungrateful, but we’ve all worked jobs where we’ve thought, ‘am I realising my potential here?’ So many people we’ve met at shows, or our friends or

family, are ending up doing something that they hate, and at the moment it's hard to get out of that cycle. You can't go elsewhere, because there isn't anywhere to go, but if you stay where you are then everything becomes so grey and featureless. That doesn't make for interesting music, so we make it into a panic attack. Likewise the b-side, 'Carrier', is also about physically feeling something, and opting for that rather than suppression and drifting around the same ever-shrinking circles. People need an outlet. I mean, why do people go to gigs? Right now, we're trying to share something exciting in everything we do. It's an obligation, a compulsion."

GOING BACK TO THE VERY beginning, Spring Offensive formed at school in a rather different incarnation to the tight five-piece fighting unit we know them as (alongside Matt and Lucas are bassist Joe Charlett; guitarist Theo Whitworth and drummer Pelham Groom).

PELHAM: "We were all in different bands at school and they gradually merged in to one. We bonded musically over The Cooper Temple Clause and Hope Of The States, but we hadn't the faintest clue how to make music like that. It didn't help that at that point it was really more of a gentlemen's club than a band. We had nine members, but we all played the same instruments, so we had three singers, three guitarists, two bassists and two drummers in a rotating line up - one of the many reasons we were terrible. We wrote and recorded some awful songs, spent huge sums of money printing up a thousand copies of a dire EP (which we still have in attics and under beds) and generally made all our rookie mistakes while no one was watching. Looking back, we realise that all of our friends were sympathetic liars who, against all common decency and good sense, told us to continue."

UNSURPRISINGLY GIVEN THE city they've made their name in, early reviews of Spring Offensive made comparisons to local post-rock pioneers Youthmovies, comparisons they've long since outgrown but a band who provided early inspiration for the fledgling quintet.

MATT: "We all went to their last gig at the downstairs at the O2, which was an incredible experience. I remember thinking that there was something wrong with a band of that calibre and creativity splitting up. Obviously it is more complicated than that, but it felt totally fucking wrong. That was my first real experience of them, though. We have always found that the comparisons to Youthmovies and

Jonquil flattering, but if we sound similar it has always been purely accidental."

LUCAS: "Youthmovies were my favourite band when I first came to Oxford - I'd go and see them whenever I could. I still love their music and ethic, but as Matt says, it's totally unrelated to what we do. I love them independently of Spring Offensive!"

It wasn't simply Youthmovies' music that provided some of those initial sparks of inspiration for Spring Offensive. Their DIY ethic and desire to organise their own tours and to play shows in unusual settings has also rubbed off on them. Lately Spring Offensive have performed at the Ashmolean and worked with performance artists Curious Directive at Green Man

"So many people end up doing something that they hate, and at the moment it's hard to get out of that cycle. You can't go elsewhere, because there isn't anywhere to go."

Festival.

MATT: "A lot of what we do stems from an interest in theatre. We all wrote music for a theatre show in 2009, which went to Latitude Festival, and a lot of our backgrounds are theatre-based. We are pretty hooked on offering audiences an experience more out of the ordinary, whether that is a gig in a non traditional venue or being involved in a show like the Curious Directive one, it just gets our rocks off."

"Green Man Festival was awesome and the performance itself was crazy. Writing for Spring Offensive doesn't allow us to be too off the wall but being involved in all these other projects means that we get to meet other like minded people and play music, in the case of Curious Directive, dictated by the roll of a dice."

THEO: "I think more bands should try it really - keeping out of venues, working with non-musicians on shows, that kind of thing. If anything it makes you realise how many people are trying to stamp a creative identity on a bit of public consciousness, and that you can be useful for each other."

Spring Offensive's willingness to work at making it well beyond Oxford resulted in them touring across Germany and Switzerland last year.

JOE: "Getting to play over there was an amazing experience. We were spoilt with lots of the good stuff: sausage and beer. The punters love that you're a foreign band gigging

for them in their country and they made a big effort to come and chat to us after the shows, which was really touching. We're going back in April and we can't wait."

A sign of just how popular Spring Offensive have become in Oxford came when the band's 'secret' show before Christmas sold out as soon as it was announced. Does that give them an idea of how you've progressed over the past two years?

PELHAM: "It was certainly a lovely surprise. Any progress we've made has always felt wrenchingly slow at the time. For every success there are many failures, and it's pretty hard to see the wood for the trees. However there are moments when something amazing happens - a heaving album launch, a big-time review or an amazing support slot -

that makes you feel like you've made a quantum leap, like an event from a more successful future has dropped in to the present. Then you play The Pig and Whistle the next day and you forget all about the good times. In the words of Les McQueen: 'It's a shit business'."

MATT: "We left it all a bit late to be honest. It was a bit of a nightmare in fact. The day we sold all of our tickets, the first venue said 'actually we have changed our minds'. It was a little not-to-be-named shop on the Cowley Road. The next two weeks were a frantic mess of phoning in favours and lying to people, saying everything was all set and going just fucking swell. We were really happy with the show in the end. It's all we wanted. We aren't trying to break any barriers, we just think an unusual space makes for a more enjoyable show. It takes people out of their comfort zone a bit. In fact, looking back on it that show felt really special and we were so happy that people came down to see us. A free show was, without sounding like total martyrs, the least we could do for people after all the support we have been given."

ONE OF THE MOST STARTLING Spring Offensive shows Nightshift has witnessed was at last year's Audioscope mini-festival where they were pitched in between two incredibly extreme bands, Necro Deathmort and The Victorian English Gentlemen's Club on a highly eclectic bill. After the

fantastically oppressive electro-grind of Necro Deathmort, Spring Offensive's fidgety, airy, at one point *a cappella*, performance felt like, well, spring sunshine after a particularly harsh winter. The sudden shift in mood seemed to really capture the imagination of the audience there.

THEO: "That's very flattering! But I reckon if anything the crowd were probably more confused by the shift than out-and-out into our set. I think acts like Necro Deathmort and Victorian English Gentlemen's Club challenge people, sometimes in a way that can make you want to evangelise about it on a diet of locusts and White Lightning. Our music perhaps doesn't push people to quite those extremes. But we're kind of used to being billed with bands that we sound absolutely nothing like. What we've found is that it's never good to try and change your set to suit the night. Just do what you do."

On the completely opposite end of the gigging scale, you also played the Rotunda in Iffley with Gaz Coombes at the end of last year; how was that? You'd worked with him before, as producer.

LUCAS: "That was a magical show. The atmosphere in there was something else and it felt like a special gig. When I was growing up in Argentina, we didn't get much UK music beyond the 'NOW' CDs, and I remember dancing around like an idiot to songs like 'Alright' and 'Moving', so getting to know Gaz and playing a show with him is a little surreal, really. He's a lovely guy, and he's worked with us on mixing our two forthcoming singles. He knows how to get the best out of us!"

With a new single out this month and a steadily growing back catalogue to their name, we wonder, finally, when we might hear a full Spring Offensive album.

PELHAM: "We're pretty happy with where we are at the moment. Getting a full-length album right is a big task and we tend to be a bit nit-picky with what we put out. All bands are of course, but we probably have an above average level of panic and crises of confidence. We can't wait for the day that we have the time and resources to make an album that we'll all be proud of, but pushing the boat out always feels like a good idea until you're knee deep in acid. Sorry, I may have fallen asleep watching *Dante's Peak* last night."

'Worry Fill My Heart' is released on 17th March. Spring Offensive play Modern Art Oxford on Saturday 10th March. Visit www.springoffensive.co.uk for songs, videos and gig news.

COVER UP

Nightshift front pages through the years

TWO HUNDRED ISSUES. Two hundred front covers. Two hundred months of the latest local music news or the latest new local heroes staring out at you from the counter or bar of your favourite shop or venue.

Nightshift didn't start sticking big shiny pictures of bands on the cover until issue 100; before that, for those of you too young and fresh-faced to remember, it was merely the latest news from the Oxford scene accompanied by a succession of usually rather laboured puns posing as headlines.

Even so, over the years there's been some pretty special

stuff on the cover, from good and bad news, to the most iconic acts to emerge from a scene that never fails to deliver something special.

So, we've compiled a collage of our favourite covers over the years, whether it was the stories that changed the local scene for better or worse, the front cover debuts of bands who were to go on to wider fame and fortune, or simply excellent photos that we particularly love.

And since so many people ask us why Nightshift is still printed in black and white, the simple answer is, it's cheaper than colour. Artistic statements don't come into it.



July 1995. The first issue, with The Mystics' Sam Williams on the cover



January 1996. Oxford pop pioneers Ride announce they are to split



August 1996. Radiohead play two sold-out shows at the Zodiac



December 1996. The Shifty Disco singles club is launched with Dustball's 'Senor Nachos'



October 1997. Radio 1 Sound City comes to Oxford



June 1998. One-day local music festival Oxstock takes place in Cutteslowe Park



September 1998. The very first Truck Festival takes place. Nought headline.



January 2001. The Rock of Travolta lead Oxford's new music revolution



April 2002. The Young Knives prepare for The Oxford Punt and Truck gears up again



January 1999. The Samurai Seven sweep the board at the Shifty Disco Awards



July 2001. Radiohead's 40,000-capacity homecoming show in South Park



November 2003. Nightshift somehow makes it to 100 issues



October 1999. Rage Against The Machine play a secret show at the Zodiac



November 2001. Bass/Six Continents close down The Point venue.



March 2004. Suitable Case For Treatment get their first front cover



April 2004. Youthmovies' first front cover, in their original, elongated guise



October 2004. Winnebago Deal rock it up



March 2005. Dive Dive hit the comeback trail



May 2005. The Young Knives' make the first of three full front cover appearances



August 2005. Fell City Girl are the hottest new band in town



September 2005. Now officially a four-piece, Supergrass grace the cover again



November 2006. Foals' first cover feature in any magazine



February 2007. Rich Walters stakes his claim as Oxford's best kept secret



July 2007. Before they were Number 1 across Europe, ASF make their Nightshift cover debut



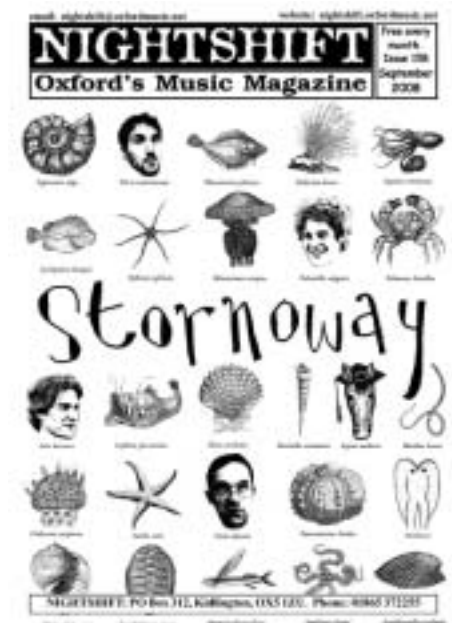
November 2007. Little Fish make the first of their three cover appearances



April 2008. Jonquil make their pre-fame Nightshift debut



July 2008. The first of two - so far - cover showings for The Epstein



September 2008. Stornoway's first time on the cover is a marine life concept collage



August 2009. Mr Shadow's second cover feature finds him in full flow



November 2009. The second of Borderville's three cover features to mark their debut album



January 2010. Twenty years after their debut EP, Ride reconvene



November 2010. A metal special helps reignite the local heavy rock scene



March 2011. Fixers cover debut finds them ready for lift off

A NIGHT TO

BY ALL THAT'S HOLY WE'VE SEEN SOME GREAT SHOWS IN our time doing Nightshift. It's what keeps us going – that adrenaline rush when you realise you're witnessing something beyond a mere gig. A list of the truly great gigs we've witnessed since Nightshift started in July 1995 would run to pages and pages and be considerably less thrilling than the shows themselves, so, for brevity's sake, we decided to compile a special Issue 200 Top 20 greatest gigs by Oxford artists in that time. Sometimes it was the excitement of seeing a new young band for the first time, tearing up the stage and promising to tear a whole in the sky, at others it was a band we already knew and loved playing the show of their lives. Every time, though, it was the unmistakable feeling that here in Oxford there is something very special going on. Read 'em and weep.

Dustball



DUSTBALL – The Point October 1995

Prior to this live debut, Dustball had their decidedly lo-fi demo disembowelled in Nightshift, the review suggesting its only redeeming feature was that Royal Mail hadn't franked the stamps on the envelope so we could use them again. Did they sulk or rant? No, they simply turned themselves into a fiery furnace of rock and roll energy and blew the Point apart. Within moments of the trio's unassuming slunch onstage seasoned cynics were picking their jaws off the floor as Jamie Stuart, Tarrant Anderson and James Russell rampaged through twenty minutes of venomously joyous punk-pop that rampaged its way to a bruising climax of Ash's 'Kung Fu'. "Fuck-off fast and brilliant," wrote Nightshift's Mark Taylor.

THE BIGGER THE GOD – Oxford Playhouse June 1997

Perhaps the quintessential Oxford cult band, The Bigger The God were showmen beyond compare, doubtless remembered by many local indie kids of a certain vintage for their sublime

Your Song sets. Beyond those though, the quartet's joyously arch buzzsaw pop came armed with a camp, bordering on sleazy, sense of theatre, and so it was only fitting they played their finest show at the Playhouse where they threw everything into the mix, a riotously vaudevillian take on The Smiths, Bowie and Adam & The Ants. It was a grand, ambitious plan and it worked. No other local act could have carried the spectacle off with such aplomb.

JOR – The Elm Tree February 2000

The Club That Cannot Be Named provided us with so many great gigs over the years we could fill this list twice over, but of all their local metal shows this Bacchanalian bunfest took the biscuit. JOR were Oxford's premier metalcore heroes, trailblazing a path for myriad others to follow in later years. Having toured around the UK they returned to their home town for an intimate show that felt like carnage incarnate. The band piled on the pressure as a beer-and-sweat-drenched crowd dived off the stage, the bar or mates' shoulders, emerging bloodied and bruised at the end of the night with the sound of hellishly high-octane hardcore ringing in their ears. It hurt, but by God it felt good.

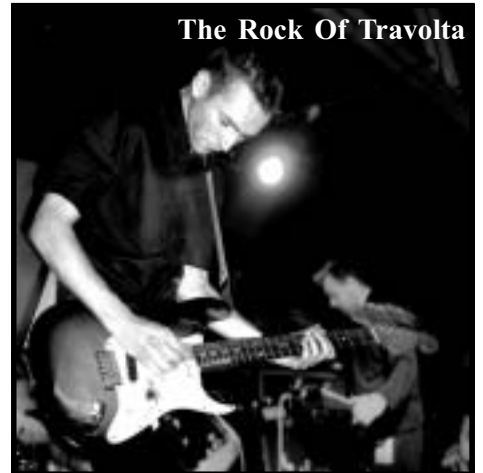
JOR



THE ROCK OF TRAVOLTA – The Zodiac December 2000

At the end of 2000 Texas's ...And You Will Know Us By The Trail Of Dead were being hailed as the most exciting live band on the

The Rock Of Travolta



planet. And then they shared a stage with The Rock Of Travolta. The six-strong local collective were playing only their second show, having debuted at Truck in the summer, and destroyed the headliners. Completely destroyed them in a tightly-orchestrated display of electro-classical-hardcore instrumental rock that sounded like a combustible fusion of Stravinsky, Shellac and Spinal Tap. To their credit Trail Of Dead promptly invited them on tour with them. It was the start of a musical revolution in Oxford music, the effects of which are still being felt today.

Radiohead



RADIOHEAD – South Park July 2001

Radiohead's show at the newly-opened Zodiac in summer 1995 was possibly a greater performance, a sublime realisation of the band's still unfurling potential, but this was The Event. The Homecoming. A celebration of all the great things that had happened in Oxford music over the previous decade. 40,000 fans packed into South Park for a day of special guests – including fellow Oxfordians Supergrass, Hester Thrall and The Rock Of Travolta – culminating in a spectacular show against blackening skies, starting with the static hum of 'The National Anthem' and rising to an astonishing climax with 'Creep' – the first time the band had played it live for years. At its magical high point the heavens opened just as Thom Yorke sang "Come rain down on me". It was a homecoming to rival any conquering Roman emperor and Radiohead proved beyond doubt they were the greatest band in the world.

REMEMBER

photos by Sam Shepherd, rphimages, Gerard Wood et al

LAST NIGHT AT THE POINT – The Point

October 2001

Having provided early exposure for bands like Muse, Coldplay and Catatonia, as well as debut UK shows for The Strokes and White Stripes, the legendary Point, run by the former Jericho Tavern main man Mac, was shut down by some simpering Six Continents marketing shiteap called Rick Nicholls, who wanted to replace its sweaty uniqueness with yet another student bar. The only way to go was with a party to rival Ragnarok. **The Rock Of Travolta, Arthur Turner's Lovechild?, Paper Sun, Comrade Duck and Dustball** all played, while local rock heroes **Vade Macum** kicked out a whole set of Spinal Tap covers. The night ended with half the musicians in Oxford up on stage bellowing out a rousing 'If The Kids Are United' as a beyond-capacity crowd sang along and turned the pub upside down on the way out. The Point was gone but it went out in style. And Rick Nicholls? He got the sack shortly after when his theme pub tonked.

THE YOUNG KNIVES – The Cellar *March 2002*

"There is genius here tonight," went the opening line of Nightshift's review of Young Knives' first show after changing their name from Ponyclub. The trio, still barely known in their adopted city, were up on stage strangling hysterical pop songs til they screamed, channelling influences as diverse as Pixies, Pere Ubu, Adam & The Ants and Television Personalities and making rock music seem completely childish after years of everyone trying to act all grown up and sensible. They wore oddly sensible clothes, sang in disquieting falsettos and bickered wittily between songs. In one truly bizarre moment, they broke off from the scratchy, scratchy ball of musical wobbliness that was 'Easy Peasy' so House Of Lords could chant Throbbing Gristle's 'Subhuman' in all its deadpan nightmarish glory. Truly there was no other band in town, or for many, many miles beyond, like Young Knives.



SMILEX – Truck Festival *July 2002*

Oxford's own pocket-sized lovechild of Iggy Pop, John Lydon and Marc Almond, Lee Christian was always a heroic believer in the myth of the rock and roll martyr and faced with a packed Trailerpark Tent he decided to take on the world, fighting with the front row, inciting a hail of missiles, screaming stuff about S&M and generally playing at being a one-man riot in front of his band's confrontational cock-rock attack. He ended the set covered in blood and with a broken nose for his troubles, vomiting at the side of the stage as Tom Sharp hurled his guitar into the crowd where it was seized by a member of Lapsus Linguae who managed to knock out some decidedly Motley Crue-like noises before being consumed by the mob. Pure punk cabaret.



GUNNBUNNY / ELIZABETH – The Zodiac *December 2002*

Hippies and social worker types are forever telling us to be nicer to young bands and always encourage them however dubious their musical talents. Which we always feel would be like encouraging naughty puppies to foul the pavement. Instead we reserve our undying love and purple prose for those magical moments when young teenage bands blow our minds as completely as these two did. Elizabeth "used guitars as weapons, handling them with a deft touch and letting their dysfunctional melodies hover and crackle in the air before crunching down on their fretboards with and easy venom, occasionally sounding like a teenage Captain Beefheart trapped inside Sonic Youth's 'Daydream Nation'", went our review. The equally fresh-faced Gunnbunny, meanwhile, were "steaming along the road to garage metal heaven, fronted by a long-haired bruiser of a lad with a throat-ripping voice that sounds like hell erupting." A decade later, where are those keen young teens? Well, Yannis Philipakis and Jack Bevan have long since conquered the globe with Foals, while Gunnbunny's Jack Goldstein and Michael Thompson are all set to do so as Fixers this year. Way back then their talents were all too apparent.

MEANWHILE BACK IN COMMUNIST RUSSIA – Holywell Music Room *February 2003*

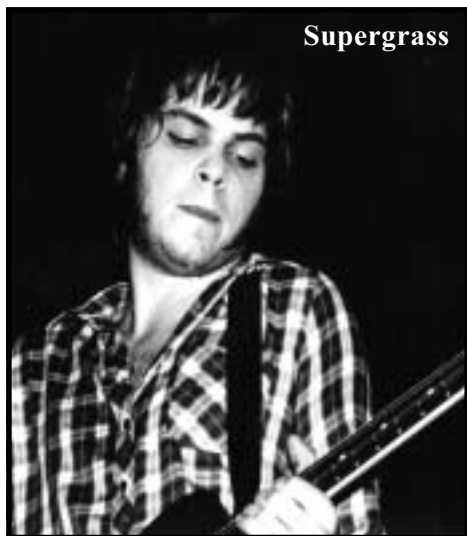
Poetic and pensive, The Russians always felt either too fragile or simply too chaotic to work properly as a live band. Their albums were delicately layered even as their guitars screamed with pain, so it needed a special venue to capture the slow-burning atmospheres of which they were capable and this show at the UK's oldest live music venue brought out the very best in the band, their songs-cum-stories building into howling storms of guitar and electronic noise over – or under – which Emily Gray's quavering narratives played out. The band famed, in the days before the smoking ban, for playing tab-on, were forced to take a break mid-set so they could all nip out for a quick fag, ciggies being not quite welcome even then in such a hallowed setting. An amusing diversion but musically this was a serious triumph by a band that remains one of Oxford's finest lost treasures.

THE OXFORD PUNT 2003 – *Various Venues May 2003*

If the Oxford Punt was like an annual grape harvest for local bands, 2003 was its vintage year. **Richard Walters, Suitable Case For Treatment, Ivy's Itch and Sextodecimo** were among some of the acts who have become part of local music folklore, while **Elizabeth** were to go on to later glory as Foals, **Gunnbunny** were exorcising their grunge demons ahead of becoming part of Fixers and a young Hugo Manuel from Jonquil and Chad Valley was making his first steps onto the local scene with **The Modern**. But the two towering sets of the night, even in such exulted company, came from **Sexy Breakfast** at Jongleurs, where they forever looked set to break out of the confines of a tiny stage that's tilting like a wayward raft, while suggesting they were made to be playing stadiums, and **The Evenings** at The Jam Factory, who came armed with dancing girls and took Neu! and Add N To (X) raving, breaking down all barriers between band and crowd as everyone in the venue reached some plain of euphoric bliss in unison.



A NIGHT TO



SUPERGRASS -

The New Theatre

May 2004

While they might deny it, Supergrass are a great singles band – in the tradition of bands like Madness or Buzzcocks – and so, to our great joy, they celebrated their tenth anniversary with a Greatest Hits compilation and brought it all to life at what, in those days, was the only local venue capable of housing everyone who wanted to see them. And so, from the bruising, ballsy rock strike of ‘Richard III’, through swirling, psychedelic pop nuggets like ‘Sun Hits The Sky’, to a cosy, acoustic take on ‘Caught By The Fuzz’, with Gaz and Mick ensconced onstage on an old sofa together, Supergrass knocked out hit, after hit, after hit. A decade on from witnessing their first sparks of life down at the Hollybush in Osney alongside The Nubiles, Supergrass appeared tonight as fully-fledged pop stars, having lost not one ounce of that initial youthful flourish.

THE FACTORY – The Bullingdon February 2005

While local stars like Supergrass were able to celebrate their tenth anniversary in such style and Radiohead have endured into their second decade together, some bands burned brightly for a few fleeting moments. None more so than The Factory, whose fractious internal politics saw them rip themselves apart mere months after they’d promised to steal the throne. Musically and aesthetically inspired by The Velvet Underground, The Stooges and The Doors, as well as 80s drone bands like Spacemen 3 and Loop, and fronted by the imperious vocal talents of Laima Bite, The Factory mined a groove so deep and so dark, light itself struggled to escape, “squalls of heavily-flanged guitars sweep everything from their path, swirling like a cyclone while the bass cuts a groove through anything that stands in its path,” went our review. Sadly they soon split; even more tragically they left no recorded songs to remind us of their brief glory. Never mind, we’ll never forget this astonishing show.

SEXTODECIMO –

The Wheatsheaf

March 2006

Back in November 2010’s metal special, Nightshift voted Sextodecimo as Oxford’s greatest ever metal band. We’d already had the band on the front cover a couple of years before this particular gig but by this stage the band had developed a sound so dense, dark, intense and, heck, LOUD that they almost rendered the term metal obsolete. “Two-thirds of the crowd evaporate as the band’s all-consuming grind spirals in on itself like a sonic black hole. Sextodecimo have travelled so far into rock’s black heart they’ve emerged on the other side into another world entirely. It’s like a radioactive fallout from Chernobyl has formed a band,” went the awed review; “worship them,” it concluded. Years later we still do.

Sextodecimo



FOALS / DEGÜELLO –

The Wheatsheaf

September 2006

Two astonishing local bands together; one would go on to be one of the most acclaimed bands on the planet, the other would be remembered by an elite few, but tonight – along with the astonishingly brutal Swarm – they were united in showcasing the thrilling new paths rock music could barrel down. Foals, just starting to explore their new math-disco sound, look like “a counselling group for musicians unable to find anyone to keep up with them,” while “hitting the funk button and freewheeling through a many-angled spazz-jazz math-rock tumult of tightly-orchestrated chaos,” while Degüello “could, at times, give Swans a run for their money in the sheer bloody brutality stakes”. Nightshift left the gig content that “the future of local music is in such safe hands”. We weren’t wrong.

THE LAST NIGHT OF THE ZODIAC – The Zodiac May 2007

A night of very mixed emotions as we bade farewell to the old girl, a home from home for

the best part of a decade and a half, the place set to be revamped as a shiny new Academy venue after long-time promoters Nick Moorbath and Adrian Hicks sold up after helping put Oxford firmly on the world’s music map. And what better way to say goodbye than get some of those bands who made the place what it was to reform and kick out the jams one last time? So **The Nubiles**, **Dustball** and **Unbelievable Truth** joined the stalwart likes of **The Relationships** and **Winnebago Deal** for a party to end all parties. People came from all around the UK to pay their last respects to the place that had been part of their youth – and in more than one case, met their future spouse. Stuff, characteristically, broke and the night ended with a set from **The Candyskins**, proving, once more, that they are a pop band to whom all others should aspire. Oh sorry, there seems to be something in our eye.

LITTLE FISH –

Thirst Lodge May 2008

Like a living embodiment of the spirit of rock and roll, Little Fish blew fiery fresh air into the local scene, Julia Sophie sounding like Patti Smith’s long-lost daughter at times, howling and sometimes screaming her lungs out in the pursuit of exorcising the demons in her soul, while behind her drummer Nez clattered his kit with nonchalant brutality. This particular show was the centrepiece of the 2008 Oxford Punt and such was the excitement surrounding the band that more people were crammed into Thirst Lodge’s intimate confines than was decent and when the band hit the stage, a certain graceful form of carnage was inevitable. So tightly packed was the crowd it was all you could do to stand and stare at the cathartic garage-hewn pop explosion on stage. A band who seem to pour every last drop of themselves into each performance, even by their own high standards, they excelled here tonight.

Little Fish



REMEMBER

STORNOWAY – The Sheldonian November 2009

On a night that transcended the word ‘gig’, Stornoway became the first band ever to play at the 550-year-old, Christopher Wren-designed Sheldonian concert hall. Stornoway have always been fond of unusual gig settings, from botanical gardens to dinosaur museums and the odd pool hall, but the grand, ornate setting of the Sheldonian suited them perfectly, the band playing virtually unplugged and backed for much of the concert by the Oxford Millennium Orchestra. There was an almost campfire intimacy about songs like ‘On The Rocks’, while ‘The Cold Harbour Road’ soared into the venue’s upper reaches like a cormorant above a bleak Hebridean beach. Every ounce of passion and emotion was wrenched from the performance where band and venue became one and when it was over the audience, who had sat in rapt silence throughout, rose as one for a roof-lifting ovation. Stornoway proved that rare as rock shows are at the Sheldonian, they are just as precious.

BELLOWHEAD – Truck Festival July 2010

Ever witnessed a packed Oxfordshire festival field go completely and utterly stark-raving



Bellowhead

bonkers? For a folk band? If you’d been at Truck in 2010 you would have. It’s a cliché to claim a band tore the roof off the place in a review but it was as true here as it’s ever been. Except Truck doesn’t have a roof, so Bellowhead tore the sky off the place instead, the folk big band, formed by local luminaries Jon Boden and John Spiers, unearthing classic songs from the past few hundred years and turning them into burlesque dance anthems, Napoleonic shanties kicked out with wild abandon, while Jacques Brel laments sounded as bold and brash as the drunken sailors they were written about. So spectacular and successful was Bellowhead’s Truck debut that they were promptly invited back to headline the following year. For who, on this evidence, could follow them?

FIXERS – Truck Festival July 2011

We didn’t know it at the time but this was to be Truck’s last hurrah – at least until it was taken over and hopefully set up for a few more years’ life – so it was fitting that it featured one of the great local band sets. Fixers are bat-mad psych-pop crazies but they are also entertainers, never content to knock out a few songs when they could dress up in daft costumes and pretend they’re performing on Saturn. And so we had the spectacle of Jack Goldstein garbed up like Captain Birdseye’s Hawaiian cousin, invoking the spirit of Sun-Ra as Fixers stormed through all the best bits of their electro-rave-60s-dream-pop catalogue. For all the silliness, this was classic pop fare – anthem after anthem after anthem, the sun beaming down on a Steventon field transformed into a Californian LSD commune party for forty minutes.



Fixers

Grey Children is a new project from David Griffiths, who used to sing in Witches and eeebeee.

Grey Children have recorded an album. It is called **Doctor, Doctor.**

It features amazing bands and artists such as **Little Fish, Tamara Parsons-Baker, The Evenings, Witches, T.Rextasy,** and many more.

Tony Visconti is also rather fond of it.

You may wish to **download it for free:** www.greychildren.co.uk

Grey Children are **raising awareness of Pure-O**, a little-known form of OCD that affects as much as **1.5%** of the population.

Pure-O affects adults and children alike. It is a **terrifying illness** that **destroys lives, families and relationships.**

You can find out more on the **Grey Children website.**
Thank you.

Family Machine

Quiet as a mouse

Available from 5th of March on
sheet music and digital download

free copies at
beardmuseum.co.uk/quiet
youarethefamilymachine.com

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101 Cowley Road, Oxford

SPRING OFFENSIVE

‘Worry Fill My Heart’

(Own label)

It won't be surprising to see 'Worry Fill My Heart' augmented with a variety of video and other presentational devices, as Spring Offensive are a modern, multimedia kind of band. They don't just let the songs speak for themselves; they're too savvy for that, and have created a convincing, specific world in which to inhabit; one that comfortably houses them as their songs and personality slowly take shape. The 'wimpy miserablists' tag they've attached to themselves as part of this seems too harsh: over the past year, previous single 'A Stutter And A Start' and a series of exceptionally high-quality gigs in Oxford and beyond has confirmed that they're a step beyond an average, run-of-the-mill 'local' band. A sense of drama, aesthetics and moment permeates their work, and this has generated something of a cultish, devoted following.

'Worry Fill My Heart' starts out as an archetype of what is already their familiar sound - skittish rhythms, a light touch on the rhythm



section, gently fractured guitars, and lyrics delivered in a conspiratorial and knowing style. The sonic palette is filled out by dulled, angry guitar noise in the distance, tying together the sparse song construction and contrasting with sweeter, echoed strummed chords. It seems influenced by, but not directly reverential to, the lush Foals sound of 'Total Life Forever' and (subtly, at least) the more out-there sounds of

bands like Sweep The Leg Johnny, with a sense of awkwardness and oddity. Overall, it reinforces Spring Offensive's previous work, but perhaps doesn't develop this as much as one might have hoped.

'Carrier' reminds us rather strongly of Fell City Girl in its vocal delivery style - simultaneously urgent and weary - and through the idea of a Mum-style soundscape being shaped into a pop song. It's a more interesting song than 'Worry Fill My Heart' in terms of texture, moving through several sections, transmuting the pomposity of prime Echo And The Bunnymen into something more delicate and naive.

Both songs display a keen grasp of dynamics and contrast - these are cleverly-constructed songs that are equally confusing and familiar. As part of an evolving sound, they don't stretch Spring Offensive beyond what will be already familiar, but they're certainly good listening, and display a clean, sharp recording style that suggests a band that is gaining an understanding of how they *want* to sound, rather than accidentally capturing what happens when they play together as a group.

Simon Minter



GUNNING FOR TAMAR

‘Time Trophies EP’

(Alcopop!)

Everything about the 'Time Trophies EP' sounds *big*. Immaculately recorded, with spot-on musicianship throughout, the songs speak of a band with ambitions far above the size of venues coming up on their upcoming tour.

'Astronaut-Abort' is the highlight here, a mini-epic in its own right, with a piano line twisting in and out of the guitar parts, and most of the last minute dedicated to a satisfying meaty and meandering instrumental coda that does the song justice in the finest manner. The earnest vocals and energetic, muscular guitar lines sound pleasingly mid-90s, bringing to mind old Revelation Records bands like Texas Is The Reason or The Movielife (there, and I did that whole sentence without uttering the dread 'e' word).

The addition of a Maybeshewill remix is, as with most remixes stuck on the end of an EP, somewhere between an interesting curio for huge fans of the band, and a nonessential makeweight. Still, the production's nice, with some clever out-of-phase stereo double-tracking and vaguely Moderat-ish synth parts, though it does make Gunning For Tamar sound a little too close to Enter Shikari for comfort.

Oh yes, and we should mention that the physical version, as befits a label well known for the more esoteric formats on the market, comes on a wristwatch. Our review copy was sadly online only, so I can't report on the accuracy of said timepiece, but if their playing on the EP is any indicator, it'll be Greenwich Observatory-standard.

Stuart Fowkes

JONQUIL

‘Point of Go’

(Blessing Force)

Jonquil have come a long way since their debut 'Sunny Casinos' back in 2006. With all the comings and goings in Oxford music in recent years and the waves made by singer Hugo's Chad Valley project, alongside the rest of the Blessing Force movement, it's easy to forget that Jonquil have been quietly excelling and reinventing themselves for well over half a decade now.

This latest chapter builds on last year's 'One Hundred Suns' EP, but whereas that EP still had moments of whimsy and the occasional lack of substance, this full album sees them painting

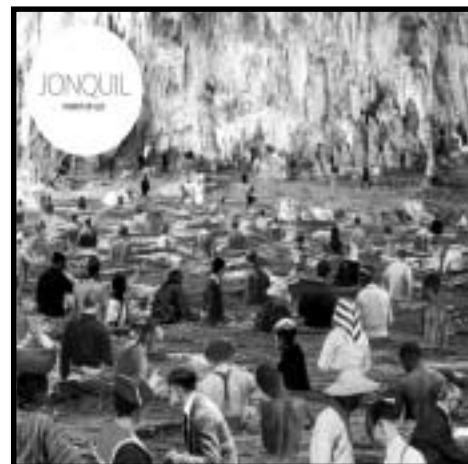
with a full range of colours.

They've pulled back a little on their earlier 'tropical pop' schtick, though it's still present in places - 'Mexico' is just a bit *too* sugary. 'History of Headaches', though, is a lovely, spacious song with a terrific break that makes a break a minute from the end into a panoramic final furlong. 'Getaway' crowbars a guitar solo that's almost Bryan Adams in amongst interlacing piano and synth lines, and manages to pull it off somehow.

Title track 'Point of Go' wanders off in the direction of Panda Bear, a reverb-drenched vocal hook repeating itself to fade over a Caribou-esque arpeggio, while 'Run' is the instant standout, some coruscating flourishes failing to conceal a fantastically-simple pop song at heart.

It's a record that sounds, above everything else, as if it was a joy to make, something that means it's going to soundtrack - deservedly - an awful lot of people's summers this year.

Stuart Fowkes



BRICKWORK **LIZARDS**

‘Zaman’

(Wingnut Music)

This 13-track debut album shows how, by mixing sounds as diverse as 1930s swing, spaghetti western themes, and the deep tones of Tom O’Hawk’s spoken word and rap vocals with Tarik Beshir’s contrasting Middle Eastern voice and beguiling oud playing, the genre-hopping Lizards have brought something refreshingly different to the local scene.

The tracks which are the most intriguing, ambitious and ultimately satisfying here are those in which neither Western or Middle Eastern sounds predominate but which have more of a balance between the two. Opener ‘Uska Dara’ is a jaunty Turkish folk tune given a dark twist by lyrics about possible redemption from dancing with the devil that could be straight from Robert Johnston or Tom Waits. ‘Higher’, again about redemption, blends a traditional Iraqi song with a mournful Western cello, Spanish guitar and melancholy trumpet and works beautifully. The instrumental title track ‘Zaman’ has a contemplative Middle Eastern feel, coupled with cool lounge jazz that hops over to what could be film music, while ‘Sahara’ builds to an ecstatic Middle Eastern climax, underpinned by a Western contemporary pulse.



The band are into lighter 1930s swing, ballad and crooner territory with ‘When She Whispers’, ‘The Things She Makes You Do’ and ‘Happy As Can Be’, however, they show their streak of black humour by following the sunniest happiest track on the album with ‘County Jail’, a prison gospel blues piece that has them waiting to hang and go straight to hell.

There are a couple of tracks here which seem too diverse even for this eclectic album: ‘The Wall’, which sounds Japanese, and ‘Song For Alice’, a very short keyboard solo. Overall though, ‘Zaman’ is a fine combination of fun and fine musicianship, and benefits from having been lovingly produced so all the twists and turns are easy to hear.

Colin May



THE FAMILY MACHINE

‘Quiet As A Mouse’

(Beard Museum)

While we often have The Family Machine down as being as cosy as an old sofa and as loveable as a shaggy dog, they can still spring a surprise on us, albeit it a gentle one.

‘Quiet As A Mouse’ teeters on the slenderest of acoustic guitar lines, sparse handclaps the only rhythm track and Jamie Hyatt’s doleful drawl entirely absent. His minimal vocal contribution is an easy, crooning backing to the female lead which sounds like Laura Marling absent mindedly singing ‘I Saw Mummy Kissing Santa Claus’ to herself while baking fairy cakes or something. Except she’s not baking fairy cakes. She’s breaking into your house. Quiet as a mouse. “I went through all

your things / Your books and dreams,” she chirps angelically. It’s probably a metaphor for something wholly evil, but seductive witch queen that she is, she’s got us thinking the whole business is as slight and pretty as an elf princess. It’s an illusion we’re more than happy to believe in completely.

Dale Kattack

ROBOTS WITH SOULS

‘Droids That Bleed’/

‘Watch Out!’

(Own label)

When the two members of Phantom Theory announced they were both working on side projects, lily-livered acoustica and woe-is-me mewling were never likely to be on the agenda. While guitarist/bassist Aaron Delgado has joined forces with former members of Dial F For Frankenstein and 50ft Panda in Kill Murray, drummer Steve Wilson has opted to go it alone. This double A-side single sees him accessorising the primal heaviness of his main band with bowel-loosening buzzing electronics. ‘Droids That Bleed’ might pass for stomp-along glam round the Melvins’ house, while it’s appropriate that ‘Watch Out!’ carries its own health and safety warning. A little clunky, perhaps, but there’s enough promise here to suggest that Robots With Souls could yet be the droids you’re looking for.

Ben Woolhead

SCOTT E COOPER

‘Homesick’

(Own label download)

Scott’s album was, he states, inspired by a trip to Bude in Cornwall and “centres around the theme of finding that spark in life to move forward”. Such romantic sensibilities are admirable but all too often difficult to live up to, as much of ‘Homesick’ proves.

Very much cradled in that safe, homely haven of folk-pop, Scott works hard to embellish simple, acoustic ballads with everything from seemingly token electronic bleeps and wibbles (notably on the title track’s opening reverie) to more fulsome and nuanced instrumentation – an almost jaunty piano line on ‘Sweet Nothing’, or sparsely plucked electric guitar and gentle horns on ‘Chant’. Sometimes this can leaven the mood enough to add some variety across eleven songs, but when it comes to the bit, it’s only the strength of the melodies and Scott’s ability to carry them matters. And this is where he too often falls short.

‘Chant’, for instance, promises to take the album to a higher level late on, but it ends up weighted down by heavy-handed harmonies and a leaden chorus that drag it into the realms of the mundane, while album closer ‘I’m With You’ paints a pretty pastoral picture that is never matched by the vocals and feels like an overlong plod along a deserted Cornish beach through a heavy drizzle.

There are moments of hope: the Paul Simon-like ‘Best Of Me’; ‘There You Go’ with its simple brushed-snare rhythm and organ hum, which lend it a far richer atmosphere, and the almost Arab Strap-like synthetic monologue that is ‘The Waking Hours’ all reveal a stronger side to Scott’s songwriting and singing, while ‘Broken Sleep’ is the album’s strongest melody and feels less emotionally detached than much else here.

Elsewhere though, there’s a mood of indeterminate melancholy that permeates everything and when Scott croons “You’re stuck in a cycle of self-obsessed yearning,” we wonder if he recognises the irony. Perhaps next year he might do better to go to Butlin’s on holiday instead of Cornwall. Rather than pedestrian whimsy, he might return with a songbook full of excitable jollity or, if our brief experience of the place is anything to go on, a barely-restrained desire to butcher every last human being on the planet.

Dale Kattack



GIG GUIDE

THURSDAY 1st

BAND OF SKULLS: O2 Academy – Southampton's blues-rockers launch their second album, 'Sweet Sour', having supported Black Rebel Motorcycle Club on tour in the States and opened for Muse and The Dead Weather over here. Their studiously dark-hewn form of melodic modern blues recalls The Kills and The Breeders as well as Led Zep and The Rolling Stones.

ALLO DARLIN': Truck Store – Elizabeth Morris plays a low-key solo instore ahead of her band's gig at The Cellar tonight.

Thursday 1st

ALLO DARLIN' / MOUSTACHE OF INSANITY: The Cellar

Anyone hankering for a time when indie bands still sounded like proper indie bands – you know, stuck together with sellotape and unrequited love, flogging badly-photocopied fanzines outside Talulah Gosh gigs and pinning photos of Clare Grogan over their beds – will be rapt with joy that Allo Darlin' are coming to town. And well they might, because they're bloody brilliant. From innocuous beginnings – originally the band was just Aussie-born Elizabeth Morris and her trusty ukulele – they've gone on to tour the States four times and been a star turn at End of the Road and Indietracks festivals. Elizabeth lives in London now and has a full band of beardy blokes to back her but the naïve, lovelorn pop dream continues. She can be twee and knowing at times ('Henry Rollins Don't Dance') but the personal, poignant nature of the songs marks Allo Darlin' out as a successor to the likes of The Shop Assistants and The Flatmates, while on new single 'Capricornia', the first song to be taken from forthcoming second album 'Europe', Morris shows she's possessed of a gorgeous, heart-melting voice that sounds like a young Kirsty MacColl. Support at tonight's Adventures Close To Home show are Moustache Of Insanity whose geeky, lo-fi indie pop sounds like a cross between Jeffrey Lewis and Weezer.

MARCH

ALLO DARLIN' + MOUSTACHE OF INSANITY: The Cellar – Divinely heartbroken indie pop of the old school – *see main preview*

CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre – Oxford's oldest and best open mic club continues to showcase local singers, musicians, poets and more every week.

COLLISIONS + BLOODLOSS + K-LACURA: The Bell, Bicester – Jambox metal night with a double-header tour from electro-metal groovers Collisions and full-pelt heavyweights Bloodloss, set to release their debut album 'The Struggle'. Local metalcore tyrants K-Lacura support.

JAMBOX ACOUSTIC & OPEN MIC NIGHT: The Wheatsheaf, Banbury – Tom Muddle, Oliver Coates, Karl & Amie and Ellie Hanger play unplugged, plus open mic session.

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon

FRIDAY 2nd

SETH LAKEMAN: O2 Academy – The Devonian folk hero launches his latest album – *see main preview*

A NIGHT OF QUEEN WITH THE BOHEMIANS: O2 Academy – Queen tribute.

SMILEX + THE CELLAR FAMILY + DEER CHICAGO + DJ THEORETICAL + HALF DECENT: The Jericho Tavern – Cult local rockers Smilex return to action after a lengthy lay-off, celebrating over a decade of riff'n'mayhem-based fun that's seen them mutate from blood and beer-spattered garage-noise to a more Guns'n'Roses-inspired rock outfit; they're never less than action-packed and given his time off, frontman Lee should be up for some characteristically OTT onstage action. They're joined by more recent local punk heroes The Cellar Family, whose spiky, sheet-metal post-hardcore recalls McLusky, At The Drive-In and Fugazi; epic shoegazers Deer Chicago, plus aspiring local rapper and beatmaker Half Decent.

KLUB KAKOFANNEY WITH THE MIGHTY REDOX + TORN LIKE COLOURS + LOST DOGS: The Wheatsheaf – Characteristically mixed bag of sounds from Klub Kak, tonight headlined by club hosts The Mighty Redox with their enduringly popular blend of swampy blues rock and witchy psychedelia. Bluesy soft rockers Torn Like Colours support.

THE WILL JOHNS BAND: The Bullingdon – Powerhouse blues-rocking from the UK veteran, inspired by Ry Cooder, Hendrix and Clapton, who mentored the guitarist in his younger days, Johns having gone on to play

alongside the likes of Joe Strummer, Ronnie Wood and Jack Bruce over the years.

SKYLARKIN SOUNDSYSTEM: The Cellar – Count Skylarkin's monthly reggae, ska and dancehall celebration, tonight featuring a live set from Belgium's Caroloregians, whose deep-fried reggae funk has seen them backing Trojan legends like Dave & Ansell Collins and touring across Europe and the USA. Veteran Bristolian ska godfather DJ Derek enters his eighth decade in irrepressible form, spinning his trademark selection of reggae, dancehall and soul, alongside Count Skylarkin and Indecision.

MOTOWN'S GREATEST HITS: The New Theatre – A night of classic soul and r'n'b.

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

COLLISIONS + BLOODLOSS + K-LACURA + HAUNTED TRANQUILLITY: The Wheatsheaf, Banbury – Jambox metal night.

SALEM RAGES + THE CELLAR FAMILY: The Port Mahon – Double dose of virulent hardcore and punk noise with Liverpool's Salem Rages out on tour to promote their new single, 'Our Halloween. Local firebrands The Cellar Family unfurl their tapestry of disgust in support.

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

DISCO MUTANTES: The Library – Italo-house, cosmic funk and rollerboogie session.

DISCLOSURE: The Swan, Wantage

SATURDAY 3rd

JONQUIL: Truck Store – Instore tropical pop fun from the local stars, launching their new album, 'Point Of Go'.

SPEECH PROJECT: The North Wall, Summertown – Oxford Contemporary Music's spring season continues with composer and producer Gerry Driver fusing folk minimalism with recordings of spoken word passages from some of Ireland's favourite folk icons – including Shane McGowan and Christy Moore. Catweazle Club host Matt Sage opens the show with his romantic 60s-inspired acoustic folk-pop.

MARIANA MAGNAVITA + ANA SILVERA + GIL KARPAS: The Cellar – Brazilian-born local siren Mariana Magnavita plays her first local show in some time, bringing a little bit of South American sunshine to the local acoustic scene, in the vein of Vashti Bunyan and Minni Ripperton. She's joined by former English National Opera singer Ana Silvera, whose piano-based song cycles explore fairy tales and folklore with a poetic lyrical edge. Former-Oxford based songsmith Gil Karpas, meanwhile brings his soul-infused electro-acoustic funk-pop along in support. Followed by Extra-Curricular.



PROPAGANDA + TRASHY + ROOM 101:

O2 Academy – Weekly three-clubs-in-one extravaganza with classic and contemporary indie at Propaganda; 80s hits and kitsch pop at Trashy and metal, hardcore and alt.rock at Room 101.

SIMPLE: The Bullingdon – House and techno with Waifs and Strays, plus Simple residents.

NOT TOO SHABBY + DEAD SAINTS:

Folly Bridge Inn – Bluesy rocking from locals Not Too Shabby, plus indie rocking from Manchester's Dead Saints.

MILLION FACES + K2: Witney Snooker Club – Benefit concert for Oxfordshire MIND with local rockers Million Faces and indie rock covers act K2.

THE PETE FRYER BAND: The Red Lion, Eynsham – Blues rock.

POWERTRAIN: The Swan, Wantage – Rock covers.

TREVOR WILLIAMS: Magic Café (1pm) – Emotive acoustic balladry from local troubadour Trev.

SUNDAY 4th

MATT CARDLE: The New Theatre – Biffy butchering *X-Factor* winner Matt heads off on tour to promote his debut solo album, 'Letters', keeping one eye on the fame clock. Tick, tick, tick...

BEARD OF DESTINY + MOON LEOPARD + PENNY & PHIL + SQUEEZY PHIL: Donnington Community Centre (6pm) – Free live acoustic session.

MONDAY 5th

KRISSY MATTHEWS + HIS BLUES

BOYS: The Bullingdon – The British blues scene's hot new talent comes to The Famous Monday Blues. Matthews, barely out of teens, is already being heralded as the best young blues guitarist in the country, having played alongside Robben Ford and Joe Bonamassa

SHARK DENTIST + OXFORD UKULELES: The Port Mahon – New ukulele-based music night.

TUESDAY 6th

HAIGHT ASHBURY + GRUDLE BAY: The Cellar – Shoegazy psychedelic folk from Haight Ashbury, plus chilled-out electro-pop and indie funk from Grudle Bay.

OXFORD IMPROVISERS ORCHESTRA: Old Fire Station – Oxford Improvisers bring their expansive orchestra to the live stage for a night of freeform virtuosity.

JAZZ CLUB: The Bullingdon – Free live jazz every week at the Bully's Jazz Club, tonight with guests Alvin Roy & Reeds Unlimited.

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

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Port Mahon

WEDNESDAY 7th

THE MILK: The Jericho Tavern – Chelmsford's young soul rebels bring their Stax and Motown-inspired r'n'b to town, riding high on the back of anthem-in-waiting 'All I Wanted Was Danger', coming on like a modern day

Dexy's or Geno Washington with their horn and hook-heavy sound, while bringing elements of Trojan reggae and hip hop into the mix.

ELLEN & THE ESCAPADES + TOLIESEL + SAM LEWIS: The Wheatsheaf – Bittersweet, harmony-drenched 60s-flavoured folk-rocking from Leeds' Ellen & the Escapades, sounding like a Yorkshire-based tryst between Bob Dylan and Kirsty MacColl. Support for tonight's Coo Promotions show are local indie-Americana types Toliesel and London's soulful country-folk singer Sam Lewis.

FREE RANGE: The Cellar – Hip hop club night with Elro, Ctrl Alt Crash, Stranger, Teknikal, Elements and MC Macular.

WEDNESDAY BLUES: James Street Tavern – Weekly jam session.

THURSDAY 8th

CAVE PAINTING: The Bullingdon – Elaborate, prog-tinged dream-pop from Brighton's spaced-out soundscapists.

RIZZLE KICKS: O2 Academy – Brighton's pop-rap duo enjoy their brief tenure as world-conquering chart stars on the back of their debut album 'Stereo Typical', part produced by Fatboy Slim. Having kicked off their career rapping over Arctic Monkeys and Lily Allen samples, the Brit School-produced pair create a goofy, toddler-friendly mix of hip hop, ska, funk and mariachi that sounds like a 21st Century update of 90s acts like Kid'n'Play and PJ & Duncan.

PINEY GIR + DENNIS HOPPER CHOPPERS + OLY RALFE + RICHARD WARREN: The Jericho Tavern – Kansas pop kitten Piney returns to her spiritual second home – see main preview

CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre

DOGSTATE + STILLPOINT + RUBBERTONES: The Bell, Bicester – Jambox rock night.

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon

FRIDAY 9th

RAE MORRIS: The Jericho Tavern – Blackpool's fast-rising blues and jazz songstress, whose smooth, emotive piano-based balladry recalls Joss Stone and Edie Brickell at times.

CHARLY COOMBES & THE NEW BREED + AIR CAV: The Bullingdon – Soulful, 70s-styled rocking from Charly and his band, back in local gigging action after a South American tour and set to release their new single, 'Sub-Divider' this month. Support from Manchester's darkly atmospheric popsters Air Cav, whose string-led drone-pop recalls 4AD's 80s output as well as Spiritualized's more considered moments.

LIANNE LA HAVAS: O2 Academy – Former Paloma Faith backing singer Lianne has found herself championed by Jools Holland before she's even released a record and counts Gary Barlow and Bon Iver as fans. Not surprising really given her smoky, passionate soulful voice that sounds like a young Erykah Badu at times, her tales of broken romances set to a classic soul and jazz soundtrack.

BOSSAPHONIK: The Cellar – Latin dance, Balkan beat, world breaks and nu-jazz club night with a live set from eleven-strong



Friday 2nd

SETH LAKEMAN: O2 Academy

While it's no longer appropriate to describe Seth Lakeman as the poster boy for new English folk music, he's hardly reached elder statesman level quite yet. It hardly seems eight years since the release of his Mercury-nominated debut 'Kitty Jay', possibly because Lakeman has been such an ever-present figure on the UK's live scene since, now an established festival crowd-puller. Like Pentangle in the 60s and The Pogues in the 80s, Lakeman brought a freshness and attitude to traditional folk music while remaining steeped in its often ancient history. Growing up in Devon he sang about the ghosts of Dartmoor and the English Civil War, while songs like 'Solomon Browne' update the classic seafaring tragedy tale with a real emotional hit. His new album, 'Tales From The Barrel House', which he recorded and produced by himself, and comes out on his own Honour Oak label, pays homage to Devonian miners, mariners and craftsmen, recorded as it was in the workshops and even down the mines at Morwellham Quay. A powerful singer and talented guitarist, it's when Lakeman picks up the fiddle that he really dazzles, with a style as close to Roy Williamson or even John Cale at times as, say, Dave Swarbrick, emphasising its droning, psychedelic capabilities. And live he is always, always, a superb performer.

Ethiopian funk collective The Fontanelles, playing tribute to the great Fela Kuti.

FUNKY FRIDAYS: The Bullingdon DOGSTATE + STILLPOINT + RUBBERTONES: The Wheatsheaf, Banbury – Jambox rock night.

ANYONE CAN CUE UP CDs: The Duke, St Clement's – In tribute to Jon Spira's *Anyone Can Play Guitar* film, the Duke hosts an entire evening of local music from assorted guest DJs. If they play Xmas Lights' 'The Threat Level Is Orange' in its entirety we promise we'll dance. You may want to look away and stand well clear, mind.

MARK McCABE + OXYGEN THIEF: The Port Mahon

PLAYMAKERS + EMPIRE AFFAIR: The Swan, Wantage



Thursday 8th

PINEY GIR / DENNIS HOPPER CHOPPERS / OLY RALFE / RICHARD WARREN: The Jericho Tavern

An exceptional bill of country-flavoured music courtesy of Coo Promotions tonight. Kansas-born, London-based songstress Piney Gir should be no stranger to local audiences after over a decade of gracing the Oxford scene, in particular as a regular at Truck Festival in her myriad guises (her debut solo album 'Peakahokahoo' came out on Truck Records and was produced by A Scholar & A Physician). From her early synth-pop roots she moved into full-on country mode with The Piney Gir Country Roadshow, but latterly seems to mix styles up, possessed of a sugar-coated voice that suits ebullient pop songs like new single 'Outta Sight' perfectly, while she can knock out a wistful torch song with equal ease. Joining her is Ben Nicholls, whose Dennis Hopper Choppers project has expanded from a solo concern to a full-on band with the recent addition of Acoustic Ladyland's Pete Wareham and Eno sidekick Leo Abraham. New album 'Be Ready' features the gorgeous, shimmering single 'Good To Me', and his mix of mariachi, surf and country-folk augments his rich baritone perfectly. Also on the bill are Ralfe Band frontman Oly Ralfe and Richard Warren, formerly of Heavenly sigings Hybirds and Mute signings Echoboy, as well as a touring member of Spiritualized and Mark Lanegan's band.

SATURDAY 10th

SPRING OFFENSIVE + BLUE ON BLUE: Modern Art Oxford – Single launch show from this month's Nightshift cover stars, plus sweetly pensive electro duo Blue On Blue – *see main interview feature*
FOXES!: Truck Store (4.30pm) – Instore janglefest from the one-time local popstrels ahead of their Cellar show tonight.
FOXES! + THE FAMILY MACHINE + COUNT DRACHMA: The Cellar – Former-Oxford-turned-Brighton-based janglers Foxes! return to their ancestral home to launch their eponymous debut album, evoking the spirit of 80s indie in effusive style. Local indie dreamers The Family Machine support. Followed by Extra-Curricular.
PROPAGANDA + TRASHY + ROOM 101: O2 Academy

HODGE PODGE: The Bullingdon – Festival fundraiser with live bands and DJs.
OPEN MIC SESSION: The Hollybush, Osney
ELECTRICHEAD: The Swan, Wantage – Rock covers.
ROOF THIEVES: Magic Café (1pm) – Rocking blues.

SUNDAY 11th

McFLY: The New Theatre – What with Harry winning *Strictly Come Dancing* and Dougie triumphing on *I'm A Celebrity...* McFly's pop career looks set for a revival this year, the enduring boy-band-with-guitars still able to pack out Wembley Arena despite disappointing sales of their most recent albums.
HAWKHURST: The Bullingdon – Female-fronted folk-rock from Abingdon's Hawkhurst.
OPEN BLUES SESSION: Cricketers Arms

MONDAY 12th

THE STRANGLERS + MIKE MARLIN: O2 Academy – The Men In Black return, now into their sixth decade together, and showing no sign of giving up any time soon. Back in the 1970s their aggressive form of pub saw them simultaneously adopted by the burgeoning punk movement and shunned by its prime movers, either for being too old or having a keyboard player, or just being a bit too yobbish for the art set. Over the course of 20 or so Top 40 singles and 17 Top 40 albums, they've moved far and wide from those punk beginnings. While 'Get A Grip' and 'Peaches' confirmed their image as violent misanthropes, 'Golden Brown', 'Skin Deep' and 'Always The Sun' are among the most beautiful pop songs to grace the charts. Of course the current Strangers line-up is hardly the classic incarnation, singer Hugh Cornwell having departed, amid scenes of characteristic violence, as far back as 1990 and things have never been quite the same, but with JJ Burnell, Jet Black and Dave Greenfield soldiering on with current frontman Baz Warne, plenty of old classics will get an airing
VIRGIL & THE ACCELERATORS: The Bullingdon – Wales's blues-rock power trio hit the road ahead of the release of the follow-up to their 2010 debut album 'The Radium', their high-octane sound in thrall to Hendrix, The Blues Breakers and Stevie Ray Vaughan.

TUESDAY 13th

KASSIDY: The Jericho Tavern – Big-hearted, even bigger-riffed folk-rocking from Glasgow's anthemic Kassidy, out on tour to promote debut album 'Hope St'.
OPEN MIC NIGHT: Cornerstone Arts Centre, Didcot
JAZZ CLUB: The Bullingdon – Live jazz from The New Jazz Collective at the Bully's free weekly jazz club. Did we mention jazz?
INTRUSION: The Cellar – Goth, industrial, EBM and darkwave club night.
SPARKY'S FLYING CIRCUS: James Street Tavern
OPEN MIC SESSION: The Port Mahon

WEDNESDAY 14th

ANTHRAX + DIAMOND PLATE + OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE: O2 Academy – The thrash-metal titans return to town – *see main preview*
PHAT SESSIONS: The Cellar – Full band jam session with The Phat Sessions Collective, plus an open jam session. Kid Fury spins a selections of funk, hip hop and soul tunes.
WEDNESDAY BLUES: James Street Tavern

THURSDAY 15th

LAZY HABITS: The Cellar – Hip hop-infused jazz from London's eight-strong collective who have supported Mos Def, Soulwax and The Specials in recent times, as well as stealing the show at venues as diverse as Glastonbury, Secret Garden Party and London's Jazz Café, bringing a decidedly cockney slant to their fusion of New Orleans jazz, soul, rap and 50s big bands.
ROOM 94: O2 Academy – Hertfordshire's soul-crushingly generic landfill sound makers return to town, apparently not having taken the hint last time.
STUKA SQUADRON + DEDLOK + AGONYST + SAVE THE SAVIOUR: The Bullingdon – A bunch of vampire Luftwaffe pilots inspired by classic Iron Maiden? That'll be London's Stuka Squadron, then. Classic metal dressed up in WWII uniforms, replete with fangs and air raid sirens. To quote Maximus in *Gladiator*, "Are you not entertained?" Seriously 'eavy punk-tinged thrash-metal support from local behemoths Dedlok and Abingdon's post-hardcore crew Save The Saviour.
CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre
HITCHCOCK BLONDE + THE BRINK + CLIPPER: The Bell, Bicester – Jambox rock night.
OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon

FRIDAY 16th

THE BIG TEN INCH: The Cellar – Count Skylarkin's monthly celebration of jump blues, rockabilly and swing, tonight with The Congo Faith Healers and Greg Butler – *see main preview*
GRUDLE BAY + MY GREY HORSE + JESS HALL: The Jericho Tavern – Daisy Rodgers Music Night with chilled-out electro-funk soundscapists Grudle Bay alongside Stratford's indie rockers My Grey Horse and emotive and quirky songstress Jess Hall.
MOON MOTH + EYES FOR GERTRUDE + TANUKI SURF: The Wheatsheaf – Chili Peppers-inspired funk-rocking from Moon Moth, plus support from Rugby's female folk-pop duo Eyes For Gertrude.
ROBOTS WITH SOUL: Truck Store – Single-launch instore show from Phantom Theory drummer Steve Wilson's one-man drone-rock machine RWS.
STEM + BEARD OF DESTINY + STEAMROLLER + SUPERLOOSE + DAVE & JEREMY: The Hollybush, Osney – Fundraising gig for Wittstock free festival.

TWINKLE & THE SLUTS + THE BRINK + PRIMER: The Wheatsheaf, Banbury – Jambox rock and metal night with Birmingham's sleazy female-fronted goth-rockers Twinkle & The Sluts.
HEADINGTON HILLBILLIES: The Chester Arms
FUNKY FRIDAYS: The Bullingdon
EMPTY VESSELS + HUBRIS: The Swan, Wantage – Ballsy blues-metal rocking from local faves Empty Vessels.

SATURDAY 17th

KILLING JOKE: O2 Academy – Welcome return to town for the industrial-strength post-punk behemoths – *see main preview*
THE HALF RABBITS + LISTING SHIPS + THE CELLAR FAMILY: The Cellar – Local

Wednesday 14th

ANTHRAX: O2 Academy

When Anthrax played at the old Zodiac back in July 2005 it felt slightly unreal to have such a titanic band playing such intimate confines. Seven years on and even with the Academy being double the size, it still feels a bit strange, given that the band are as popular now as they've ever been, having spent much of the last two years playing a rolling Big Four show as part of Sonisphere. Those shows brought together the four bands who rejuvenated metal's crumbling dynasty in the 1980s, Metallica, Slayer, Megadeth and of course Anthrax. Since their formation in 1981 they've sold in excess of 10million albums worldwide and become one of the most influential rock bands of the past 30 years. In that time they've undergone myriad line-up changes and a multitude of singers, the only constant being guitarist Scott Ian. From their early skate-punk-influenced racket, through classic albums like 'Spreading The Disease' and 'Among The Living' and a genre-breaking collaboration with Public Enemy on 'Bring The Noise', Anthrax have rarely lost their grip, surviving the vagaries of fashion by sticking relentlessly to their guns and retaining a sense of humour missing from their compadres. With Joey Belladonna now back in the fold and Charlie Benante and Frank Bello still solid, it's close to the classic Anthrax line-up on show tonight. And they're gonna rock. Like bastards.



dark-hearted post-punk types Half Rabbits launch their new remix album with a free give-away to everyone who comes to the gig. Their serrated mix of The Doors, Sisters Of Mercy and Chameleons comes topped with some suitably apocalyptic lyrical themes. Joining them are alternatively pensive and bulldozing post-rockers Listing Ships and marvellously misanthropic post-hardcore tigers The Cellar Family. Followed by Extra-Curricular
BLACK HATS + THE SCHOLARS + MATT MIDGLEY: The Jericho Tavern –

Ahead of the release of their new single, 'Kick In The Doors', (an understandable sentiment given Jim Morrison's abject loathsomeness as a human being), Black Hats give away free copies to the first 15 people through the door at tonight's gig. The spiky power-pop trio are joined by shimmering synth-rockers The Scholars.

SNORKEL: Modern Art Oxford – Sub-aquatic explorations into jazz, afrobeat and dub from the London-based collective at tonight's Oxford Contemporary Music show, fusing experimental psychedelic repetition with intense polyrhythmic grooves.

UNHINGED SOUND SYSTEM: The Bullingdon – Drum&bass with Mzone, Mark EG and the Unhinged crew.

PROPAGANDA + TRASHY + ROOM 101: O2 Academy

CLARE FREE: Bowyers Arms, Radley – Local blues guitarist.

THE PETE FRYER BAND: The Cricketers, Temple Cowley

MAEVE BAYTON & IAN WYCHERLEY: Magic Café (1pm) – Quirky blues and balladry.

SUNDAY 18th

KLUB KAKOFANNEY ACOUSTIC SESSION: The Wheatsheaf (2.30-7pm) – An afternoon of acoustic acts, hosted by Phil Freizinger.

MONDAY 19th

MATT TAYLOR & THE MOTIVES: The Bullingdon – Contemporary blues with a virtuoso touch from the acclaimed guitarist who has played with Gary Barlow, Belinda Carlisle, Jamie Cullum and Joe Bonamassa as well as part of Snowy White's Blues Project, and who has been hailed as a natural successor to Eric Clapton's throne.

JOAN BAEZ: The New Theatre – Without a doubt a musical – and political – legend. Baez's 50-year musical career has seen her release some 30 albums, moving from the early-60s folk revolution scene (along with then boyfriend Bob Dylan) through a career that's taken in gospel, blues, rock, and country. Her collaborations read like an A-Z of rock's great and good through the years, from Paul Simon to Bruce Springsteen, while her tireless campaigning for civil rights, anti-war and environmental causes would be enough on its own to secure a place in the history books.

OXFORD UKULELES: The Port Mahon – Live music from Sheik Anorak, Colin Webster, Mark Holub and Lunatic Toys.

OPEN MIC & JAM SESSION: The Ampleforth Arms



Friday 16th

THE BIG TEN INCH with THE CONGO FAITH HEALERS: The Cellar

Continuing to prove that the past is the future and classic dance music can never die, even if the people who made it have long since passed on, Count Skylarkin's Big Ten Inch celebrates the best jump blues, rockabilly and swing every month. Tonight's party is particularly special since it welcomes to town for the first time The Congo Faith Healers, a band whose reputation on the festival circuit in particular is growing and growing. Steeped in swampy Creole blues and voodoo music, the band's blend of skronking brass, rockabilly rhythms, primal rock'n'roll guitar and Latin American beats harks back to another age, while still sounding fresher than most modern rock or dance music. Unsurprisingly Imelda May and Mark Lamarr are already big fans and the band's debut album, 'Juju Mix', was produced by Chris Kimsey, famed for his work with The Rolling Stones. So go get your finest whisky bottle and best dancing shoes. Just to make sure the vintage dance party goes with a real swing Festival's Black Dahlia grandmaster Greg Butler will be manning the decks, armed with his trademark crates of vintage shellac 78s to spin dancefloor tunes from beyond the edges of time. Come closing time you won't want to be back in the 21st Century.

TUESDAY 20th

SPIRITUALIZED: O2 Academy – Jason Pierce prepares for psychedelic lift-off again – *see main preview*

JAZZ CLUB: The Bullingdon – The Hugh Turner Band provide the live sounds at tonight's Jazz Club.

SPARKY'S FLYING CIRCUS: James Street Tavern

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Port Mahon

WEDNESDAY 21st

CHRIS REA: The New Theatre – The gravel-voiced blues-rock veteran airs old hits from his 80s heyday, like 'The Road To Hell' and 'On The Beach', as well as songs from his new album, 'Santo Spirito Blues'.

WEDNESDAY BLUES: James Street Tavern

FREE RANGE: The Cellar - Hip hop club.

THURSDAY 22nd

CHIMAIRA + REVOKER + NEOSIS +

BLACK SKIES BURN: O2 Academy – Ohio's metalcore types hit the UK in support of their sixth album, 'The Age Of Hell'; they're joined by Welsh Roadrunner signings Revoker and Switzerland's electronic concept metallers Neosis.

BEAVER FUEL: The Bullingdon – Scuzzy indie with a toilet humoured delivery from the local rockers.

CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre

LOSER TOKEN + EAST END PROMISE + TENTH LISTEN: The Bell, Bicester – Jambox rock night.

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon

Saturday 17th

KILLING JOKE:

O2 Academy

If they appoint a Composer In Residence for the apocalypse, chances are Jaz Coleman will get the job. He formed Killing Joke back in 1978 with Paul Ferguson, Kevin 'Geordie' Walker and Martin 'Youth' Glover, ostensibly to create music for the end of days. In that aim they've been pretty much on the nail, their eponymous debut album redefining post-punk rock and inspiring a legion of bands, from Nirvana, Big Black and Nine Inch Nails to Lamb Of God, Rammstein and Ministry. Their brutish industrial dance came with a Wagnerian stomp and live Coleman was – and remains – a shamanic figure, invoking demons few mortals can begin to comprehend. Over three decades and fourteen albums Killing Joke have undergone myriad line-up changes but with the sad death of Paul Raven, the original line-up reconvened and together recorded 'Absolute Dissent' in 2010, an album that sounds every bit as potent as their earliest offerings. Of course the music press hated them back in the day and commercial success was modest, but the band's influence has grown if anything and in recent times they've been awarded Lifetime and Innovation awards by the likes of *Kerrang!* and *Classic Rock Magazine*, as well as appearing at festivals as diverse as ATP and Sonisphere. And when Killing Joke hit the stage tonight – 26 years after they provoked a riot up at the old Polytechnic – by God, you'll know you've been hit.



FRIDAY 23rd

LOS CAMPEsinOS!: O2 Academy –

What's this? Los Campesinos! do sad and sultry? Well, sort of. The expansive twee-pop outfit's recent fourth (fourth? Jeez, where does the time go?) album 'Hello Sadness' was their break-up album, adding a darker, more romantic edge to their shouty indie euphoria.

OLD SKOOL ACADEMY: O2 Academy – Like what it says on the box, a night of old skool dance hits, with live sets from Shades Of Rhythm and Liquid, plus DJs Osprey, Marty P and more.

THE DOWN & OUTS + KOMRAD + TENTH LISTEN: The Cellar – Benefit gig for the Oxford Wheels Project, raising money for a new skatepark in town. Liverpool's singalong punks The Down & Outs headline, with support from fiery local tech-core monsters Komrad and melodic noise band Tenth Listen. Followed by drum&bass club night HQ.

MATT WINKWORTH: Cornerstone Arts Centre, Didcot – Campy oddball cabaret pop from Mr Winkworth, injecting a light-hearted sense of the ridiculous into his Brecht and Weill-inspired music hall.

LOSER TOKEN + RYKER SEAR + KAOS + TURNING DAYS: The Wheatsheaf, Banbury – Jambox rock night.

INVISIBLE VEGAS + THE JUKES: The Swan, Wantage – Rocking roadhouse blues from Invisible Vegas.

FUNKY FRIDAYS: The Bullingdon

SATURDAY 24th

GAZ COOMBES + THE FAMILY MACHINE: East Oxford community

Centre – After last December's solo live debut at the Rotunda in Iffley, Gaz Coombes returns with a full live band – including brother Charly, and former-Ride sticksman Loz Colbert – but an equally intimate setting, to play a set of songs from his forthcoming solo album, 'Here Come The Bombs', his new songs taking a left turn from Supergrass, with a more electronic, sometimes krautrock-inspired sound. We've heard it. It's bloody great. Support comes from The Family Machine, launching their excellent new single, 'Quiet As A Mouse'.

GUNNING FOR TAMAR + JUMPING SHIPS + DEER CHICAGO: The Cellar –

Rising local math-rock faves Gunning For Tamar launch their new wristwatch-based single on Alcopop! with support from labelmates Jumping Ships, the effervescent Brighton-based indie rockers set to release their new single 'Standard Bearer' for Alcopop! Epic shoegazing rockers Deer Chicago open the show, riding high on the acclaim afforded their debut single, 'Lantern Collapse'. Followed by Extra-Curricular.

BLACK SKIES BURN + CRYISIS + DEDLOK + OVERLORD + SOMNUS: The Wheatsheaf – Quintuple helpings of all that's good and heavy in life, courtesy of Buried In Smoke, including extreme death-cum-thrash brutality from Black Skies Burn, punk-infused thrash merchants Dedlok and new thrash kids on the block, Crysis.



Tuesday 20th

SPIRITUALIZED:

O2 Academy

Jason Pierce is a man obsessed by love, death and God. The man who launched his musical career with the seminal Spacemen 3 back in the mid-80s with the slogan Taking Drugs To Make Music To Take Drugs To, and himself nearly died in 2005 when he succumbed to pneumonia and a collapsed lung, has ploughed a singularly spiritual furrow ever since, those major themes never far from the surface of his music, which itself is as grand as those themes would suggest. Spiritualized have always been a pretty linear continuation of the sound that Spacemen 3 created: a narcotic-fuelled blend of 60s garage rock, krautrock, Sun Ra-inspired jazz, southern soul and gospel that's woven with masterful artistry into a beautifully hypnotic wall of sound which veers between mournful paeans to love and death to sky-touching improvised cacophonies. Such grandiosity reached its pinnacle with the massed horns and strings masterpiece that was 'Ladies & Gentlemen, We Are Floating In Space', which Pierce played in its entirety at the Royal Albert Hall back in 2009. The long-awaited new album, 'Sweet Heart, Sweet Light', is out next month and promises a more stripped-down and poppier direction, but live Spiritualized's power remains undiminished, and with a few choice Spacemen 3 classics always snuck in amid the extensive back catalogue, there are few better ways to completely lose yourself for a couple of hours.

THE BOOTLEG BEATLES: The New Theatre – Reliably extravagant tribute to the Fab Four.

PROPAGANDA + TRASHY + ROOM 101: O2 Academy

PULL UP: The Bullingdon – Lovers rock, reggae, dancehall and r'n'b, including a live PA from former-Tradition singer Paul Dawkins, best known for his lover rock anthem 'To Love Someone'.

PAUL DUGGAN: Magic Café (1pm) – Mellow café sounds from the blues pianist.

SUNDAY 25th

OPEN BLUES SESSION: Cricketers Arms

OPEN JAM SESSION: The Swan, Wantage

MONDAY 26th

THE MITCH LADDIE BAND: The Bullingdon – Electric blues from north eastern guitarist Mitch at tonight's Famous Monday Blues, inspired by John Mayer, Stevie Ray Vaughan and Hendrix and who has been out on tour in support of Walter Trout.

TUESDAY 27th

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

SPARKY'S FLYING CIRCUS: James Street Tavern

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Port Mahon

WEDNESDAY 28th

GOOD OLD BOYS: The Wheatsheaf – 50s and 60s r'n'b from the London veterans.

PHAT SESSIONS: The Cellar - Live band and open jam session.

WEDNESDAY BLUES: James Street Tavern

THURSDAY 29th

CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre

SIX BULLET CHAMBER + EVERYTHING BUT ARMS +

LIBERATION ACT: The Bell, Bicester – Jambox rock and metal night.

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon

OUTPUT: The Cellar

FRIDAY 30th

JAGUAR SKILLS: O2 Academy – Return to town for the ninja-obsessed hip hop DJ with his eclectic mixing skills. As ever... HoooOOO!

THE GRACEFUL SLICKS: The Wheatsheaf – Garage-rock and psychedelia 60s style from The Graceful Slicks.

THE MIGHTY REDOX: The Chester Arms – Funky blues, swamp-rock and psychedelia from the local stalwarts.

SLIDE: The Bullingdon – House club Slide teams up with the Red Bull Music Academy to present a night of house and techno.

BASSMENTALITY: The Cellar - Future dub with Iration Steppas.

PETER & THE WULF + JESS HALL + SHRUTI PROJECT + TREVOR

WILLIAMS: Isis Farmhouse – Acoustic session.

MOON MOTH: The Swan, Wantage

SATURDAY 31st

PROSPEKT + RED SEAS FIRE + RISEN IN BLACK + THE CRUSHING + EMPIRE DIVIDED: O2 Academy – Skeletor dish up another molten night of metal with progressive local faves Prospekt mixing technical virtuosity with sludgy riffage somewhere between Opeth, Rush and Meshuggah, while Risen In Black thunder in between death and thrash metal and The Crushing add a dash of panto theatre to their old-school thrash.

GAPPY TOOTH INDUSTRIES with SECRET RIVALS + VODOO RAYS + AGS CONNOLLY: The Wheatsheaf – Characteristically mixed bag of styles at this month's GTI, with synth-pop-infused indie rioters Secret Rivals now picking up plays on Sky Sports as well as plaudits in *NME* and beyond, coming in somewhere between The Cure's sultry pop and the girl-boy clarion calls of Bis and Huggy Bear. They're joined by east London's Voodoo Rays, named after one of the greatest dancefloor classics of all time but sounding more like a collision between Pink Floyd and Sonic Youth, and local country-folk singer Ags Connolly, with his Johnny Cash and Kenny Rogers-inspired campfire storytelling.

IMPERIAL LEISURE: The Cellar – Skronking, horn-heavy ska-rocking from London's party faves Imperial Leisure, back in town after their appearance at Arcane Festival last autumn. Followed by Fresh Out The Box.

MOON MOTH + BILLY RAY CYPHER + DAVE OATES + BEARD OF DESTINY + CHILLUM: Café Tarifa (5-8pm) – Quickfix present a late afternoon / early evening of unplugged live music, including Whitney's Chili Peppers-inspired funk-rockers Moon Moth.

PROPAGANDA + TRASHY + ROOM 101: O2 Academy

SIX BULLET CHAMBER + EVERYTHING BUT ARMS + THE REAPER: The Wheatsheaf, Banbury – Jambox metal night.

CLARE FREE: The Fox Inn, Middle Barton

LOST CHIHUAHUA: The Swan, Wantage – Rock covers.

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The Jericho Tavern: 01865 311775
Fat Lil's: 01993 703385
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LIVE

Wild Swim photo by Marc West



WILD SWIM / GRUDLE BAY / INCHTIME

Modern Art Oxford

Pindrop Performance host Seb Reynolds thanks the initially sparse crowd for making our way through the snow to get to tonight's show but it's scant effort compared to Inchtyme who has come all the way from Australia to play to a dozen hardy souls.

His laptop-based sonic moonscapes are appropriately played out in front of a projection of *Bladerunner*. The undulating, gently shifting electronic patterns

and subtly dubby beats merge with the visuals and as Rutger Hauer plays out his role as sci-fi's greatest noble savage Inchtyme's starlit ambience washes through us like a gentle blizzard of sonic snow.

The *Bladerunner* visuals have, of course, been provided by Grudle Bay, who last month declared it their most indispensable album. Live the duo expand to a full four-piece band, complete with drummer, and thus they're far more aggressive

and full-bodied than their softly trippy recorded work so far. At times they remind us of former Oxford faves The Egg, with their almost jam-band-like dynamics, while elsewhere they're closer to Trophy Wife's slightly woozy indie-funk, but often you feel they're lacking in the melody department, even as they ratchet up the grooves. It's encouraging that a new song, not far off Wild Beasts' rarefied space-pop, is the

strongest moment of the set, which promises better things to come and when they let the synths fully dominate the guitars they sound so much more like an original act.

There's little risk of Wild Swim's music falling on the wrong side of the originality line. There are reference points for sure, but more in the spirit with which they tinker with pop than in their actual sound: Japan and The Associates spring to mind for fleeting moments as the quintet spice up their electro-heavy sound with almost operatic, often eastern motifs and the way they let songs shape-shift unpredictably reinforces comparisons to such maverick pop talents.

They touch bases with Radiohead and Talking Heads too, but again, more in their approach to melody and rhythm than their actual sound, unafraid to gambol off towards pastures new lest the – now sizeable crowd – get too comfortable. Fidgety electric piano passages are cut through by odd guitar shapes and embellished by shifting textures, but always, always the centrepiece of the band is singer Richard Sansom's powerful but idiosyncratic voice, one that can switch from portentous, even pompous, to fragile in the blink of an eye. Like the band's surging songs, there's a lack of histrionics for all that power and on the few occasions when the band do slip down a gear and sound a little ponderous, his voice takes hold even more.

Tonight we've merely braved snow to be here tonight. The way Wild Swim are going, it might not be long before people are crawling over broken glass to witness them.

Dale Kattack

JAMES VINCENT MCMORROW /

ROB BRAVERY

O2 Academy

Despite the O2 Academy being fit to burst, tonight's atmosphere is still light and cheery, mostly thanks to support act Rob Bravery's Ed Harcourt-like smooth vocals and Jamie Cullum-like piano jangling.

It is a shame, then, that despite his credentials, he is yet another support act that is barely given a second thought, the crowd seemingly giving the singer-songwriter as much attention as they would a CD provided to fill the awkward silences that occasionally spring up in conversations that apparently cannot wait a couple minutes.

But as soon as James Vincent McMorro projects a single syllable, it is evident that what was Rob Bravery's weakness is the headline act's gain; within seconds the bearded Irishman

has the venue as loud as it would be empty, and justifiably so. You feel it's telling that, at first, it is difficult to decipher whether some sort of Auto-Tune device is being used, such is the quality of the lead man's vocals and his backing band's harmonisation. This chemistry is evident throughout, and not only from the music they and their instruments produce – they all look happy, as if they're as comfortable as they would be rehearsing just amongst themselves. McMorro is even chipper enough to admit he thinks of himself as "the Elvis of the indie-folk world".

Although he says this purely for comedic effect (one senses he is in a particularly jovial mood this evening), you cannot help but feel he is far closer to reaching the iconic status he refers to

than he thinks. Although his band are hardly harming his case any time soon, there is no denying who the star of the show is. Whilst the inevitable camera-phones and gawping mouths rightly come out for McMorro's chilling cover of Steve Winwood's 'Higher Love' (of LoveFilm fame), we alike can't help but merely stand and stare as he gives such belters as 'If I Had a Boat' and 'From the Woods!!' the epic finale they deserve. Time and time again there is a slight pause just after he finishes doing his bit, time that is needed to digest what we just experienced before we show the man how much he is appreciated.

As if this isn't enough, McMorro even gives us a new song; the good news is that it makes you think twice about whether he was joking when he referred to himself as 'the Elvis of the indie-folk world', the bad news is that (at the time of writing at least) we don't know when we can get our hands on it.

Nick Beaver

M83

O2 Academy

M83's latest album 'Hurry Up We're Dreaming' has not exactly been welcomed with open arms. Although it is true that the double album feels a little overlong and bloated there are a number of fine moments to be found and Anthony Gonzalez seems to have done a fine job at picking these out as tonight's set concentrates firmly on his latest album rather than heading way back into the past just to pacify older fans.

Once the mind-bending, seemingly endless intro-tape fades away M83 launch into the phenomenal syncopated synth attack of 'Intro'. Where Zola Jesus handled the vocal duties with Gonzalez on the album, tonight it's down to Morgan Kibby to make the song soar, which she does with considerable ease. It's perhaps Kibby's presence that means that the majority of tonight's set is drawn from 'Hurry Up...' and 'Saturdays = Youth' (she co-wrote a lot of the material on these albums). Interestingly, Gonzalez takes something of a back seat tonight, leaving Kibby to take on the role of fronting the band. It's not entirely surprising as her voice lights up every song that it graces – 'Kim and Jessie', and

'Steve McQueen' for example.

Fortunately for Gonzalez the material he's picked from 'Hurry Up...' is infinitely more exciting in a live setting that the record suggests. 'Midnight City's siren synths and 80s sax solo seem to make perfect sense at full volume and become a forceful call to the dance floor. Yet it's down to 'Saturdays = Youth' to provide tonight's high points. 'Skin Of The Night' is stunning, with Kibby perfecting a beautiful siren call for the verses that doesn't sound a million miles away from Kate Bush in her pomp. 'Couleurs', meanwhile, is reworked into a full-on dance anthem which finds the band members attempting to start the dance once again. It's quite tricky after the beguiling 'Skin Of The Night', but such is the forceful nature of the reworking that the dancefloor is quickly heaving once again. It's a shame that the only early M83 track that gets the nod tonight is 'Teen Angst', but perhaps Gonzalez wanted to prove that 'Hurry Up...' isn't the stinker many believe it to be. On tonight's performance, you'd have to say that he has a point.

Sam Shepherd

FINK / RACHEL SERMANNI

O2 Academy

Scottish singer-songwriter Rachel Sermanni douses folk melodies with intricate turns layering them under pitch-perfect vocals, both drifting through octaves with ease. Her playful nature is evident, both in style and content, especially in the likes of 'Pirate Song', which boasts the opening line, "I pulled the plug and travelled down the drain pipe". In entirety her set ranges from the poignant and melodic 'Sleep', which gives a nod back to more traditional numbers, to the dark and angry riffs of 'The Fog', culminating into a varied and diverse offering that leaves a hungry lust for more. Meanwhile Fink, the artistic alias of long-time Ninja Tunes signing Fin Greenall, exudes brooding ambience, cramming his set with sombre rhythms and hypnotic vocals. At times I find myself lost in the old fashioned desk lamp back drop, mind wandering to anything but the music. It's clear within minutes that the power of the set is firmly placed in the melodies and sweeping refrains. The sound draws you in, eliciting an emotional response even without full

attention to the lyrics.

Opener 'Biscuits' fuses a heartbeat drumbeat over dark lyrics that serve to remind anyone who's spent a grey day in October pushing paper in an office of the futility of it all. Elsewhere 'Blueberry Pancakes' manages to musically convey the euphoria of love, combined with depression of its end, subtly flicking back and forth between styles. The music and subject become one, each feeding and drawing from each other. 'Fear Is Like Fire' drifts out of the ambient realm into heightened rock but it follows a similar pattern, word and music bound together, each completing and complementing the song.

Whilst each song brings individual subtleties the night seems to drift into one, all sense of time and space removed. The trippy elements of Fink's music seems to transfix the audience, until glazed eyes seem commonplace and I leave having experienced a cocktail of emotion-ridden moments which linger on long after the set is drawn to a close.

Lisa Ward



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LIVE

Photo: Johnny Moto



VIENNA DITTO / YELLOW FEVER / WHO'S FELIX

The Wheatsheaf

Who's Felix are a young band barely a year old. Their cheerful lack of polish complements their

meaty but loose sound, though the Cure influences are worn too prominently to let their own

identity through. The singer's voice struggles at higher volumes but as the set progresses into quieter

keyboard-led territory the interest picks up considerably. There may be enough potential here to warrant a second look, in due course.

Yellow Fever are the undoubted stars of tonight's Klub Kakofanney show. Singer and guitarist Dele Adeweyo has just turned 18, opening up gigging opportunities they seem eager to grasp. Half-Nigerian Dele is a big Fela Kuti fan, which emerges in his guitar solos and infectiously danceable compositions.

This is married with an indie sensibility with more than a hint of Arctic Monkeys or even The Jam, particularly in the wordy, storytelling lyrical style. They still need to find their own voice and work on more musical depth and variety but the set is relentlessly upbeat, the band wearing permanent smiles that may hint at quiet ambition, and the crowd is suitably wowed.

After this adrenaline overdose Vienna Ditto bring the pace down a gear. A vocals and keyboards duo, their own description of 'voodoo sci-fi blues' is equal parts accurate and misleading but either way they're an intriguing proposition. Conjuring up smoky nightclubs, maybe in Berlin rather than Vienna, their strong sense of style has not surprisingly turned heads at the BBC, including Tom Robinson and Huw Stephens. In fact their second gig was on the BBC Introducing stage at Glastonbury. There are clear reference points, from Lana Del Rey to Portishead, but 'Snowbound', from their new single is catchy and well-crafted. All this stylishness is somewhat incongruous in the cheerfully unshowy context of Klub Kak, but there is undoubtedly an appetite for this kind of torch song escapism, particularly in times of recession.

Art Lagun

NUCLEAR SKYLINE / VERY NICE HARRY / ARTCLASSSINK / THE JUKES

The Bullingdon

It's All About The Music, as the promoter's name would have it. Watching a band like The Jukes, you wish it were about something else, for once. Lightshow; dancing gimps; contentious race politics. Anything to distract from their atonal chugging guff, that's like the Portsmouth Sinfonia playing Franz Ferdinand. A trumpet adds a little James-esque flourish, but the gig is unsalvageable.

"It's a very, very nice song", announce Artclasssink, before launching into something. They're confident and audacious; we like that. They're also wrong, of course. Like a desperate pool player, smacking the white up the table in

blind hope, they shoot at various styles – Psych? Funk? Skank? Shoegaze? – but tend to end up muddled after a minute or so, looking to the incomprehensible vocal yelps to drag the song home. Yet there's something loveable about this band, not least their evident self-belief. We feel musicians *should* grow up in public, so good on you, Artclasssink. Now get better.

Very Nice Harry shine in this company, with a highly polished melodic set of energetic, atmospheric pop. They're at their least convincing when trying to be Foals (as is everyone except Foals, let's be honest), but

when they create more space in the music, with some neat delay pedal use, and drizzle it with *Blake's 7* synths, they boast some really quite impressive, dynamic songs, allowing Sam McNeill's lithe, clear vocal lines a chance to unfurl. Very promising. Do you know what I mean, Harry?

Nuclear Skyline look excitingly like a greasy rockabilly bassist has gatecrashed a teenage grunge act, but they sound like any other clod-hopping, inexperienced punk band. Good spirited fun, of course, but lacking in anything memorable to balance the lack of musical prowess. Currently it's brash and ballsy but not very interesting. They've got a Black Flag T-shirt and a shiny double bass, though. We're sure they'll come up with something, given time.

David Murphy

NEW NOVETA / LISTING SHIPS / MANACLES OF ACID

Modern Art Oxford

"Is it art or just a load of arse?" is an oft-asked question and tonight we get a literal dose of the latter with the supposed former in the form of New Noveta, a performance-art side project of Maria & The Mirrors who have replaced their full band selves tonight.

Ahead of their promised confrontational performance, local electro-squelchers Manacles Of Acid do exactly what they promise with their name, rebooting 80s acid house with an authentically rough-hewn analogue edge, while Listing Ships wage a war of attrition on themselves, grinding juggernaut bass, sheet metal guitar and brilliantine synth lines against each other in a shifting sea bed dynamic that occasionally sinks into ponderous doldrums before rousing itself in a storm-tossed release of pent-up tension, climaxing with the thunderous '100 Gun Ship'.

And then things get a bit strange and silly. Stripped half naked, New Noveta have covered the venue floor with industrial polythene and proceed to smear each other in pieces of fruit and fish to a soundtrack of short-circuiting electronic mayhem, while a strobe casts the crazed spectacle in a disorientating light. Back and forth to the pile of food at

the side of the room the pair go, returning to wrestle each other as scant clothing blurs into flesh and the room is filled with an increasingly sickly mixture of over-ripe melon and seafood. It feels like an overstretched build-up to something truly astonishing, but ten minutes later it's all over. The strobe stops flickering, house lights go up, the promoter calls for a round of applause from a confused, numbed crowd and New Noveta begin the process of cleaning up their mess.

So... are we stunned and shocked by such a challenging display of rule-breaking art attack? Well, no, not really. It's little more than one step up from nude female mud-wrestling, and one step down from a food fight in a crèche; the music sounds like an out-take from an old Atari Teenage Riot bootleg and given the disorientating effect of the strobe, a couple of times the spectacle looked like nothing more than two drunkards trying to hang their laundry on a line to dry. Still, it does add new meaning to the question, "can I have some more bass in my monitor please," and we wander into the night wondering if New Noveta have just invented chubstep.

Dale Kattack

BABYBIRD

O2 Academy

Stephen Jones is a man riled – so much so that it seems he's built a career on it. It could almost have been deliberate that his band became best known for an often misunderstood song – the anticipation of which hangs in the air tonight like a dirty plastic bag caught on a washing line.

The mid-late 90s expansive guitar sound is still in evidence, but the music largely feels secondary to Stephen's lyrics and voice. He carries the words' emotions masterfully, his weariness picking its way carefully between anger, resentment and resignation. Tonight's journey takes in self-loathing ('Goodnight'); hope and despair ('Send Me Back My Dreams'; 'Unloveable'), via musings on parenthood ('Like Them'; 'I Love Her'). Songs like 'Drug Time' aren't subtle, but aren't mawkish either. The mood conjured by the repetitious, menacing insistence of songs like 'Back Together' and the internet stalker tale 'www.song' seems effortless.

These mini sagas are punctuated by some heated chat and banter with the audience. 'Cornershop' is "dedicated to our government for slowly destroying life", and the gloriously sinister 'Bad Old Man' is dedicated to Louis Walsh, not far off the luminaries it was rumoured to be about at the time.

"Everything's written from a happy place; I'm not a tortured artist!" Stephen insists, somewhat belligerently, and his encore is announced by an acerbic "I've just found my happy pills backstage!"

Stephen complains that "someone's got Gorgeous Tourette's" after only three songs, but the band do eventually play that huge hit, and even the arrangement seems reluctant. He almost spits his parting shot – "You wouldn't want me to sing that to you if you knew the real meaning of the words" – suggesting the hecklers have hit a nerve about a misunderstanding of Babybird in general. There has long been far more to them than that, though.

Kirsten Etheridge

JON COHEN EXPERIMENTAL / ABANDON / MUSTARD & THE MONOCLE

The Wheatsheaf

Tonight is a Gappy Tooth Industries night at its best, showcasing a raggle taggle line up of evolving troubadours from beyond the county and beyond the country. Missing members, going it alone or trialling a new project, they each perspire and unfurl their own keen spirits and ultimately entertain us in that "glad you came; glad we came" Oxford way.

Wiltshire's Mustard & The Monocle are a sprightly young bunch, with a cartload of interesting Mumford-style folk-rock tunes and an inoffensive demeanour. Maybe as they are, tonight, without their keyboard player, they could add a real life fiddle player to go alongside the lemon twist of Chris Difford-style vocals, instead of the guitarist playing the descant part; then perhaps the promising 'New New Song', which gets people up and dancing, would really take flight.

Now living and working in a studio in Reading it's good to see Umair Chaudhry back in town, debuting the first live performance of his Abandon project. Whenever his work on the brilliant limited edition 'Monsters EP' is discussed, words like bleak, doomy and gothic inevitably crop. Here, with just a bassist and his own chiming guitar and laptop, I'm more impressed by the magisterial nature of it all, epic in its slow motion Sigur Ros-like

processional gait, and despite the vocals jarring live instead of being mixed back and wonderfully droned as on the CD, this is a performance to close your eyes to and savour, as it breaks down every resistant bulkhead in your body.

Jon Cohen is reverse engineering himself. A true veteran of every worthwhile band on the Montreal scene, most notably the late-90s incarnation of The Dears, he has spent the subsequent years casting off the concepts and traditional formulaic mores of music making, which inevitably brings him to his own ground zero and singularity of self. Surrounded by a DIY steam punk of loop machines and personal electronica, he has me from the moment he asks everyone at the start to shush up and take a second to listen to his gong. From then on every full-on, clattering, funky rumba-based anti-folk song, like 'Midnight Train' and 'My Weakness Is My Strength', comes topped and tailed with a great piece of spoken life philosophy, as it crescendos with his frequent, kneeling, sallies into the audience, the loops pumped to full OMD max, and the Zen war of ceaseless action and timeless recreation that's going on inside of him, compels everyone who rejoices in their own spiritual safaris to envy his itinerant gusto.

Paul Carrera



Jon Cohen photo by Paul Carrera



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DR SHOTOVER

Bicentennial Special -

Interview With The Ham Squire

Ah, you're the cub reporter from *Sports Goth Weekly*? Ms Cringley, you say? Charmed, I'm sure. Are you old enough to be out at this time of night in a den of iniquity like the East Indies Club bar? Mind you, many of us have been here for the last 200 years, and it's amazing how young we all still look. Must be something to do with those, ah, Transylvanian transfusions we keep getting from our medical colleague Nurse Feratu, or is it the gentle pickling induced by our "special" club cocktails? Talking of which, my dear, why don't you pull up a pew and catch the eye of Bedingfield our cadaverous bar steward... then you may ask me some questions, after the correct libational niceties have been observed. Line 'em up just there, yes, that'll do fine. Oh, and get one in for our Esteemed Editor, why don't you? He is the eerily-smiling fellow in the monocle and long dark cape, just further down the bar. He wears the latter so that the blood of innocent young bands

whom he has slaughtered doesn't show, you know... [wheezy laugh/cough]. Now, ask me anything, ANYTHING. Just don't expect me to remember much after the 80s. Yes, that's 1880s. Now, where were we? [The background music gets louder – a semi-Teutonic female voice over flanged guitars: "Waiting for the Night Shift... Waiting for the Night Shift"... as Dr S talks animatedly into the ear of the doll-like Ms Cringley in a darkened corner of the East Indies Club bar... the lights begin to fade...]

Next Month: Boozy & The Banshees



"Excuse me while I adjust my helmet" - Dr Shotover cosies up to Ms Cringley in the Aleister Crowley Memorial Room

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INTRODUCING....

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

JADA PEARL

Who is she?

Local r'n'b, soul and acoustic pop singer Jada Pearl, 25, has been a presence on the local scene for a few years now, usually adding a sprinkling of soul to other acts' music, notably GTA, with whom she earned a Nightshift Demo Of The Month back in 2008. She's been a singer since the age of eight, and recording since she was 14, inspired by her mother, also a singer, attending stage school and graduating in performing arts. Possessed of a tightly-controlled, wide vocal range, her talents have seen her working with producers such as Fuzzy Logic. Her debut single, 'All My Love', was released on a London-based indie label last year, while her new single, 'Like That', is released this month.

What does she sound like?

Jada's rich, soulful voice is a pretty versatile instrument, so she can turn her hand to a variety of styles: last year's 'All My Love' was soulful funky house, while her latest, 'Like That', is darker, a brooding, pensive dubstep piece based around the piano riff from Mike Oldfield's 'Tubular Bells' part that provided the theme to *The Omen*. Within the song Jada switches between playful to strident, while elsewhere she's capable of Mariah Carey-like acts of vocal acrobatics.

What inspires her?

"Life, books, conversations and personal experiences. All help me to be creative and get in a zone. Amy Winehouse inspired me in the subject matter in her songs: very personnel and story telling. What I take from her is liberation."

Career highlight so far:

"Getting the first funky house song that I wrote signed."

And the lowlight:

"Being booed off stage when I was 17."



Her favourite Oxford act is:

"I guess the ones that we can *all* look up to that have made it big are Supergrass and Radiohead; they are examples of real music in a way that they were a group of local musicians that came together and created some amazing original material, and so close to home."

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

"Back in Black' by Amy Winehouse"

When is her next gig and what can newcomers expect?

"My next gig is in London, I'm afraid. Newcomers can simply expect to see me in action, and see what I'm about."

Her favourite and least favourite things about Oxford music are:

"Favourite has to be the diversity. The least is that we don't really have a lot of music venues."

You might love her if you love:

Minnie Ripperton; Beyoncé; Amy Winehouse; Mariah Carey; Ms Dynamite.

Hear her here:

Facebook/jadapearl. A selection of videos, including 'All My Love' are on Youtube.

ALL OUR YESTERDAYS THIS MONTH IN OXFORD MUSIC HISTORY

20 YEARS AGO

Oxford's close association with Aylesbury raised its head again in Curfew's March 1992 interview with the band **Blood Oranges**, who no-one could really decide which town they actually came from. Not that it mattered too much since they sounded a lot like The Chameleons, which instantly made them great. Which was a bonus since their interview reveals little other than they liked football and were incapable of having a band photo taken with the guitarist's eyes open. Still, it was a classic piece of reportage compared to a mini feature on Chinnor metallers World Gone Crazy, whose pearls of wisdom included the claim that they "don't like to be categorised." Crazy times, dear reader. Elsewhere there was good news on the local venue front as **The Pennyfarthing** re-emerged as a home for gigs (albeit temporarily), while the **Arena** nightclub on Cowley Road started hosting live music, courtesy of one **Spike Holifield**, bass player with Sinead O'Connor, later to become sound engineer at the Academy. The Arena is now a block of flats.

Curfew's main live review this month was from Ride's show at the Apollo, while coming to town in March were perennial pub rock faves Dumpy's Rusty Nuts; American hardcore heroes Action Swingers (still regarded as one of the greatest gigs ever at the old Jericho Tavern) and Ipswich's indie darling Bleach – previously Ride's tour support.

In the demo pages newcomers **Sevenchurch** were starting to show the world a whole new level of doom, while one curio from that issue was an advert stating that a local band called **On A Friday** had

changed their name to Radiohead. Wonder what became of them.

10 YEARS AGO

The main news in March 2002 was the announcement that **Mindsurfer**, **Miazma**, **South Sea Company Prospectus** and some young scamps called **The Young Knives** were the first batch of names to be confirmed for that year's Oxford Punt. The main interview was with **Goldrush**, who, as well as running **Truck Festival** and **Truck Records**, had recently signed to Virgin and were fresh from supporting Elbow and recording a session for Steve Lamacq's Radio 1 show. They waxed lyrical about their shared love for The Band, Neil Young and The Handsome Family, while Robin Bennett pondered the possibility he might the alt.country Fred Durst.

The Candyskins released a posthumous 'Live At The Zodiac' album, while ebullient local faves The Samurai Seven released their first single for four years, 'Lucky Pierre'.

Electric Soft Parade, American Head Charge, Clinic and Will Haven were the big names coming to town, while local bands treading the boards included **Marconi's Voodoo**, **Caliber**, **Smilex**, **Mackating**, **Centre Negative** and **Coma Kai**.

In the demo pages "skin-stripping, hellbastard, vicious, brutal and nasty" metallers **Faith in Hate** were top of the pile, while the hapless **Touched** sounded like "Sting with a large cotton wool ball up each nostril, holding a conversation, Johnny Morris style, with a hippo, to the tune of Toto's 'Africa'." Actually, that sounds pretty awesome.

5 YEARS AGO

Whoa, spooky. Guess who's on the front cover and the main interview exactly five years on? Yes, it's **Goldrush** again, who by this time have become an established cult concern over in the States, both in their own right and by touring as former-Ride man Mark Gardener's backing band. In March 2007 they were set to release their third album, 'The Heart Is The Place'. Robin Bennett spoke of the magic mushroom influence on the new record and the affect of supernatural forces surrounding the band and Truck Festival.

In local music news the **Oxford Folk Festival** announced Eliza Carthy and **Spiers & Boden** as headliners, while **Young Knives** were set to play their biggest hometown gig so far at Brookes. Sadly Nick Simmons, landlord of the Victoria in Jericho was found dead, putting an end to live music at the pub. Previous Nightshift cover stars **Belarus** split up.

Long-time Nightshift favourite **Richard Walters** released his 'Pilot Lights' EP and there were releases too from **Smilex** and **The Sad Song Co.** the solo project of Unbelievable Truth and Dive Dive drummer Nigel Powell. The month's gig highlights included Tilly & The Wall, Charlotte Hatherley, John Cale and Unearth at the Zodiac, with Idlewild and Bright Eyes playing up at Brookes.

Ragged, lo-fi punk-metallers **Randall Flagg** were Demo Of The Month, while **Juxstar** occupied the Dumper spot for their "polished, glossed-over wedding reception rock," the review concluding that the band's song 'Chocolate Pie' was "more like a shit sandwich." Some things never change

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DEMO OF THE MONTH

UNPUNISHED MONSTERS

As any fool knows, what dangerously talented young rockers really fantasise about is being, oh yes, Gary Numan. And so it is that Gus Rogers, formerly singer with Dial F For Frankenstein and lately frontman with the equally excellent Kill Murray, turns in this surprisingly un-rocking electro demo, which opens with the track 'Negative Capability', in which Gus morphs into Gaz, only not the usual Gaz of 'Are 'Friends' Electric?' and 'Cars' hitmaking fame and fortune but the Gaz of the early-90s when he decided to try and be Prince for a couple of albums (y'know, just before he decided it was more productive to try and be Trent Reznor, a man who, just to confuse matters, had started his career trying to be Gary Numan in the first place). So anyway, Gus makes a pretty decent Gaz-as-Prince, particularly vocally, the acid squelch of the synths mixing with funky beats. Thereon in, Unpunished Monsters tread an oddly beguiling path between knowing 80s pop fetishism – 'Neon Lung' feels like a warped tribute to Kraftwerk, albeit via LCD Soundsystem – and a somnambulating form of spaced-out and spooked electro soul. Demo highlight is 'Moon Dance', which sounds like the last smoochy dance at the robot disco seen and heard through the haze of several glasses too many of whatever it is they serve up at robot discos. At times you're transported unapologetically back to some long-lost early-90s rave but for all its electro transpotters' fantasy spot-the-reference approach, it's a wonderfully coherent exercise and a salutary lesson that some bastards get all the bloody talent.

PAUL BRENNAN

This CD is entitled 'True Love Waits', so we opened it and thought, for one giddy moment, we'd been sent the new Tom Waits album. Curse these teasing local pop people. While he might not sound like he's just ingested a bottle of whisky and an entire tobaccoconist's like Mr Waits, Witney-based singer-songwriter Paul Brennan exists in almost as dark a place as old Tom. Each way you look there are tales of, usually alcohol-affected, heartache and disenchantment. 'Stay With Me Tonight' is a particularly maudlin acoustic lament, Paul's sleepy-eyed singing style reminiscent at times of both Candyskins' Nick Cope and Idlewild's Roddy Woomble. 'When I Told You I Loved You' is even more funereal, a lost-love affair with the demon drink again a central player in

the plot, the overriding lesson of the song ('I'm pretty sure when I told you I loved you, I was holding a drink') echoing that other former-Candyskins Cope chap Mark in his bleak Nine Stone Cowboy guise. We hit rock bottom (subject-wise – we're really quite enjoying this, truth be told) with 'Drunken Stroll', which digs deeper still into the more desolate corner of melancholy and comes up smelling of day-old Shiraz and regret, a relentlessly downbeat piano-led slice of self-hating reflection. By contrast, demo closer 'Love Is So Blind' is positively jolly, very much in the vein of Roddy Woomble's folkier excursions. The five songs here maybe don't hit the raw nerves of pop's finest arch miserablists, but Paul has a pleasingly desolate sense of melody and an enticingly emotive voice that convinces you his tales are from the heart rather than random pages ripped from The Big Book Of Pop Angst.

THE SHAPES

More melancholy here from The Shapes (well heck, it is the depths of winter and as we sit here going through the demo pile the Met Office has just issued a Level 3 cold weather warning, which means they expect people to drop dead from the soul-chilling conditions), though compared to Paul Brennan they're approaching barrel of laughs status. Opener 'Baby You're Strange' is a downbeat, country-tinged lullaby led by a delicate mandolin chime, the overriding Dylan and Band stylings cut through with a softer 80s pop feel, not unlike Lloyd Cole. The song's problem is that it doesn't sound like it can decide whether it's royally fed up or maybe in the mood for shaking off those blues and popping down the pub, so it leaves in a strange middling no-man's land. 'Getting It Right This Time', by contrast lives up to its title and finds The Shapes in far bouncier mood, cute female backing vocals giving it a much sweeter pop feel, and while it hardly knocks planet pop off its axis, it's damn near impossible to dislike. Unlike cheesy demo closer 'Queen Of The Scene', which is by-rote feelgood pub rock with the lamest of blues edges that might be an old Del Amitri cast-off or something The Beautiful South thought up when Paul Heaton wasn't around to exercise some quality control.

ZAOS

A sharp change of musical style now, though the mood remains less than chirpy, as local death-groove metallers Zaos take a sledgehammer to any notion of romantic self doubt or morning-after regret, their singer, Mike Goodson (Garlgax The Destroyer to his *World Of Warcraft* chums) instead genuinely sounding like a badly hungover Uruk-hai vomiting last night's dinner (twelve pints of heavy and a razorblade and sprout vindaloo)

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proudly down the nearest lav. It's great, grim super-heavy stuff, but never relentlessly so – the guitar takes proggy detours, while piledriving drummer Rob Hembrow varies the paces enough, Mr Goblin Tonsils up front gargling ever more hellishly the slower things proceed. Opening track 'Metamorphic Disarray' has the merest hint of Faith No More at their heaviest about it but soon we're grinding and pillaging our way through yer actual Meshuggah territory, growling, screaming and blast-beating a path through most people's notions of musical subtlety. Great stuff then, though a small part of us secretly hopes all three of Zaos work in a call centre dealing with complaints about insurance policies or council refuse policies and speak to customers in the same voices they perform with. In fact it should be the law that all call centre employees speak like this. That'd stop the tedious moaning bastards from complaining just cos their bins didn't get collected on time.

LEST WE FORGET

Metal of a very different density here from Lest We Forget who feature two classically-trained musicians in their ranks. It shows to an extent since, technically at least, they're more accomplished than many fret-mangling heavyweights in town, but sadly they're not nearly as exciting as four-to-the-floor vomit goblins like Zaos. It takes them two and a half songs to even get halfway to anything like full throttle, opener 'So It Begins' being a scene-setting instrumental overture, while 'All The Empty Promises' feels ponderous, like all the pieces have been carefully and correctly assembled but someone's forgotten to charge the batteries. Vocally in particular, it sounds limp; a decent growler might have made the most of the pensive guitar arrangements instead of adding to the feeling it's all going nowhere in no great hurry. 'When Angels Fall' does up the ante considerably, but while our attention is at last pricked, what's on offer is pretty standard metalcore fare, dual growly/clean vocals and plenty of chance for the lead guitarist to show off his chops, but it's wandered off message by the long overdue end as a desire for histrionics overcomes any sense of cohesion or malice, and come the equally overlong 'Death Us Do Part' the horrendously nasal lead vocal is turning the whole thing into something approaching a pastiche of metal's supposed menace. In fact it's dangerously close to the sort of spandex-ripping power ballad bands like Poison inflicted on metal's battered reputation in the 1980s. Time to stick Zaos back on the stereo and quick.

TRAPS

If Lest We Forget's vocalist sounds like he's letting the side down with an apparent lack of effort, maybe he could take some lessons from Traps singer Lex, who, if nothing, else, sounds like she's busting a gut to get as much emotion into every line as is humanly possible. Which is highly admirable but it feels like there's too much disassociation between her and the rest of the band. While she's bellowing it out in

stridently soulful fashion they sound like a punked-up, speed-addled shoeegaze band trying to punch their way out of a locked room. A wall of effects-heavy glissando rises and falls turbulently on 'Day I Decided To Change' while Lex hollers with great gusto and the end product reminds us of All About Eve if they'd ditched the gothic fairy whimsy and started knocking out blues power ballads sometime around 1986. 'Dolls House' is more jagged and less strident but again the overdriven nature of the song and the polish which coats it makes it feel like The Sundays if a major label marketing drone had replaced all their idiosyncratic charm with stage school technical perfection. 'Studying Napalm' is the best song here, the vocals more soulful, almost conversational by comparison, while the band seem more at ease simply rocking out. Traps have got something here, and you feel they'd make more sense live where a bit of volume and a few rough edges would take it all to a higher level, but for now, it feels like a decent band in need of less polish.

THE DEMO DUMPER

JANE DOE

Well, here's an appropriate name for a band. Jane Doe manage to be both lifeless and anonymous, incapable or unwilling to commit themselves to any musical style or infuse themselves with even the barest semblance of attitude. Instead they're a cipher of a rock band, seemingly placed on this earth to occupy that void where landfill indie and soft-centred hair-metal might meet if they could only realise how much they have in common (utter stinking shittiness to be precise). On a good day, squinted at from a certain angle, your brain perhaps befuddled with the remnants of last night's Rioja, 'Stand Together' might pass as a modern day protest anthem, although if the Occupy protesters adopted anything like the lily-livered fortitude displayed here they'd deserve every baton round and teargas pellet the capitalist system could muster. Onwards they flounder without a single original thought in their collective head. We got a bit giddy at one point thinking they'd snuck a subliminal mobile phone ringtone in the middle of one particularly laborious congealed sausagemeat of a song but it turned out to be an actual phone call and we spent five minutes answering some call centre dronebot's customer survey questions rather than listen to any more of the innocuous slobucket shitemongery herein contained. But, dear reader, there is an especial treat in store for us before it's all over and we're finally free to throw ourselves under the next passing refuse truck. A cover version of Arcade Fire's 'Keep The Car Running' that serves to suggest Jane Doe either have a grasp on the irony of their chosen name, or else they're so dumbfuckedly delusional a future weighted down at the bottom of Oxford Canal with their identifying features chopped off or filed down is the only decent option in a civilised society.

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

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Propaganda Trashy Room: 101

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Thurs 1st Mar • £15 adv
Band of Skulls

Fri 2nd Mar • £18 adv
Seth Lakeman

Fri 2nd Mar • £10 adv
6.30pm
**A Night Of Queen
with The Bohemians**

Thurs 8th Mar • £10 adv
Rizzle Kicks

Fri 9th Mar • £10 adv
6.30pm
Lianne La Havas

Mon 12th Mar • £23 adv
The Strangers + The Popes

Weds 14th Mar • £20 adv
6.30pm - 10pm
**Anthrax + Diamond Plate
+ Obsessive Compulsive**

Thurs 15th Mar • £10 adv
6pm
Room 94

Sat 17th Mar • £19.50 adv
6.30pm - 10pm
Killing Joke
+ Icarus Line + The Crying Spell

Sat 17th Mar • £5 adv
Upstairs in association
with BBC Introducing

Tues 20th Mar • £17.50 adv
Spiritualized

Thurs 22nd Mar • £16 adv
Chimaira + Revoker
+ Neosis + Black Skies Burn

Fri 23rd Mar • £10 adv
7pm - 10pm
Los Campesinos!

Fri 23rd Mar • £12.50 adv
11pm - 4am • over 18s only
Old Skool Academy
ft. Shades of Rhythm (live),
Liquid (live), Marty P, MC Osprey,
Old Skool Jezza, Invisible Man,
Danny Rose, MC Faze, Prism,
Old School Academy

Fri 30th Mar • £15 adv
10.30pm • over 18s only
Jaguar Skills
+ Loadstar + Zinc + DJ Cable

Sat 31st Mar • £7 adv
6.30pm
Skeletor ft. Prospekt
plus Red Seas Fire, Risen in Black,
Crushing, Empire Divided

Sat 7th April • £5 adv
6pm
**MMG Oxfordshire
BOTB County Final**

Fri 13th April • £17 adv
Graham Coxon

Sat 14th April • £9 adv
6.30pm
Orange Goblin
+ Grifter + Desert Storm
+ Komrad

Sun 15th April • £19.50 adv
**An Evening With
Martin Stephenson
& The Daintees**

Tues 17th April • £9 adv
Delilah

Fri 20th April • £10 adv
6pm - 10pm • seated show
Charlene Soraia

Fri 20th April • £14 adv
6.30pm
Bow Wow Wow

Sat 21st April • £5 adv
Upstairs in association with
BBC Introducing ft. Lake Poets

Tues 24th Apr • £15 adv
The Lemonheads

Thurs 26th Apr • £8.50 adv
Futures

Fri 27th Apr • £14 adv
6.30pm - 10pm
Ladyhawke

Sat 28th Apr • £7 adv
6.30pm
**Skeletor
ft. The Safety Fire**
+ K-Lacura, Zaos,
Save The Saviour, Elysium Waits

Sun 29th Apr • £10 adv
Blood Red Shoes

Tues 1st May • £13.50 adv
The Rapture

Fri 4th May • £10 adv
6.30pm
Guns2Roses

Sun 6th May • £15 adv
Ultimate Eagles

Thurs 10th May • £16 adv
Newton Faulkner

Fri 11th May • £10 adv
6.30pm
Brokencyde
+ Psycho Dalek

Sat 12th May • £12 adv
Boot Led Zeppelin

Thurs 17th May • £7.50 adv
Fixers

Fri 18th May • £7 adv
6.30pm
Dick Valentine
(Acoustic)
+ Lewis Watson

Sat 19th May • £5 adv
Upstairs
in association with BBC
Introducing ft. Admiral Fallow
+ Adam Barnes

Thurs 24th May • £15 adv
Blancmange

Thurs 31st May • £18 adv
Half Man Half Biscuit

Fri 1st June • £7 adv
6.30pm
Tragedy
All Metal Tribute To The Bee Gees

Sat 2nd June • £20 adv
6.30pm
Peter Hook & The Light
Perform 'Unknown Pleasures'
A Joy Division Celebration

Sat 2nd June • £10 adv
6.30pm
The Smyths

Thurs 7th June • £10 adv
Belleruche

Fri 22nd June • £10 adv
Definitely Mightbe
Oasis Tribute
& Changing Man
Paul Weller Tribute

Sat 6th Oct • £12.50 adv
6.30pm - 10pm
Azealia Banks

Fri 12th Oct • £12 adv
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