

NIGHTSHIFT

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"I want to play with the idea of a woman being driven to the point of madness where she does an unthinkable deed."

TAMARA & The Martyrs

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A quiet word with

TAMARA & The Martyrs

photo: Bruce Markos



“I HAVE A TRULY horrendous laugh. A friend once told me quite matter of factly, ‘Your singing voice is much more beautiful than your speaking voice’. Harsh but true. I also can’t yawn quietly and I’m currently working on my ‘Yawn Opera’ which will wow audiences but inevitably send them to sleep.”

NIGHTSHIFT HAS JUST ASKED Tamara Parsons-Baker what would be the biggest surprise for anyone who met her, knowing her only for her songs.

We only ask because if Tamara was anything like the subject of her music, you probably wouldn’t want to meet her. You’d hide the sharp cutlery and lock yourself in a secure cupboard. Here are songs of overwhelming passion, neglectful fathers, spurned love, death and infanticide, sung with a fiery intensity by a woman who declares in her own lyrics to be “a real bad lover.” To enter Tamara Parsons-Baker’s musical world is to enter a snowstorm of wild drama, desolate emotional turbulence and dark, dark thoughts. But it’s not a world without light or humour. What’s as

enthraling and unnerving as the predominantly bleak lyrical content is the way it’s often presented in an almost jaunty fashion, with hints of Weimer-era cabaret evident in the big, baroque arrangements. So while the harrowing ‘I Stuck It Out’, is musically sombre and tense, the equally tragic ‘Daddy’ is something of a roustabout romp.

And then of course, there’s the fact that Tamara’s debut album, recorded with her band The Martyrs, is called ‘Girl Jokes About Boy Parts’.

IN REAL LIFE OF COURSE, Tamara is far from the murderous, on-the-edge wreck of her songs. Like all great songwriters, she has the gift of bringing emotional extremes and tragic tales to startling life, to the point the listener feels completely immersed. It helps that she has a simply stunning voice; one that can turn on a sixpence, from brooding introversion to almost operatic heights of gothic drama, with hints of influences as diverse as Tom Waits, Sinead O’Connor, PJ Harvey, Jacques Brel and Amanda Palmer in her range.

In this she is brilliantly aided and abetted by The Martyrs, her band

that features Smilex guitarist Tom Sharp and former-Sextodecimo and current Epstein drummer Tommy Longfellow, and until recently included another ex-Sextodecimo chap Humphrey Astley, who has left to concentrate on his Masters degree and work on his own Huck & The Xander Band project. Each of them is used to playing in bands where intensity and extremism were cornerstones of their appeal.

TAMARA’S STORY BEGINS a few years ago when she went to university in Bath, before immediately deciding to move to Tokyo for a year. “By the time I got to university I had caught the travelling bug and so when the opportunity arose to spend a year studying in Tokyo I jumped at the chance. I won a scholarship from the Japanese University in Tokyo and blew the first instalment on a beautiful Takamine guitar from the instrument-filled streets of Ochanomizu. I had always been singing and wanted to learn the guitar for a long time but was way too shy having been surrounded by some seriously heavyweight musicians at school. Being in Tokyo enabled

me to start from the beginning and let myself develop naturally as a musician without any peer pressure or competition. My first gig was at a little bar called Cosmos Café in Shibuya; I was so nervous, drank too much whisky, slurred my words and swore a lot between verses as I tried to place my fingers on the right strings. From that moment I was hooked and spent every spare moment I had practising. By the end of the year I was gigging round Tokyo, had a regular well-paid hour slot at a very reputable hostess bar and had recorded two EPs. It was the first time I returned from a stint abroad with money in my pocket and confidence in my ability to become some sort of musician.” Did that give you the confidence to get involved in the Oxford scene? “I finished my final year of university and continued to play gigs in Bath and Bristol. Returning to Oxford and penetrating its music scene was comparatively hard. I was still finding my musical identity and I don’t think I or other people really knew where to place me. I had mixed receptions and even in a place like Oxford my double-barrelled surname didn’t help. The feedback was that my voice

was good, which was positive, but I knew I wanted my song writing to match up. I had a clear idea of the songwriter I wanted to be but it would take a lot of work to get there. I only feel like I’ve become that person in the last two years: able to write and arrange songs as I want them and be able to express myself musically from inception to reception.”

PERHAPS UNDERSTANDABLY given the nature of her music Tamara’s local gigs quickly picked up some fanatical fans; does she think the intensity of their feelings is a reflection of her music’s own intensity? “It’s a hard one to answer. I’ve had people approach me in tears telling me that a song reminds them of their mother or father, or that it just stirred them emotionally in some way. I don’t go out there intending to upset people and I don’t sit down thinking, ‘How sad can I make this song?’ I do want people to feel something though. In contrast, when the Martyrs perform we can get a whole room dancing and yelling. Music that has some kind of impact and is emotive is the music that I love listening too and connect with the most. That has obviously affected my writing; I wouldn’t be able to write in any other way. I also believe that it’s good to be able to experience this level of intensity as a songwriter, musician, audience-member. When we are low we might put on a sad album or conversely something happy to cheer us up. Live gigs can be experienced and prescribed in the same way. If it gets too much you can put on some Lady Ga Ga afterwards and jump around.” There’s some serious soul-bearing and emotional intensity in your songs; do you find music a good outlet for your emotions? “Like most people in life, I have experienced some incredibly tough things. But I think I am generally a very up-beat, energetic person with a good sense of humour. I find it very hard to talk about my feelings and emotions – ask any of my ex-boyfriends – but for some reason I have no problem addressing these feelings in my music. It is definitely the outlet for my emotions. That can be quite jarring for people who get to know me well as a person and then later might see me perform. That laid-back persona quickly transforms and sometimes people come up to me after a gig and ask if I’m okay. But I am not an unhappy person, quite the opposite, and perhaps that is partly because song writing acts as a sort of remedy for me to be able to work though my emotions. It’s also worth mentioning that not all my songs are about me. I love writing stories and using strong characters to draw people into music for that is the sort of music I also enjoy. ‘Waiting For You’ is a good example. It is about a woman

whose husband goes out to sea to work but he never returns. She’s at her wits’ end waiting for him so decides to get her own boat and go and seek him out. She spends years searching for him and is driven mad by her surroundings. With all her energy spent she finds herself hallucinating, she sees her husband’s face in the moon and starts following it instead, believing she has found her husband but losing him every time the sun comes up, over and over again. I can honestly say that this has never happened to me, but it makes for a nice song.” ‘I Stuck It Out’, with its tale of infanticide, and a woman driven to the edge and beyond, is particularly bleak. “Yes. I had been reading *Jude the Obscure* at the time which might go some way to explaining it. I wanted to play with the idea of a woman being driven to the point of madness where she does an unthinkable deed, but in a way that the listener is able to sympathise, or at least try to understand why she does what she does. Time passing is a constant theme and helped to develop the storyline, but is also used to highlight how people and feelings can change so dramatically over time, how the past can be over-bearing and controlling, and how the outcome of people’s lives can be irretrievably changed by these facts.”

SOME OF TAMARA’S SONGS are autobiographical though, notably the heartbreaking ‘Daddy’, about an artistic but absentee father who neglects and forgets his children in pursuit of fame and glory. It carries echoes of some of Dolly Parton’s classic 60s songs and, being based on a true story so close to home, is almost too heartbreaking to listen to. “It is the most obvious song about my father that I’ve written but there are many others. The story is a sad one juxtaposed with the upbeat catchy tune. This is just how it came out and it helps me disengage with it to a point that the band and I can really ham it up and play on the sarcasm of the song. I’m looking forward to sending it to him and I think that will act as some sort of middle finger flipping off towards him and the past.” There’s a real air of drama about your songs too, in songs like ‘Charon’s Boat’.

“Well, part of my degree was in drama and I absolutely love the

theatre, especially anything by Brecht or Shakespearian tragedies. I love it when a song tells a story, the more dramatic the better, and ‘Charon’s Boat’ is my attempt at that. Likewise ‘I Stuck It Out’. I enjoy getting into a character for a song and seeing how far I can take it. I had the most fun recording ‘Charon’s Boat’ because it gave me such freedom to experiment with sound and make the song as dramatic as I pleased. I was really nervous about the rest of the band hearing the final version in case they thought the sound effects were too OTT but they loved it.”

GIVEN THE NATURE OF HER songs and lyrics, and the image she presents on stage, and the reactions to them, does Tamara think there are still big expectations of what a female singer-songwriter should be like – doe-eyed and unthreatening for instance? “I have experienced sexist comments and judgements made about me as a performer by both men and women. I once recorded a gig because I wanted to hear back how some new songs were sounding. The recording picked up a conversation between a group of men and women sitting in the audience. As I walked on stage they decided that I wouldn’t be a good performer because I was a) female and b) had spent too much time (in their opinion) on my hair. Once I started playing they seemed surprised, and then more personal comments about my appearance ensued. It was a real shock to hear this. I understand that it is human nature to judge people on this level to some extent but I don’t think I’ve ever sat waiting for a performer to play and decided they wouldn’t be any good because of their gender. “I have been told that my singing style is ‘masculine’ or ‘un-lady like’. A promoter tried to get out of paying me for a performance and after I refused to back down he remarked ‘are your band called The Martyrs because they have to deal with you?’ I’m not sure he would have made the same comment to one of my male bandmates. I think there are still very dated expectations of what a female singer-songwriter should be like. People say ‘so how do the boys in your band take to be being bossed around by a girl?’. First of all, why is there the assumption that I am ‘bossing’ in the first place. Is it

because I am female; is it because I am a woman in a generally heavily male environment and the only way I can get what I want is to ‘boss the boys around’. And what is this unbearable difference that a boy being bossed around by girl is so much worse than a girl being bossed around by a boy? People, get a grip. I can only honestly begin to answer this question here but to put it bluntly things still need to change massively in the world for women to achieve equality, and not just in the music industry.”

WHILE TAMARA’S DEBUT album is a full band affair, Tamara more regularly performs solo; bands shows lean towards a livelier, louder experience compared to the more introspective and emotionally intensive solo gigs, and a solo album, ‘The Girl With The Secret Fire’, is pencilled in for 2014. How does she see ‘Girl Jokes About Boy Parts’ now that it’s finished and released? Is it everything she feels she’s about right now? “Well, it took about two years to make if I’m honest. We spent the best part of a year recording it and then I buggered off to Australia for four months. When I returned mixing and mastering started and this year we’ve been steadily promoting it with single releases and launches. During those two years I’ve been writing my solo album which I’ll start recording in January. So I feel incredibly proud of the album, but musically I’m in quite a different place from two years ago. I still feel like it is everything I’m about, but since then I’ve written 15 songs which belong on a solo album, not a Martyrs album.” Given the nature of the music and lyrics, the album title is daft and light-hearted; is it meant to be deliberately disarming? “Yes. And a little tongue in cheek. ‘Boy Jokes about Girl Parts’ is a common phrase I hear and so I wanted to turn it on its head so it was more in-line with my feminist values but not ram it down anyone’s throat, and also maintain a sense of humour. Some tricky juggling to do.” Come on then, what’s your favourite willy joke? “What is forty feet long and has eight teeth? The front row at a Willie Nelson concert.” Disarming and unpredictable to the last. Tamara is a singular talent and one you *should* want to meet. Don’t be afraid – take a trip to the dark side.

‘Girl Jokes About Boy Parts’ is released this month. Tamara plays the All Tamara’s Parties Christmas party at Somerville Collge Chapel on Friday 13th December with Candy Says, Count Drachma and more. Visit tamaramusic.co.uk for music and news.

Tracks of our Year

It's that time of year again. Y'know, the endy bit where we look back on all the great music Oxford has produced over the past twelve months and attempt to squeeze it all into a fancy list-type thing with the absolute greatest thing right at the top. Again it was spectacularly difficult not only to choose which of several great tunes should be Number 1, but also to narrow all our favourite stuff down to just 25 tracks. Votes were cast, tears were shed, angry words exchanged and sharp objects removed from clenched fists. In the end YOUNG KNIVES' victory was, if not unanimous, then by a good length, in horse-racing terms, while the mighty FOALS have to settle for second spot for the third time in four years. It's Young Knives' third top spot triumph since they formed, just over a decade ago, and their first since 2004, proving that staying power as well as pop genius are vital ingredients to success. Anyway, here's the essential Top 25 Oxford songs of 2013. It's great. You can make your own if you like, but ours will still be better.



1. YOUNG KNIVES 'Maureen'

Freed of the shackles of management and record label expectations and demands, Young Knives financed their new album 'Sick Octave' through Kickstarter, promising to make the album they'd really wanted to make for years. It was a triumph and this was the genius coda, a song so sleepy-eyed and simple it could be a lullaby, but so deviously twisted it could be the inspiration for a very British stalker movie, as Henry Darnall negotiates the primitive synthesizer wows and flutters to proclaim first concern for an abused neighbour, then a more sinister obsession. It wouldn't work if it wasn't such an irresistible gem of a pop song, proof that it doesn't matter how hard Young Knives try to fuck with their music, they just can't help writing classic singalong tunes.

2. FOALS 'Bad Habit'

Second for the third time in four years, and again with a song good enough to top most lists; it's typical 'Bad Habit' came up against a song as brilliant as 'Maureen'. If 'Holy Fire' was a mixed bag of an album, most of Foals' third was still pop of a superior pedigree and its peaks – 'Inhaler', 'Providence', and this, the fourth single taken from the album – showed just why Foals are now a global musical force, capable of a kind of plaintively euphoric grace that

can't be forced or learned; you've either got it or you haven't, and 'Bad Habit', as it soars above all pretenders to Foals' indie disco throne, has it in spades.

3. STORNOWAY 'Farewell Appalachia'

As rustic and romantic as a bluebell wood, this sublimely haunting highlight of 'Tales From Terra Firma', captures Stornoway's signature spiritualism of the universal rhythm of nature with its shimmering dulcimer, dreamy

waves of bass and the sound of chopping wood, Brian Briggs' eternally questing voice capturing the emotions he experienced while hiking the Appalachian trail through Vermont and New Hampshire. Forever evoking visions of warming campfires or snug secluded cottages, no other local band ever sound so at home with the wilderness as Stornoway.

4. CANDY SAYS 'Favourite Flavour'

Released, entirely appropriately, at the height of the summer heatwave, 'Favourite Flavour' buzzed bumble bee-like out of a west coast hideaway where songs are made from cherry bubblegum and lemon *bon bons*, singers Julia Sophie and Eliza Zoot harmonising and setting up a euphoric nursery rhyme that borders on a devotional chant, even as we learned that "Love, it's like an addiction / Love, it's like a stab in the heart." Simple, repetitive and dangerously catchy, it was a wide-eyed kid sister to The Shangri-La's, less a nagging insistency, more a childlike pester.

5. THE GOGGENHEIM 'Moth'

"Moth on a train / Ride 'em, ride 'em / Moth in the circus / Big moustache / Moth on a beach / Bikini!". It might be going a bit far to describe 'Moth' as a nonsense song, but it was the most brilliantly odd slice of screwball pop you're likely to hear here, there or on Saturn any time soon. Here was a band who genuinely didn't fit in – to any pigeonhole, or with any other band, perfectly balancing seriously experimental musical adventures with silly, simple pop brilliance.

6. WILD SWIM 'Another Night'

Wild Swim's second single, released

in May, builds from almost wraith-like beginnings to a swarming climax, a rising snowstorm of rarefied electro-pop built on hollowed-out guitar and sparse drumming, augmented to greater and greater degree as the song progresses with streaks of silicon, all wow and flutter, above which Richard Sansom's near-operatic voice circles and soars. In a rare case of the accompanying video actually enhancing the experience the animated film finds a lost, lonely figure travelling from a bleak monochrome cityscape to the sea and then through a hole in the ocean to an ecstatic flight through the stars, like a tribute to the starchild climax of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, a stellar trip that perfectly reflects the song.

7. TAMARA & THE MARTYRS 'Get Him Out'

Three and a half minutes of turbulent emotional unravelling and brooding hurt from fantastically witchy siren Tamara Parsons-Baker and band. Sounding like a vengeful cross between Nico and Anna Calvi trapped a trauma cabaret penned by Jacques Brel, Tamara did musical drama with almost operatic intensity, the pensive, oddly incongruous query, "Your shop sells lots of nice hats / Do you have one big enough for my whole head?" merely accentuating the tempestuous soulbearing that surrounds it.

8. COMA WALL 'Summer'

The very notion of unplugging a band as monstrously heavy and doomladen as Undersmile seemed almost ludicrous before we actually heard what it entailed, as the band replaced sludgy distortion with banjos and acoustic guitars in their alter ego Coma Wall guise. Hel and Taz's haunting close harmony singing still brought a tingle to the spine as the band dredged southern gothic creeping dread and spectacularly outdid their electric selves on their split 'Wood & Wire' EP, bringing a little bit of Ride's otherworldly spangle to a doleful stadium-sized anthem that Wilco would have been proud to call their own.

9. GLASS ANIMALS 'Psylla'

Having signed to Paul Epworth's new Wolf Tone label, Glass Animals

released their second single, displaying a more soulful side to their spectral electro-pop, sounding like something The Ink Spots might have conjured had they grown up surrounded by modern r'n'b – the sort of rarefied mantra you could imagine was made by romantic robot ghosts from some dysfunctional near-future. Oh yes it was.

10. FLIGHTS OF HELIOS 'Star'

Appropriately for a collective obsessed by space travel and the all things stellar, Flights of Helios' debut single sounded like it was cast adrift in the firmament, gliding serenely in the endless black reaches of the cosmos, the densely shifting orchestral electronics the canvas for Chris Beard to croon angelically as the whole thing builds with almost hymnal grace, like The Beta Band taken to a higher plane by Spiritualized.

11. DESERT STORM 'Word To The Wiseman'

Now firmly ensconced at the top of the local rock Premier League, Desert Storm's chief weapon remains their ability to take riffs, grooves and a sense of simmering rage that are as old and heavy as mountains, and make them sound fresh and exciting again. This opening slab of stoner-blues-metal from their 'Horizontal Life' album was a towering beast that launched the album full pelt out of the blocks, after which, the only sensible course of action was to roll a large fat one and succumb to their unstoppable power.

12. TOLIESEL 'Whispered Half Asleep'

With cinematic scope and a heart full of romantic longing, ToLiesel brought a sense of the epic to earthy Americana-inspired guitar pop, the shimmering shoegaze glissando of 'Whispered Half Asleep', the lead track from their 'Contours' EP, bringing a little bit of Ride's otherworldly spangle to a doleful stadium-sized anthem that Wilco would have been proud to call their own.

13. VIENNA DITTO 'Liar Liar'

Vienna Ditto sing the blues. But not as we know it. Theirs is a dark, sci-fi voodoo blues from a secret subterranean jazz lounge where the clientele are alien lizard creatures and *Dark City* is perpetually projected

onto the walls. This title track of the duo's spring EP was a gem, seamlessly sewing Hattie Taylor's breathy vocals and synths made to sound like a horn section (or is that a horn section made to sound like synths?) into a deft rockabilly shimmy'n'shake. A rumba from the dark side.

14. THE AUGUST LIST 'All To Break'

Married couple Kerraleigh and Martin Child write and record their music in a cottage in the woods on a hillside in east Oxfordshire. Of course they do – how else would they so brilliantly capture the ambience of deserted backwoods shacks and autumnal giant redwoods? This lead song from their last EP, 'High Town Crow', sounded like Black Sabbath's 'Paranoid' performed by Dolly Parton backed by a misfit gang of wildwood country-folk musos. Which, let's face it, is a bloody brilliant thing to sound like.

15. THE ORIGINAL RABBIT FOOT SPASM BAND 'King of Wine'

"For a long time the band thrived on the image of the old, drunk jazzman, but it's become artistically redundant," said Stuart Macbeth of his band's increasing propensity for playing gigs sober, but it didn't stop TORFSB celebrating the joys of drink across their excellent 'Party Seven' album, the revelry reaching a raucous peak with this Falstaffian slice of swing, which best exemplified the band's ability to revitalise almost century-old jazz dance with all the vim and vigour of the final Friday night on earth.

16. RALFE BAND 'Magdalena'

One of Oxford's great unsung talents, Oly Ralfe, released his third solo album this summer, following award-winning films and working with *The Mighty Boosh*. The much-travelled troubadour revealed a musical imagination and creativity that was as emotionally engaging as it was eclectic and this slender slice of melancholic pop simplicity was one of several highlights of 'Son Be Wise', at once spectral and rustic, and simply heart-meltingly lovely.

17. DALLAS DON'T 'Witches Stone'

Songs about burning witches tend to be a bit of a downer, don't they? Not in the hands of chipper indie noisy

bastards like Dallas Don't, they, erm, don't. While they've always tended to shroud what are essentially great catchy tunes in an absolute blizzards of hardcore noise, this highlight from their 'Retrace This Place' EP is positively jaunty, Nail and Jenny's boy-girl vocals giving the tune a bit of the old fire and ice treatment. Can't see them turning into Steps quite yet.

18. RICHARD WALTERS 'When You Gonna Come Back?'

Our favourite harbinger of heartache recently announced he's giving up his balladeering for a life of disco music. How true that turns out to be, there's evidence here that Richard can do proper pop music – of a sort. All upbeat vocals and harmonies, and animated piano, it might not fill many dancefloors but it's positively rollicking compared to his more typically desolate pieces. Of course it's actually all about lost love and being down on your knees. Sadness remains his curse and his blessing.

19. DESPICABLE ZEE 'You're Mean, Ya Can't'

Can't help thinking this title is actually a lot ruder than the spelling suggests, but you'd expect nothing less from Baby Gravy compadres Zahra Tehrani and Iona Roison, reunited for Zahra's debut under her new Despicable Zee guise, exploring her love for underground hip hop and dubstep, providing the industrial machine beats and scathing electronics over which Iona, under her Stray Dog pseudonym, intones with darkly soulful zeal.

20. PROSPEKT 'Dissident Priests'

Prog they may be, but Prospekt still know how to kick out a killer riff and a decent chorus amid the intricacy, as they showed across their epic debut album, 'The Colourless Sunrise', new singer and keyboard player Richard Marshall elevating the band to a new level, bringing elements of Symphony X to their Dream Theatre and Opeth influences, for a series of elaborate technical opuses that nevertheless possessed a heart and soul that too many in the genre have lost or never had in the first place.

21. PET MOON 'Hold the Divide'

The highlight of the lovingly-packaged 'Trashnicolour' EP, found Andrew Mears and crew delving

back into early-80s synth-pop, 90s r'n'b and dubstep for a restless but ultimately uplifting song that drags Talk Talk and Japan into the 21st Century and forces them to dance in self-consciously awkward style down D'Angelo's local disco, Andrew's terse falsetto offset by Karina Scuteri's cheerleading soul at the heart of a thoroughly modern r'n'b anthem.

22. BETA BLOCKER & THE BODY CLOCK 'Pickle Jar'

"Sounding like a heady cocktail of love and rain compared to some of the carefully crafted shitecakes we often get sent in the demo pile," ran our Demo of the Month review of Beta Blocker's 'Pickle Jar', as the band displayed an almost heroic disdain for high-end production values or the concept of happiness, instead sounding like a dizzyingly fuzzy mash-up of My Bloody Valentine, Dinosaur Jr and Sebadoh as they simply turned everything up, stamped on every pedal in sight and just went for it.

23. WE AERONAUTS 'Through the Door'

Transforming on their recent 'Don Valley' EP from a dour, ramshackle folk-pop outfit into a sleeker, sharper guitar'n'synths pop group, We Aeronauts recognised that all the best pop music has a sweet core surrounded by layers of steadily building chaos and muted anger, singer Anna's honeyed voice holding its own as guitar fuzz and keyboard swell rise and rise like an unruly tide in an attempt to engulf her.

24. GUNNING FOR TAMAR 'Yogging'

Matching nimble, fidgety fretplay with sizeable riffs, Gunning For Tamar continued to etch out their own identity ever more fully with their 'Camera Lucida' EP, pleading "What a waste of energy / What's the point?" when it's evident all that energy has an entirely potent point – making a right old rock racket.

25. DUCHESS 'Oven Time'

Nightshift rarely cracks a smile, and even less often deigns to dance, and yet there we were at Duchess' last Academy show grinning from ear to ear and even shuffling around in an ungainly fashion to their ebullient afropop stomp, a small army of percussionists backing up singer Katie-Louise Herring's soulful, sing-song voice, like Blondie partying in Soweto.

RELEASED

THE DEVIL

‘The Devil’

(Own label)

For those of us who’ve been waiting for longer than we’d care to mention for a second album from erstwhile Oxford legends Nought, any new release bearing the line ‘guitars by James Sedwards’ is going to be worth a look. The Devil is Sedwards’ project with Ben Wallers of Country Teasers, and it’s a nasty, sordid, relentless record.

Opener ‘My First Waltz’ is comfortable territory for Nought aficionados, a sinewy, revolving guitar composing the backbone of the song, and sitting somewhere between their disintegrating no wave and the sleaze of The Jesus Lizard. ‘The Throne’ is The Fall as covered by Cop Shoot Cop, Wallers answering his own question ‘what is it?’ by intoning ‘it’s a chair’ in the most threatening furniture description in recent rock history. ‘So Cool’ sees Sedwards reining in the urge to take the song in ten different directions at once by hammering on a groove until he’s accompanied by barbaric, relentless synth stabs. And that’s just the first four minutes. The remaining six are what Glenn Branca might have come up with if asked to soundtrack Herzog’s *Nosferatu*.

In one of the oddest covers of the year and doubtless the most talked-about track on the



album, The Devil take an obscure Kool Keith cut, ‘Girls Want You’, and expand it into a grotesque ten-minute mission statement, spaghetti western guitar shapes giving way to extended vocal breaks that expose the naked misogyny of the lyrics. Over this marathon length, the lyrical content becomes an endurance test, a distinctly unsettling experience. But then The Devil wouldn’t have it any other way – it’s an album calculated to set the nerves on edge and abrade like the best records by Big Black or The Birthday Party. Are you sitting uncomfortably?

Stuart Fowkes



LES CLOCHARDS

‘Any Fool Can Wear Their Heart On Their Sleeve’

(Big Red Sky)

Pull up a stool and pour yourself a glass of Bordeaux. Make yourself comfortable; it’s raining outside but inside the fire’s lit, and if the mood of the band is melancholy, they still radiate their own gentle warmth.

Les Clochards have been sitting genially in the corner of the local scene for a fair few years now and this second album feels as comfortable and familiar as an old sofa; they’re a band made for dark, wet autumn evenings, infused with an innate sense of sadness that makes you feel they’re always casting a wistful eye to a past

Sponsored by



PHIL McMINN

‘The Space Has A

Meaning’

(Own label)

The Winchell Riots may be gone but Phil McMinn is setting about gently shovelling meaning into the gap they’ve left behind with considerable aplomb.

This EP might have been recorded in a single day earlier in the year, but the depth and quality of these songs suggest that considerably more time was spent on them. They radiate an elegant beauty that we’ve come to expect from McMinn, so there are no surprises there, yet these three songs still have the ability to take your breath away.

The stunning ghost story of ‘Wooden Bones’ opens the EP and quickly sets about proving just why Phil is still one of the most exciting artists in Oxford. The careful arrangements somehow manage to sound delicate and full to bursting. He utilises the space perfectly, his voice and guitar in perfect harmony, while a simple bass line pulses like a broken heart. It’s the interaction between his vocal and the fleeting violin of Sian Lloyd Pratchett that really makes the song, however; they dance around each other, using one another for inspiration and putting flesh on the bones of lines like “Somewhere up above me watching, you still haunt me as I go”.

There’s a slightly militaristic feel to the EP’s title track, due in part to its pastoral feel and the clatter of drums that punctuate the otherwise subtle arrangement. Yet the only battle fought here is one of the heart with regret, hurt and love being central to the meaning of the song. When McMinn sings the lines in that quite spellbinding voice of his, “when we are older and the edges are blurred, when we are older and the heart starts to hurt, son I’ll hold you”, it brings a lump to the throat every time.

‘Barrowlands’ is similarly affecting with its sweeping strings and tales of heartbreak and crisis of confidence. It perhaps lacks the subtlety of the songs either side of it, but the sheer grandeur of what he can achieve with a guitar, violin, a Macbook and that voice is simply phenomenal.

Sam Shepherd



SHAADOW

‘Kung Fu Hustle’

(Own label)

Along with his innate sense of theatre and a natural flow, one of the things we always loved about Mr Shadownow was the positivity and understated humour of his rhymes. Here was a guy with stuff to say, whether about racism or the self-importance and snobbishness of sub scenes, and not about himself. Which makes it a bit of a shock to find much of ‘Kung Fu Hustle’ dedicated to haters and his own worth.

A lot has happened, and changed, for ShaoDow (he’s dropped the Mr) since he went forth to make his name by endlessly busking and gigging, selling CDs from a suitcase (over 10,000 at last count). Some of it for the good, particularly musically, others less so, notably the perceived hatred he feels for what he’s doing. The way the latter feeds into the former, though, actually makes for some of the best moments on this new album. Chief among these is ‘Why My Brother’, a righteous attack on those who’ve dissed him for essentially not being the right kind of black guy (“a coconut” and “a bounty”) which brings out both his rhyming worth and his wit with the retort “I’m chocolate skinned but I’ll never be a minstrel”. The song, though, is as

THE SCHOLARS

‘Re-Wired EP’

(Own label)

You should all be familiar with The Scholars by now, but if they have somehow eluded you thus far, this is about as good a point to start as any. ‘Re-Wired’ is a coming together of the band’s singles to date and although there’s obviously an element of progression to be found across these songs, they’ve always been a well polished and ambitious band from their beginnings back in 2008.

Opening with ‘Love The Thunder’ it’s clear the band are more than happy to bludgeon all and sundry with glossy production. It’s a song that should by rights find the band starting to kick on significantly. A moody epic, it simply seethes with pop *nous* and a dark edge. If iLikeTrains had suddenly decided that they wanted to write tunes like U2, the result would most likely sound a little like this: grand, dour and utterly compelling.

‘This Heart’s Built To Break’ finds the band in pop mode once again. The drums alternate between driving rock and dance insistence, whilst the choruses reach for a Neil Hannon baritone epiphany that they just about reach. If there’s a blueprint for what Scholars do, this is it.

‘Wired’ takes the formula and twists it a little, but not too much. Deft guitar work, driving basslines and that vocal that operates with just enough scope to avoid being classed as truly baritone are The Scholars’ defining features, and once again they play to their strengths. ‘Turbulence’ is a little more angular, but as the EP progresses, the law of diminishing returns begins to take effect. There’s little doubt that in isolation, these are all fantastic tunes but with little in the way of diversity on show, fatigue starts to take effect long before final track ‘Spooks’ begins.

Sam Shepherd



much a clarion call for conciliation and unity, infused with positivity for all its anger. It also displays ShaoDow’s strength as a rapper with an ever increasing surety of flow, something that leaps out of much of ‘Kung Fu Hustler’. The machine-gun attack of album opener ‘Independent Power’ for instance, another statement of his own DIY approach (“I am legend!”), or the menacing undercurrent of ‘Y&P’ and the steely defiance of ‘One Man Army’. Production-wise too he’s on top of his game with nasty dubstep squelches, orchestral strikes and intricate but fulsome electro textures.

BRIGHT WORKS

‘Explorers EP’

(Own label)

Bright Works used to be known as Nairobi, and whilst their name is now less Africa-tinged, their music still bears the dread term ‘mafrobeat’ as a self-referential descriptor. The influence of Afrobeat has been thrown around the indie scene carelessly in recent years, with a tendency for usage as a lazy tag in place of something less cool-sounding (‘clean guitar melodies over awkwardly-rhythmical drum skitters’, perhaps). Here, at least – as with Nairobi before them – Bright Works go a little way to capture the *spirit* of Afrobeat as much as its sound, with ‘Explorers’ four tracks having a pleasingly sunny disposition, and a sense of space and joyousness that is often lacking in today’s self-serious indie kids. Mafrobeat throws math-rock equations into the musical mix in a way that’s all too familiar considering Oxford’s hefty influences, from (less recent) Foals to TTNG. The four tracks here – ‘Houses’, ‘Brammatism’, ‘Snakes’n’snakes’n’aeroplanes’ and ‘If You Have Any Sweet Nothings Whisper Them Now’, to discount Seb Reynolds’ blurry remix of ‘Houses’ – are somewhat amorphous in character, and tend towards sounding like four parts of a energetic, carefully-arranged puzzle more than four individual works.

They are, however, a happy-sounding snapshot of a band that is gradually defining its niche in a busy marketplace by *not* sounding pretentious, overly serious or too self-conscious. Without the pleasingly odd vocals of singer Liam Amie – equal parts Marc Bolan wobble and post-rock childish yelp – these songs wouldn’t sound so together. Taken as a whole, Bright Works sound full of cheer and ready to develop further, and it’s a rare treat of a combination.

Simon Minter

By contrast to the ire that fuels much of these tracks are the more contemplative pieces, like ‘What’s It Like’ or ‘Can You Help Me’, which deal with feelings of depression and initially don’t suit ShaoDow’s style as well, until you realise the latter has crept up on you and hit you with an intensity that builds by way of a soaring guitar solo. Or the more playful, soulful ‘Liar’, which keeps things lighter and simpler and exposes the man’s old scathing wit again as he knocks down flash posers in clubs and fancy cars.

Where ‘Kung Fu Hustle’ does slip is mostly in its length – at 21 tracks, some of which are throwaway or simply pointless interludes, it needs some serious trimming to maintain its energy levels, particularly towards the second half, while a succession of guest slots add variety but occasionally, as on the messy ‘I Does This’, at the expense of consistency. At its best though, ‘Kung Fu Hustler’ is as good as anything ShaoDow’s done to date, with a confidence and invention that only comes through constant performance. The self-aggrandising doesn’t suit him but as for the other, as the old cliché goes, he should let the haters hate; in the end they’re only making him stronger.

Dale Kattack

DEER CHICAGO

‘These Hollow Walls’

(Own label)

Following up a debut release as assured as ‘Lantern Collapse’ is never going to be easy; the shimmering grandiosity of that song – released almost exactly two years ago – marked Deer Chicago out as worthy successors to The Winchell Riots’ local epic rock crown as it crashed turbulently but majestically upon imagined shores.

The band seem to have reined in that cathedral of sound approach with this follow-up single, ‘These Hollow Walls’ picking its way gingerly through the rock pools rather than drenching them in overdriven guitar noise, and while the result isn’t a complete let-down, it is a disappointment given what we’ve heard of the band before, singer Jonathan Payne’s plaintive, slightly nasal voice searching for a tune to call its own, as guitars spangle prettily in the middle distance. Even the attempt at a crescendo feels stilted, dissipating into the ether before it’s even got going. It feels incomplete, as if the second half simply got left out of the final mix.

‘Casting The Circles’ is far better, Jonathan’s voice, and the core melody, stronger: questing, approaching epic and with a more forceful finale, but again you crave that vast, unrelenting climax that may be an indie-rock cliché but is still bloody effective in the right hands, and which Deer Chicago have already proved they can do with real style.

Dale Kattack

Next month..

Undersmile,
Hot Hooves
Overlord
Smilex

G I G G U I D E

SUNDAY 1st

OCEAN COLOUR SCENE: O2 Academy – The fifth most unremarkable band in rock history relive their ‘Marchin’ Already’ album.

GO WEST + HUE & CRY + THE CHRISTIANS: The New Theatre – Sometimes, quite often in fact, Nightshift gets into arguments with people who say the 1980s were rubbish for music. But then package tours like this come along and undo all our good work. Go West. Hue & Cry. The Christians. Yup, wretched old decade.

REICHENBACH FALLS: Truck Store (5pm) – Gruff, down-home country-folk from the local band. **STEAMROLLER + MAGIC MANGO BAND: The Corridor (4pm)** – The Oxford City Music Festival extends into December with a handful of shows around town. 60s blues-rockers Steamroller keep the spirit of Hendrix and Cream alive. **CHURCH OF THE HEAVY: The Wheatshaeaf** – Heavy-duty session as part of the OCMF, with sets from Ireland’s progressive metallers Ilenkus, Caravan of Whores side project Sump, plus Fallen From Grace and Noisescape Disturbance.

Thursday 5th

NIGHT BEDS:

O2 Academy

Amid all the forced good cheer of the pre-Christmas period (not least from certain perennially festive-season touring bands), we need some proper winter music. And here’s Night Beds to provide just that. Like Bon Iver, Night Beds is basically one man – in this case, Winston Yellen. Winston wrote and recorded his debut album, ‘Country Sleep’, while holed up in an isolated pre-Civil War house near Nashville that was once home to Johnny Cash and June Carter-Cash, and it shows. The album is classic baroque Americana, sparse arrangements, pedal steel and strings producing a sound that is symphonically rustic, while lyrically it’s loneliness and heartache from breakfast to bedtime. Yellen’s high, keening voice will further attract comparisons to Bon Iver’s Justin Vernon, and the woozy, wintry feel of the music touches bases with Fleet Foxes and My Morning Jacket, but really, his closest comparison is Alex Chilton, another chap who knew how to document the desolation of the heart. In ideal circumstances, it will snow heavily during tonight’s gig (which is preceded by an instore at Truck) and we’ll be trapped in here all week, with just an endless supply of whiskey and Night Beds’ dark, soothing songs to keep us going. Yeah, you can take your Yuletide jollity and stuff it. Right up a turkey’s backside.



DECEMBER

MEGAN HENWOOD + LES CLOCHARDS + WELCOME TO PEEPWORLD + RAGDOLL: Art Bar (6pm) – Rounding off the city festival is folkstress Megan Henwood, in the company of Gallic-tinged folk-rockers Les Clochards, southern gothic acoustic pop duo Welcome to Peepworld and electric trad folksters Ragdoll.

MONDAY 2nd

BLACK STAR RIDERS + THE DEAD DAISIES + WESTERN SAND: O2 Academy – Scott Gorman makes the dignified move of ditching the Thin Lizzy moniker, while retaining the celtic-infused 70s rock sound of that band, almost thirty years after the death of Phil Lynott. Now fronted by former-Almighty singer Ricky Warwick, Black Star Riders’ ‘All Hell Breaks Loose’ album is a worthy successor to Lizzy’s unique storm.

AKALA: O2 Academy – Politicised rap from the Camden rhymr, inspired by the likes of Gil Scott Heron as he explores racism, child poverty and more, using hip hop as much as an educational tool as a form of entertainment, harking back to old school sounds and style.

AARON KEYLOCK + STEAMROLLER: Art Bar – Haven blues and rock club night with teenage bluesman Aaron Keylock, recent support to The Strypes and Nine Below Zero, plus veteran local blues-rockers Steamroller, kicking it out loud and proud in the tradition of Cream and Hendrix. **ADAM BARNES + MATT SIMONS + CHRIS AYER + WELCOME TO PEEPWORLD: The Port Mahon** – Tertium Quid acoustic night with a double dose of Brooklyn singer-songwriters in the form of Matt Simons, with his piano-based pop, jazz and r’n’b, and Chris Ayer’s breezy, poetic folk-pop. They’re joined by local acoustic soul-pop man Adam Barnes and folk-pop duo Welcome To Peepworld. **HATWEAZLE: The Mad Hatter** – Catweazle Club’s kid brother/sister hosts an evening of singers, storytellers, poets and more every Monday. **NON-STOP TANGO + SUMMIT 7: St Gregory the Great, Cricket Road** – Masterful improv from the local supergroup, featuring keyboard wizards Malcolm Atkins and Pat Thomas, alongside a host of others, inspired by the likes of Henry Cow, This Heat, Fred Frith and more.

TUESDAY 3rd

JAZZ CLUB: Art Bar – Live jazz from club regulars The New Jazz Collective, plus free Spanish-flavoured live music in the front bar. **RUNDUNK: The Cellar** – Funky house club night, featuring a two-hour DJ set from Vanilla Ace (OFF Records, Southern Fried), mixing up house, disco and swing, alongside Knight rider and Varkitekt. **OPEN MIC SESSION: The White Rabbit** **OPEN MIC SESSION: James Street Tavern**

WEDNESDAY 4th

ANDY ROBBINS: The Wheatshaeaf – Moshka club night with local songsmith Robbins. **FREERANGE: The Cellar** – Drum&bass, hip hop and dubstep club night.

WEDNESDAY MATTERS with WILD SWIM + ART THEEFE + MEGAN HENWOOD: The Mad Hatter – BBC Oxford band of the year Wild Swim play a low-key set at Catweazle’s new monthly live music club night, hosted by Matt Sage’s Art Theefe band, and joined by folk-pop singer Megan Henwood. **ACOUSTIC LOUNGE: Fat Lil’s, Witney**

THURSDAY 5th

NIGHT BEDS: O2 Academy – A welcome break from the pre-Christmas jollity in the sombre, soulful company of Winston Yellen – *see main preview* **NIGHT BEDS: Truck Store (6pm)** – Intimate instore show from Winston ahead of his O2 show later tonight.

PEACE + DRENGE: O2 Academy – Post-Foals/Maccabees twinkly indie-disco, afro-pop and trebly guitar trilling from Peace, graduating from support slots to Tame Impala and The Vaccines to headline status on the back of debut album ‘In Love’ earlier this year. Brilliantly ferocious blues-rock support from Drenge, recent stars of Gathering Festival.

5IVE: The New Theatre – Oh dear, the money’s run out and even though the last reunion went down like a veal fillet at a vegan convention, Abz, Ritchie, Sean, Lemmy and Count Grishnakh are back together for another go. Expect all the hits, from ‘Keep on Moving’ and ‘Everybody Get Up’, to ‘We Will Rock You’ and ‘Humanity Is Cancer’.

DJ PIED PIPER + MC CREED: Art Bar **DEEP COVER: The Cellar** – Hip hop, r’n’b and reggae with guest and resident DJs. **CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre** – Singers, musicians, poets, storytellers and more at Oxford’s oldest and best open mic club. **CHRIS RYDER: The Port Mahon** – Soulful acoustic pop from the local singer-songwriter. **THE MIGHTY REDOX: The Wheatshaeaf** – Unplugged gig in the downstairs bar from the local blues-rock veterans. **OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon** **BLUES JAM: The Jack Russell, Marston**

FRIDAY 6th

KLUB KAKOFANNEY with BRICKWORK LIZARDS + SPACE HEROES OF THE PEOPLE + TWELVE CLAY FEET: The Wheatshaeaf – East and west collide in Brickwork Lizards’ Turkobilly fusion pot at tonight’s Klub Kanofanney. They’re joined by acid house-tinged electro-pop duo SHOTP, and Cambridge’s alt.rockers Twelve Clay Feet. **SKYLARKIN SOUND SYSTEM: The Cellar** – Count Skylarkin hosts his final Soundsystem night of 2013, playing a party-hearty selection of reggae, dancehall, bass and more, and tonight featuring The Drop, one of the foremost live reggae acts in the UK right now, the David Rodigan-endorsed nine-piece taking a break from recording sessions with Nick Manasseh to bring their deep, dubby and soulful reggae sound to the Cellar. Bass-mad cockney crew Bam Bam Sound join the Count on the decks. **CANDY SAYS: Albion Beatnik Bookstore** – First of two intimate pre-Christmas shows from Candy Says, promising a selection of new songs alongside bookstore-friendly interpretations of their old faves. They’re joined for both nights by local poets, as well as film score composer Mark Cahan, best known for his score to *The Disappearance of Alice Creed*.

RANKANKAN: Art Bar – Live Cuban music from local 20-piece dance band Rankankan, led by singers Pancho Vera and Melisa Akdogan, covering classic Cuban songs in Son, Mambo, Cha Cha Cha and Latin Jazz. Followed by Latin fiesta club night. **DISCO MUTANTES: The Library** – Cosmic disco, boogie and old school house club night.

SATURDAY 7th

DEACON BLUE: The New Theatre – The 80s industrial noise pioneers crank up the... oh, who are we kidding? Cuddly, enduring soft-rockers; y’know, ‘Real Gone Kid’, ‘Dignity’, ‘When the World Knows Your Name’... no nasty bad stuff here. **ABSOLUTE BOWIE: O2 Academy** – Bowie tribute.

CANDY SAYS: Albion Beatnik Bookstore – Second night of the band’s instore festive party. **BALLOON ASCENTS: The Wheatshaeaf** – Misty-eyed, melancholic pop from the local newcomers. **BRIGHT WORKS + BARRY & THE BEACHCOMBERS: The Cross Keys, Abingdon** – Skittle Alley night with indie-Afropop crew Bright Works supported by eccentric hardcore merchants Barry & the Beachcombers.

THE MIGHTY REDOX + OXFORD UKULELES: James Street Tavern – First of several local shows from the veteran swamp-blues rockers. **PROPAGANDA + TRASHY + JACK FM DJs: O2**

Thursday 12th

THE DARKNESS:

O2 Academy

In a tale as kitsch and clichéd as Spinal Tap, The Darkness have returned from the abyss, the fall-outs, drug and booze abuse and megalomania seemingly forgotten in the clamour to rediscover past glories. Weird to think that back in 2003 the band’s debut album, ‘Permission To Land’, sold 1.5 million copies and earned The Darkness three BRIT awards. Their unashamedly preposterous mix and match of AC/DC, Led Zep and Queen struck a chord with old school rock fans though, while even Robbie Williams asked them to support him when he headlined Knebworth. But then disaster struck – singer Justin Hawkins succumbed to those most traditional pitfalls of rock and roll and fell out badly with his brother, guitarist Dan. The former entered rehab, the latter formed Stone Gods with the remainder of the band. Sober and hopefully more humble, Justin returned to the fold and now the original four-piece are out on tour, having successfully made their comeback on the back of third album ‘Hot Cakes’ and a European tour support to Lady Gaga of all people. They may be playing rather smaller venues this time round than they did a decade ago, but for every person wondering what they were thinking when they bought ‘I Believe In A Thing Called Love’, there’s another happy to leave their brain at the door and rock like it was ever in fashion.



Academy – Weekly three-gigs-in-one night, with indie and electro at Propaganda; 80s, kitsch pop and glam at Trashy, and dancefloor faves from Jack FM DJs. **EXTRA-CURRICULAR: The Cellar** – Weekly techno, bass and house club night. **SIMPLE: Art Bar** – House and techno club night. **SANCTUM: Varsity Club** – Monthly metal club playing classics and new stuff.

SUNDAY 8th

DUCHESS + LISTING SHIPS + MIRACULOUS MULE: Old Fire Station – Ebullient afro-pop, Calypso and Latin dance from local percussion-happy starlets Duchess, alongside electro-heavy instrumental post-rockers Listing Ships and Anglo-Irish blues, gospel and hillbilly crew Miraculous Mule. **LES CLOCHARDS + DAVE TOMLINSON + KATE & PAT + PUPPET MECHANIC + LAIMA BITE + LEIGH ALEXANDER + RICH STICKS: The Wheatshaeaf (2.30-7pm)** – Klub Kakofanney host a free afternoon of unplugged live music in the Sheaf’s downstairs bar, including sets from lachrymose French café folk combo Les Clochards, gothic soulstress Laima Bite and Beaver Fuel frontman Leigh Alexander. **BEARD OF DESTINY + MOON LEOPARD + RICHARD BROTHERTON + THE RIVERSIDE VOICES + OXFORD UKULELES + DES BARKUS: Donnington Community Centre (5-7pm)** – Donnington Community Centre’s monthly music session goes in for a bit of festive funnery this time round with The Riverside Voices leading a carol singing session. They’re joined by bluesman Beard of Destiny, Jeremy Hughes’ Moon Leopard and more.

MONDAY 9th

SIMON McBRIDE: Art Bar – Blues rock from Irish singer and guitarist McBride who won *Guitarist Magazine’s* Young Guitarist Of The Year award aged 15 and has since gone on to support Joe Bonamassa, Jeff Beck and Joe Satriani. **THE VINYLS + THOMAS McCONNELL: The Cellar** **BELSHAZZAR’S FEAST: Nettlebed Folk Club** – Best known as fiddle and oboe player with Bellowhead, Paul Sartin teams up with accordion player Paul Hutchison for Belshazzar’s Feast, bringing humour and virtuosity to old English dance tunes, ballads, war poems and folk standards. **HATWEAZLE: The Mad Hatter**

TUESDAY 10th

JAZZ CLUB: Art Bar – Live jazz from Heavy Dexters, plus Spanish-flavoured music in the front bar. **INTRUSION: The Cellar** – Goth, EBM, industrial and darkwave club night. **OPEN MIC SESSION: The White Rabbit** **OPEN MIC SESSION: James Street Tavern**

WEDNESDAY 11th

AIRBOURNE: O2 Academy – Gruff, primal rock and roll from Australia’s Airbourne, back with their third album, ‘Black Dog Barking’, staying true to their simple and effective AC/DC-inspired stadium hard rock sound, all big riffs, even bigger choruses and unapologetically unreconstructed tales of booze, chicks and fighting. **CALLIGRAPHY: The Cellar** – UK garage, jungle, house and grime with garage heavyweight EL-B, plus Zyklon Sound and Evade.

THURSDAY 12th

ADRIAN EDMONDSON & THE BAD SHEPHERDS: O2 Academy– Classic punk standards played in raucous trad-folk style from the former-*Young Ones* and *Bottom* star, reworking everything from ‘Anarchy in the UK’ to ‘Teenage



Saturday 14th

UNION J:

The New Theatre

In the long-term, *not* winning *X-Factor* is a smarter move than actually coming first. Just ask One Direction, JLS and Olly Murs. And add to that illustrious list Union J, who came a measly fourth in the 2012 contest, and then only getting that far due to Rough Copy withdrawing so they could be reinstated, and subsequently surviving coming last in the public vote a couple of times. Of course, none of that has hindered their subsequent progress as they grace every teen mag and kids TV show going ahead of the release of their eponymous debut album and head off on a national tour. Helpfully all sharing an alliterative selection of names, JJ, Josh, Jamie and George – sorry, George – got themselves a deal with RCA and their two hit singles so far, ‘Carry You’ and ‘Beautiful Life’ tread a typically catchy and accessible boyband path that blends pop and r’n’b, while in George they even have their own baby-faced Harry Styles-alike. As a wise person once said, no band ever lost money making girls dance, and Union J are only going upward at the moment. Hell, they’re even working on their autobiography already. Whether it’ll equal Motley Crue’s ‘The Dirt’ for scandal and bad behaviour, is anyone’s guess.

Kicks’ with a deft touch and an obvious affection for the source material that lifts the whole thing way above novelty.

THE DARKNESS + LOSTALONE: O2 Academy – Justin and Dan Hawkins leave old animosities behind and swear they believe in a thing called love – *see main preview*

THIS TOWN NEEDS GUNS + VICTOR VILLEREAL + BRIGHT WORKS: The Cellar – A rare local show from Oxford’s math-rockers TTNG, following on from the release of their second album, ‘13.0.0.0’ earlier this year, and a recent US tour.

Support comes from former Cap’n Jazz and Owls man Victor Villereal. Afro-indie-pop from local openers Bright Works.

GOIN’ LOUD: The Art Bar – Rock’n’blues covers. **THE PETE FRYER BAND: The Wheatshaeaf** – Free unplugged set in the downstairs bar from the blues-rock stalwart.

CATWEAZLE: East Oxford Community Centre **OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon** **BLUES JAM: The Jack Russell, Marston**

FRIDAY 13th

HAPPY MONDAYS + SUNSHINE UNDERGROUND + SULK: O2 Academy – The reunion caravan continues to roll on, the original, and definitive, line-up of Madchester’s baddest gang together again, bad blood and life-threatening indulgence just about behind them. Previous reunited incarnations of the band have slightly soured the



Saturday 14th

GUNNING FOR TAMAR / WE AERONAUTS / DALLAS DON'T / TRAPS / MAIIANS: O2 Academy

The final Upstairs night of 2013 and it remains an excellent showcase of Oxford's rising talent and more established favourites. Gunning For Tamar's transition from the former to the latter has been impressively swift, on the back of a series of excellent, inventive releases on Alcopop! Records, as well as their increasingly confident and abrasive live shows. With one foot in math-pop and the other in riff-heavy alt.rocking, sort of Biffy Clyro's more nimble kid cousins meets Youthmovies' harder big brothers, or maybe both and neither at the same time. Hell, they're Gunning For Tamar and they rock. As do Dallas Don't, in a more jagged and belligerent fashion, marrying the aggressive pop tendencies of Idlwild with Pixies and Sonic Youth-style noise and wayward aggression. But they're sweet and poppy too, as are We Aeronauts, who, split between Oxford and London, are equally lush and demure folk-pop and chaotic, mutedly angry indie noise, at their best when singer Anna Wheatley commands their big, sleek synth'n'guitar anthems. Traps too work best when they allow their singer full reign, Lex being a woman of serious power as she belts it out over the band's rugged, slightly serrated post-grunge slab of stadium-friendly rockaboogie. Completing a fine old bill are newcomers Maiians, an electronica act formed by We Aeronauts and Keyboard Choir chap James Cuning.

memory of the Mondays' original prowess and they've always been an uneven live prospect at best, but with Christmas-fuelled feelings of goodwill abounding, plenty of folks will be tripping (in every sense) down memory lane as the band celebrate the 25th anniversary of their 'Bummed' album.

ELECTRIC SIX + STROKE OF LUCK: O2 Academy – If it's nearly Christmas it must be time for another Electric Six tour, Dick Valentine's garage-glam crew still doing the rounds over a decade on from hits 'Gay Bar' and 'Danger! High Voltage', playing it deliberately dumb with their tongue-in-cheek rock disco bombast.

BOSSAPHONIK: The Cellar – Dancefloor Latin, Balkan beats, Afrobeat, global grooves and nu-jazz club night with a live set from The Turbans, playing a mix of celtic dance, klezmer, eastern European folk and middles eastern sounds.

GAPPY TOOTH INDUSTRIES WINTER WARMER: The Wheatshaef – GTI's traditional pre-Christmas weekend of live music kicks off with a suitably eclectic bill topped by ambient electronica and psychedelic drone-pop crew Flights of Helios.

They're joined by swampy blues-rockers The Mighty Redox, math-rockers Vote Statham, a side project of Masiro, and campfire folk-popster Lewis Newcombe, keeping it mellow and intimate in the vein of Nick Drake and Bert Jansch.

ALL TAMARA'S PARTIES with TAMARA PARSONS-BAKER + CANDY SAYS + COUNT DRACHMA + CAROLINE BIRD + GEORGE CHOPPING: Somerville College Chapel – This month's Nightshift cover star hosts her own festive ATP show, performing solo alongside the sweetly wonderful Candy Says, Zulu folk combo Count Drachma, poet George Chopping and a large barrel of mulled wine – *see main interview feature*

HOUSE FOUNDATION: Art Bar – With Nightshift (no, not this one, we're hitting the mulled wine at All Tamara's Parties tonight) and Mark Radford.

RECKLESS SLEEPERS + JOHN LEE STANNARD: The White House – Breezy 60s-styled psychedelic folk-pop from Reckless Sleepers, plus bluesman Stannard who has played with Linda and Danny Thompson.

SATURDAY 14th

THE ORIGINAL RABBIT FOOT SPASM BAND + FRANCIS PUGH & THE WHISKY SINGERS + COUNT SKYLARKIN + NATTY BO: Art Bar – The Rabbits celebrate Christmas in suitably raucous style, ripping up Art Bar with their party-hearty hot jazz, swing and r'n'b, playing songs from their excellent second album, 'Party Seven', alongside a host of old favourites. They're joined tonight by the suitably booze-related Francis Pugh & The Whisky Singers with their warmly rustic blues and Americana, plus party floor fillers from Count Skylarkin and Natty Bo on the decks.

INTRODUCING with GUNNING FOR TAMAR + WE AERONAUTS + DALLAS DON'T + TRAPS + MAIIANS: O2 Academy – Final Upstairs local bands showcase of the year – *see main preview*

UNION J: The New Theatre – *X-Factor* boy band head for the stars – *see main preview*

GAPPY TOOTH INDUSTRIES WINTER WARMER: The Wheatshaef – Second night of the annual Winter Warmer, tonight headlined by the rolling thundercloud of psychedelic blues that is Empty Vessels, recalling the classic rock sounds of Blue Cheer and Jimi Hendrix. They're joined by swashbuckling Smiths acolytes Peerless Pirates, singer/comedian and sometime member of smut-funk band Toupe, Grant Sharkey, plus dark, almost gothic songstress Bethany Weimers.

IRREGULAR FOLK with SEA STACKS + JESS HALL + SALVATION BILL: The Cellar – Rounding off a year when it has established itself as one of the most innovative live music club nights in Oxford, Irregular Folk continues doing what it does so well, hosting folk music that doesn't fit neatly into the genre, including tonight the return to the club for orchestral folk-pop act Sea Stacks, alongside sweet-voiced local songstress Jess Hall, and melancholic indie-folk crew Salvation Bill.

PINDROP CHRISTMAS PARTY: Albion Beatnik Bookstore – Pindrop get into the festive party spirit with an intimate instore featuring a selection of acoustic performers, including Julia Meijer, Joe Swarbrick, Richard Neuberg, Jordan O'Shea and Huck. All proceeds go to the Gatehouse homeless charity.

THE MIGHTY REDOX: The Marsh Harrier – The local swamp-blues veterans bid a fond farewell to bassist Graham Barlow, after over 400 gigs together, as he sets off to concentrate on his Beard of Destiny project.

D-FEST CHRISTMAS BALL: The Red Lion, Drayton – Afropop starlets headline D-Fest's pre-Christmas party, alongside Nudybronque.

WAM: Fat Lil's, Witney – Ska-punk covers.

PROPAGANDA + TRASHY: O2 Academy
EXTRA-CURRICULAR: The Cellar

SUNDAY 15th

PALEHORSE + DESERT STORM + KOMATSU + MOTHER CORONA + LIMB + DEATH OF ORION + KOMRAD + BLUDGER + GIRLPOWER: The Wheatshaef – Buried In Smoke host their decidedly unfestive Christmas all-dayer – *see main preview*

THE WATERBOYS: The New Theatre – Mike Scott's enduring folk-rock heroes return to 'Fisherman's Blues 25 years on – *see main preview*

MONDAY 16th

ST AGNES FOUNTAIN: Nettlebed Folk Club – Festive folk songs from Chris While, Julie Mathews, Chris Leslie and David Hughes.

HATWEAZLE: The Mad Hatter

TUESDAY 17th

JAZZ CLUB: Art Bar – Live jazz from The New Jazz Collective, plus Spanish-flavoured live music in the front bar.

OPEN MIC SESSION: The White Rabbit
OPEN MIC SESSION: James Street Tavern

WEDNESDAY 18th

DON'T GO PLASTIC + SCARLET VIXENS: The Wheatshaef – It's All About The Music show with garage-punks Don't Go Plastic.

THE AUGUST LIST + FRANCIS PUGH & THE WHISKY SINGERS + YO ZUSHI: The Port Mahon – Frankie's Whisky Night with suitably down-home line-up.

FREERANGE: The Cellar
SPARKY'S JAM NIGHT: James Street Tavern

THURSDAY 19th

NYCTOPHOBIA'S TRUE SOUND: O2 Academy – Dubstep, drum&bass, glitch-hop and house with Nyctophobia and guests Zophyte, Leech and Kosepia.

BEAR ON A BYCICLE CHRISTMAS PARTY: The Cellar – The local label/collective celebrate the end of a successful year with a DJ party featuring sets from NVOY, Salvation Bill and BOAB regulars.

CATWEAZLE: East Oxford Community Centre
OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon
BLUES JAM: The Jack Russell, Marston

FRIDAY 20th

HOMEWORK with TEMPLE SUN COLLECTIVE + COLOUREDS + PIEMAN + DAN BOSSAPHONIK: Art Bar – Spasticated hardcore disco from Coloureds at tonight's Homework club night.

WE ARE ELEMENTS: The Cellar – Disco, house and boogie at the long-running club night.

OSPREY & THE OX4 ALLSTARS: The Wheatshaef – Album launch gig for veteran local songsmith Osprey and his merry men.

NORMA WATERSON & ELIZA CARTHY: The Cornerstone, Didcot – Grande dames of the English folk scene team up once again, the mother-daughter folk royalty having recorded a full album, 'The Gift', together for the first time.

PETE FRYER BAND: The Dolphin, Wallingford

SATURDAY 21st

GOD SPEED + INVOCATION + I CRIED WOLF + VISIONFALL + OVERLORD: O2 Academy – Skeletor round off another mighty year of putting on the best local and touring metal acts with an Oxford showcase. There's metalcore and old school metal from God Speed; melodic hardcore from Visionfall; more metalcore from Visionfall and dark, progressive

and groove metal from Overlord, while Milton Keynes' tech-metallers I Cried Wold provide some out of town action.

SIR NORMAN J: Art Bar – The 80s warehouse party and Kiss FM pioneer, Notting Hill Carnival stalwart (with his Talkin' Loud soundsystem), Radio 2 presenter and MBE comes to town to play his trademark mix of funk, soul, house and rare groove.

KOMRAD + TAMARA PARSONS-BAKER +SAMUEL ZASADA + THE OTHER DRAMAS: The Wheatshaef – Big Red Sky Records Christmas do, with prog-core tyrants Komrad fusing Dillinger, Shellac and King Crimson into an unholy torrent, plus a solo show from this month's *Nightshift* cover stars Tamara; icy doom-folksters Samuel Zasada, and acoustic pop duo The Other Dramas.

IN ZANADU + TRAPS + WEBS + MARIONETTES: The Cellar – Rock, blues and funk from Banbury's In Zanadu at tonight's It's All About The Music show, alongside grungy power-pop outfit Traps.

THE SHAPES: The Marsh Harrier – 60s rock and soul and r'n'b from The Shapes.

Sunday 15th

BURIED IN SMOKE CHRISTMAS ALL-DAYER: The Wheatshae

A full day and night of thunderous metal and hardcore, on the Sabbath, just before Christmas? What would Jesus think? Well, since he had long hair and a beard and an open mind to life, he'd probably be down the front leading the moshpit. And you'd be a wise man (or woman) to join him in such fun as Buried In Smoke round off another year of bringing heavyweight bands to town. Chief among today's attractions are Eindhoven's **Komatsu** (*pictured*). You'd hope that any band who named themselves after the Japanese company that manufactured the world's biggest industrial machinery would be seriously heavyweight. And so Komatsu are. They are the archetypal musical bulldozer come to level your senses with riffage. The band touch bases with all the necessary stoner/sludge big hitters – there are obvious influences of Mastodon, Kyuss and Queens of the Stone Age in their melodic but molten sound stew, as well as Clutch, Monster Magnet and Karma To Burn, all of whom they've supported along the way. They're joined by "noise-shitting bass bastards" **Palehorse**; psychedelic groove-metallers **Mother Corona**; prog-math-core monsters **Komrad**; experimental doom and stoner crew **Death Of Orion**; brutal riffmongers **Bludger**, featuring former-JOR man Aynz, and crust-punk/doom/hardcore newcomers **Girlpower**, featuring former members of the mighty Sextodecimo. Plenty more besides, and topping everything off in time for some festive cheer are hosts and Oxford's finest purveyors of bluest-tinged stoner-metal **Desert Storm**. Have a very heavy Christmas, everybody.



PROPAGANDA + TRASHY + JACK FM DJs: O2 Academy
EXTRA-CURRICULAR: The Cellar
PETE FRYER BAND: King & Queen, Wheatley

SUNDAY 22nd

BETA BLOCKER & THE BODY CLOCK + JACK GOLDSTEIN + OSCAR MOLINEUX: The Cellar – Lo-fi and experimental club night Forever Twitching hosts recent *Nightshift* Demo of the Monthers Beta Blocker with their fuzzy fusion of Dinosaur Jr, Sebadoh and My Bloody Valentine. They're joined by Fixers frontman Jack Goldstein for what is likely to be an inventive and uncompromising set of sound exploration.

SIOBHAN McLUSKY + MATT SEWELL + TWIZZ TWANGLE + MAEVE BAYTON + MARK ATHERTON + BEARD OF DESTINY: The Wheatshaef (2.30-7pm) – Klub Kakofanney host a special pre-Christmas acoustic session in the Sheaf's downstairs bar, with unplugged sets from the likes of folk-blues balladeer Maeve Bayton; rootsy bluesman Beard of Destiny and the madcap Twizz Twangle.

PLACE ABOVE + JIM GARRARD + BEAVERFUEL: The Wheatshaef – Local emo and post-hardcore rockers Place Above bow out with a tenth anniversary farewell show. They're joined by Bristol/Oxford pop-ska-Americana chap Jim Garrard and potty-mouthed indie-punks Beaver Fuel.

FLIGHTS OF HELIOS + THE AUGUST LIST + SIER PIN SKY + BEN WALKER + JOSHUA GILBERT: The Port Mahon – Tertium Quid's final show of the year and a suitably excellent mixed bill, with spaced-out ambient psych-drone ensemble Flights of Helios; backwoods porch song duo The August List; autumnal folk-popsters Sier Pin Sky, and Candy Says keyboard man Ben Walker.

CHRIS NEWMAN + MÁIRE NI CHATHASAIGH: The Cornerstone, Didcot – Rootsy blend of traditional Irish folk, jazz, swing and bluegrass from the guitar-harp duo.

MONDAY 23rd

FLUID'S CHRISTMAS PARTY: The Cellar – House, garage, dubstep and drum&bass from Captain Crunch, Zyklon Sound, Masp and more

HATWEAZLE: The Mad Hatter

TUESDAY 24th

A REGGAE CHRISTMAS with LAID BLAK + COUNT SKYLARKIN + DJ BUNJY + MC JOE PENG: O2 Academy – The Academy hosts its traditional Christmas Eve reggae party, featuring Bristol's Laid Blak, whose 'Red' and 'Bristol Love' have become modern-day UK dancehall classics. They're joined by local scene mainstay Count Skylarkin on the decks, alongside DJ Bunjy from Laid Blak.

REGGAE NIGHT: Art Bar

WEDNESDAY 25th

Ah yes, Christmas. The Wanted roasting on an open fire. Kodaline shoved up the chimney and Bastille neatly adorned with air-tight festive stockings over their faces. Deafheaven cranked up on the stereo. Time for a small glass of wine. Merry Christmas, readers.

THURSDAY 26th

PETE FRYER BAND: The Seacourt Arms – Christmas comedown fun with idiosyncratic blues veteran Pete Fryer.

FRIDAY 27th

BLUNTED: The Cellar – Hip hop, funk, soul, drum&bass and roots club night with DJs Unia, Grande, Fu and Count Skylarkin.



Sunday 15th

THE WATERBOYS: The New Theatre

The return of Mike Scott's mercurial rockers The Waterboys and a chance to relive some of the most defiantly unfashionable pop to come out of the 1980s. Going against the grain of most post-punk, The Waterboys infused their gutsy, exuberant brand of rock with a traditional piano and brass-led rootsy edge and a stadium-style grandeur that for a time threatened to take them into the same stratospheric level of commercial success as Simple Minds and U2. Instead, a trio of classic mid-80s albums, 'A Pagan Place', 'This Is The Sea' and 'Fisherman's Blues', steered clear of that sort of pomposity and the band remained more of a cult concern. Mass acceptance did finally come in 1991 with the re-release of epic single 'The Whole Of The Moon', but by then Scott had already moved on, ditching the raggle taggle Celtic rock in favour of darker, more experimental waters. To celebrate the 25th anniversary of the release of 'Fisherman's Blues', Scott, alongside fiddler Steve Wickham, teams back up with Anto Thistlethwaite and Trevor Hutchinson to relive its classic songs alongside a variety of material from The Waterboys' extensive catalogue.

SATURDAY 28th

POLEDO: The Wheatshaef – Lo-fi noisemongers return to their hometown for the first time in an age, their sugared pop nuggets wrapped in a delicious coating of uber-fuzz.

SUPERLOOSE + STEM: The British Legion, Abingdon – Skittle Alley gig night with Americana crew Superloose and trippy electro types STEM.

PROPAGANDA + TRASHY + JACK FM DJs: O2 Academy
EXTRA-CURRICULAR: The Cellar
HOUSE NIGHT: Art Bar

SUNDAY 29th

BLUES JAM: Fat Lil's, Witney (3pm)

MONDAY 30th

DJ DEREK + COUNT SKYLARKIN: The Cellar – Last chance to see the legendary Bristolian DJ in action, spinning his trademark selection of reggae, ska and rocksteady.

HATWEAZLE: The Mad Hatter

TUESDAY 31st

SWITCH featuring SHY FX: O2 Academy – Ringing in the New year in bass-heavy style.

PROPAGANDA vs TRASHY: O2 Academy – Prehistoric-themed NYE party from O2 club regulars Propaganda and Trashy.

YOUR SONG: The Wheatshaef – Local bands pay tribute to and demolish classic and cult faves upstairs and downstairs at the Sheaf's NYE party.

90s CLUB CLASSICS NYE PARTY: Art Bar
FREERANGE: The Cellar
PETE FRYER BAND: The Duke of Monmouth



MARK EITZEL

Art Bar

It’s just not happening tonight, and former American Music Club singer Mark Eitzel doesn’t really care who knows about it. Travelling from Edinburgh to Oxford in a day, missing his soundcheck, coming down with something after a dodgy taco and faced with a microphone that cuts out throughout, he folds his arms, grumbles away between songs, and leaves the stage twenty minutes early, bottle of red wine in hand. Blank faces all round.

While on record, Eitzel has grown old gracefully, the anguished howl of ‘Everclear’ long since replaced by a beautiful “seen it all” weariness, the arrangements for his latest live band veer uncomfortably towards the loungier end of things. Soft bar-room piano and lilting double bass replace the agitated complement of former American Music Club guitarist Vudi, weakening the punch of songs used to weightier treatment. Yet still, it’s a Mark Eitzel show,

and while this isn’t a gold standard performance, the gold standard for Eitzel in the past has, after all, often been something approaching life-changing. It’s hard to forget, for instance, that the last time Eitzel played solo here in Oxford, there were grown men openly weeping. He remains one of the finest living songwriters: even recent songs like ‘Decibels and Little Pills’, would, if Elbow had penned them, be soundtracking the festival season

every year. Tonight ‘Western Sky’, tossed away as an opener with a ragged guitar sound and technical problems throughout, becomes a rough diamond, making us work to get to its brilliant core. And that’s Eitzel all over: at times he may be wilfully awkward, but he remains unmatched as a painter of what it’s like to be a drunkard or a lover, or frequently both at the same time. An off night by a supreme talent. *Stuart Fowkes*

HUGH MASEKELA & LARRY WILLIS / ZENA EDWARDS

St John the Evangelist

Zena Edwards, a London-based poet and musician, exudes a confidence that belies her youth. Blending elements of UK hip hop and jazz she moves between songs and poems, occasionally playing the kora and thumb piano, accompanied by an acoustic guitarist. A long, touching poem about coming across a homeless woman in Regent Street holds the entire audience in a spell, and suggests the emergence of a significant new talent. It’s not often you get to see a true musical legend in a setting as cosy as this. Jazz trumpeter Hugh Masekela has fought apartheid in his native South Africa, played with Miles Davis and The Byrds in the US, studied at the Guildhall in London and scored an unexpected dance hit in 1984 with ‘Don’t Go Lose It Baby’. Tonight he plays an intimate show with just his old friend pianist Larry Willis as accompaniment, interspersed with plenty of anecdotes from his long career. Having only seen him with a band before it’s a shock to see what an astonishing player he is, coaxing sounds of unnatural beauty from his silver trumpet, that most modest looking of instruments. Occasionally he picks up a tambourine as Willis plays

piano (a real Steinway, no less), though they always give each other plenty of space. A tale about Miles Davis has him telling the young Masekela “if you could take some of our shit and bring some of your African shit then……. shit!” Often a story about a musician is followed by one of their standards, so a Charlie Parker anecdote precedes ‘Billie’s Bounce’, and ‘Rockin’ Chair’ follows a tale about Louis Armstrong. His voice is hugely sonorous and expressive, if lacking the phrasing of a dedicated singer, but then jazz was always about expression rather than following rules. This tour is clearly a time for reflection and two names are brought up repeatedly: Miriam Makeba, his wife for two years in the 60s, and Louis Armstrong. Tonight seems to be something of a tribute to both, and his style does seem to recall Armstrong’s in a way I’ve never noticed before. It’s all over too soon, and even in an autumn of outstanding musical treats this is one that won’t be beaten for a while. *Art Lagun*

BRIGHT WORKS / RAINBOW SHARK

The Wheatsheaf

With Autumn’s icy nights helping the old year to slide off into the past, it is energising to see the out-of-season green shoots of next year’s bands already sprouting on the boards of Oxford’s venues. Having recently enjoyed early gigs from Orange Vision and Balloon Ascents, tonight brings two more delights. Rainbow Shark are a student duo of Jack Levy and Bill Wright, hot off their gap trips and riding a digital beat with guitar and keyboards. The stand-out element at this early stage of their development is the wildly radio-friendly voice of Jack, with the bass enunciation of a Lloyd Cole or an impassioned David Sylvian, and an airy, tremulousness harking back to Bobbie Goldsboro. I say bring it on. Bright Works too are burgeoning, after their short-lived incarnation as Nairobi. Equally musically adept, they are mining away at the seam of township pop: that trickling, high-picking guitaring, so beloved locally, and owing its tap root to The Boyoyo Boys. Bright Works’ ace card is the knack of writing rich, witty lyrics to marry with this infectious, dancing vibe. So you get the paradiddle-heavy, prog-math of ‘Houses’, sidestepping into ‘If You Have Any Sweet Nothings, Whisper Them Now’, which they announce, jokingly I hope, was recently played on hospital radio, with its main refrain of “We’ll be dead forever, but we’ll be dead together”.

There’s a commonly held view that says bands never produce their best material on their first EP. I’d counter that, live, the almost mystical hopefulness, youthful caprice, and ravenous musical inventiveness of all these new born acts, is the most exciting, and ultimately most talked about, time to get out and see them. *Paul Carrera*

LANTERNS ON THE LAKE

Art Bar

Simon Raymonde still has great ears; Veronica Falls are evidence of this, as are Lanterns On The Lake. Right now Bella Union has some hot property under its tutelage. Lanterns’ second album, ‘Until the Colours Run’ has received wide ranging acclaim, stretching from gently atmospheric to a noisy maelstrom; it’s unlikely to break the mainstream but will certainly inspire future artists and connoisseurs of crafted noise sculpture. It is a work of beauty. Following directly on from a gentle, folk-centric set at Truck Store, which is pleasant but holds none of the power of the album, tonight’s show starts with new number, ‘Picture Show’; initially it consists of delicately picked violin and the gentle rolling of waves (the nautical/maritime theme runs throughout the band’s work DNA-like), before growing stronger and more insistent. The song’s title is apt as it summons images into your head; you can picture a stricken boat or a marooned

sailor both in the lyrics and their accompaniment. ‘Elodie’, which opens the new album, starts with a wall of effects and strident drums before breaking down into a gentle lilting vocal, a process repeated in a wave-like cycle, washing you up and down in its ebb and flow, at times pleasantly soporific, at others startling and nerve jangling, but always magical. It ends with a sprinkle of piano notes and then silence, leaving a pregnant pause before the audience breaks from its mesmerized state into loud applause. It’s staggering. The band takes us through such hypnotic entrancement many more times tonight and each time we awake in raptures; you really begin to feel that you’re witnessing something special. It is mournful and melancholic, yet positive and uplifting. Highlights are the huge ‘Vondlekerk’, the band’s intro to ‘The Buffalo Days’, and single ‘Until the Colours Run’. In addition to the fantastic sound and strong songwriting there’s also musical virtuosity as the band move around the stage between songs, switching and adapting instruments, blending technology and traditional instrumentation – Harmonium, keyboards, bottle neck and bowed guitar, kettle drums, effects and so on – as well as playing styles, seamlessly. In addition to many tracks from both their albums Lanterns On The Lake dip into their distant past with titles from each of their self-released EPs in evidence (albeit in reverse order): ‘Sap Sorrow’, ‘A Kingdom’, and final encore ‘I Love You Sleepyhead’. We are truly spoilt. *Mark Taylor*

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YOUNG KNIVES

The Cellar

It’s close to twelve years since Nightshift first caught sight of Young Knives, playing at this same venue. They were still called Ponyclub back then and we declared they were geniuses. They even managed to drop a bit of Throbbing Gristle’s ‘Subhuman’ into the middle of their song ‘Easy Peasy’. Tonight, we’ll happily declare them geniuses again, and that Throbbing Gristle influence even seems to be back. Choosing to play at the Cellar to launch their new album, the Kickstarter-funded ‘Sick Octave, is a smart move. The place is packed, the buzz is tangible and the band look and sound as fresh and invigorated as they ever have.

The first two-thirds of tonight’s set is ‘Sick Octave’ played in album order, from the kiddie chant intro ‘12345’ through to the fabulously sweet-hearted, oddly twisted ‘Maureen’. If there was any doubt that ‘Sick Octave is Young Knives’ best album, its live rendering squashes that. Other than a slightly muddled ‘Bella Bella’, there’s not a wasted note or weak spot to be heard. The pulsing, synthetic ‘Owls Of Athens’ is insistent and triumphant. Henry Dartnall fears it sounds like Sigue Sigue Sputnik. We reckon it’s closer to Alien Sex Fiend. Someone else mentions Suicide. I think we’re all in agreement that it’s bloody fantastic. So is ‘We Could Be Blood’ –

Genesis P Orridge menace wrapped in a pretty, sleepy-eyed nursery rhyme, and ‘White Sands’, a deceptively raucous punk workout. ‘Something Awful’ is wired and wonderful, post-punk pillaging at its absolute best. But it’s ‘Maureen’ that concludes this part of the gig so spectacularly: a lesson in how to make simple, brilliant pop while simultaneously sounding just the right kind of creepy, as unrequited love, domestic violence and obsession collide. After this, we get ‘The Decision’, a song that topped Nightshift’s end of year Top 20 back in 2004 and has lost none of its militant pop-punk appeal in the interim. A jaunt through

a handful of old avourites also throws up ‘Terra Firma’ and ‘Turn Tail’, and the only doubt is why the band themselves seem to think they’ve maybe compromised their art prior to the new album. ‘Sick Octave’ is simply a continuation of what they’ve always done, and done brilliantly: infecting irresistible melody with a sense of mischief and skewing it through a prism of their own wild imaginations. Witness the jaunty/uptight/nonchalant “La la la la, he’s a killer / La la la la, he’s alright” on ‘All Tied Up’. Twelve years down the line they’re still on top of their game and not only one of the best bands Oxford has ever produced, but one of the most original bands around, anywhere. Now, that takes some kind of genius. **Dale Kattack**

FROM THE BOGS OF AUGHISKA

The Wheatsheaf

From The Bogs Of Aughiska. From the west coast of Ireland. Two men. White shirts, black ties and black balaclavas. Gadgets, guitars and drones. The sound of vast, demonic waves crashing upon cursed shores. Black and white film footage of desolate cliffs and grey, undulating sea. The clang of haunted steel foundries. Silence. Cogs grinding, eerie dissonance. Drones, darker and darker. An overwhelming sense of something terrible about to creep, or seep, or seethe from the decayed stonework in films of neglected churches standing on bleak hillsides. Brooding wows and flutters. Drones, black as night, heavy as mountains.

Voices, Irish, talking of myths and legends, dying with the old generation. Warping, lysergic images of doomed wildlife. An oppressive feeling of unease. Subliminal voices, death metal rasps half hidden beneath shifting layers of doomladen electronic menace. Tales of banshees and portents of death. Two figures stood stock still, faces hidden, radiating cool, calm menace. A vision of Hell. Silence. Applause. Shocking, incongruous, enthusiastic applause and cheering. Exit stage left, identities never revealed. Silence. Home. Sleep. Nightmares. **Dale Kattack**

BLUE

O2 Academy

Earlier this year, two years after their modest showing at the Eurovision Song Contest, Blue released their “comeback” album, ‘Roulette’, named after their gamble in releasing it themselves. Unfortunately, by that point, the Blue credibility ship had sailed (though some would argue it was never in harbour in the first place). It’s certainly not their voices; tonight Duncan says no other band except maybe perennial revivalists Backstreet Boys has the harmonic spread, and he’s got a point. It’s not necessarily the genre, either; boybandry might have moved on to guitars and floppy hair (again), but soul and r’n’b are still going strong in various forms elsewhere. They just weren’t around long enough, or popular enough in their heyday or away long enough to draw on the level of nostalgia the reformed Take That did. The age range of the (almost exclusively female) crowd tonight is wide, but Blue have just got Radio 2 written all over them now, and it’s odd that the newer stuff they play isn’t more in keeping with that demographic. Their intermittent dance routines are surprisingly energetic and slick – I was expecting far more “we sit down, we stand up, we lean”, as Simon so masterfully put it in ‘The Big Reunion’. Simon’s naff raps and the odd “remix” bits – which seem to be a live addition – delight the audience but don’t fit; songs like the otherwise flawless “All Rise” really don’t need them. The members are easy to pigeonhole – the cool one, the ridiculous one, the one off the lottery, the one who mistook a cashpoint for a toilet – and perhaps having more personality in their hair than the whole of The Wanted have works against them, as, vocally at least, Blue are stronger together than apart, and they need to get back the momentum they lost. **Kirsten Etheridge**

LUDOVICO EINAUDI

The New Theatre

Ludovico Einaudi has effectively made a career out of one idea: the belief that a simple piano arpeggio and a comfortable chord progression can generate an emotional payoff for any occasion almost at the touch of a button. He’s been ploughing the same furrow for a few decades now, soundtracking the likes of *Doctor Zhivago*, *This Is England* and even an episode of *EastEnders*, and a packed New Theatre testifies that his heartstring-tugging formula works as well as ever. As a pianist, Einaudi is as one-track as they come: the half-hour solo piano portion of tonight’s show is like watching paint dry, albeit in a nicely-shot advert by Dulux, of course. He plinks along nondescriptly through a series of pieces that are both undemanding and evocative, though it’s no small accomplishment to be able to walk that line so deftly. Tonight, though, he’s mostly backed by a ten-piece band of strings, percussion and assorted subtle electronics, and takes most of the set from this year’s outstanding ‘In A Time Lapse’ album, a rousing Clint Mansell-style soundtrack *tour de force*. Einaudi’s melodies are bolstered by stabbing strings, guitar accompaniment and cellos running through a range of cosmic effects and it’s immeasurably more interesting than the solo spot, showing off his knack for arranging something simple and scaling it up with potency and gravitas. ‘Newton’s Cradle’ is all bombast and crescendo, exploding around a space more used to musicals and heritage acts, while ‘Experience’ is just waiting for the next Darren Aronofsky movie to come knocking grimly at its door. The full band Einaudi show, while playing the same ‘instant emotion’ trick, is undeniably immersive and impressive, perfectly orchestrated to get your heart beating just that little bit faster, even if you’re not entirely sure why. **Stuart Fowkes**

KODALINE

O2 Academy

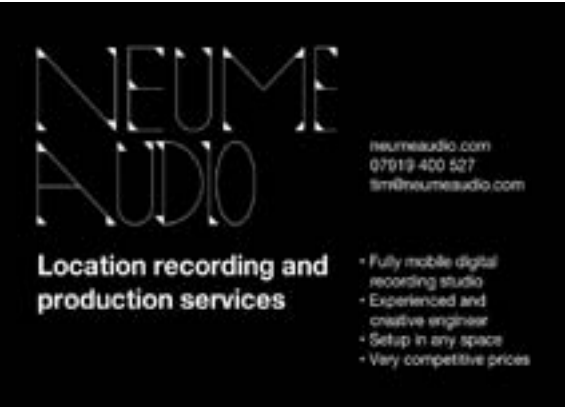
After a summer in which they’ve supported Bruce Springsteen in Hyde Park, played Glastonbury, and seen their debut album, ‘In A Perfect World’, reach number 3 in the charts, Kodaline return to Oxford at the start of their biggest UK and European tour yet, their future seemingly as bright as the fireworks exploding over east Oxford tonight. Opening with ‘After The Fall’, with its irresistibly rousing chorus, and the more melancholic, and undeniably Coldplay-like ‘Pray’, which still had the audience clapping and singing along, you feel ‘In A Perfect World’ has been the preferred soundtrack to many of the romances among the crowd. The band say they write for a purpose, that it’s a kind of therapy. And who needs to pay for a life coach when you can listen instead to the lyrics of songs like ‘Perfect World’, or ‘Big Bad World’? Similarly ‘Brand New Day’ urges you to get out of your home town and find a better life, which is exactly what Kodaline, who come from a small town in Ireland, have done since the days described in ‘Way Back When’, when the band were known as 21 Demands. In ‘Big Bad World’ the lyrics ask you to “Live every day as if it’s your last”. It’s motivational stuff. The encore begins with a surprise appearance half way down the room, with Kodaline singing Sam Cooke’s a cappella version of ‘Bring It On Home To Me’, while stood on the venue’s bar, to the delight of the audience further back, and is completed on the stage, with ‘The Answer’ and ‘All I Want’. They mention that in the past no one turned up for their gigs. Those days are gone. While the faded star that is Boy George is playing upstairs at the O2 tonight, down here, Kodaline’s star in very much in the ascendancy. **Mel Silver**



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DR SHOTOVER Christmas (Brahms and) Liszt

Tum-ti-tum, Ru-dolph the red-nosed... ah, there you are. Pull up a pint of egg-nog. Welcome to another fine Xmas-themed evening in the East Indies Club bar, though I must say, this fake snow keeps getting in one's hair... or is that dandruff? [*Dr S tastes some*]... Mmm, I see. It's not dandruff. Nor is it fake snow. I remember now, we had a festive visit from Santa Claus, aka my personal trainer 'Spanish Kevin' Sanchez shortly before my lunchtime nap at the bar, and he has generously anointed us with the fruits of his latest international business deal... [*Dr S takes out a small monogrammed silver spoon and starts ladling copious amounts of the white powder up his nostrils*]... Reminds me of the last time [*snif*] I was at one of Fondles [*snif*] Nightclub's famous [*snif*] 70s Drug Nights. Still, enough of this frivolity. Back to the serious task of putting together the list of entertainments for the East Indies Club Xmas Mixer. Pass me that crumpled old Sevenchurch set-list, and my finest ancestral quill pen. Now then... Free-form improv carols by our old Kraut-Prog pals CAN'T... tick. All the cheap brandy you can drink... tick. Charades

teams led by Thom Yorke and Carol Decker... tick. Repeat plays of *I'm Gonna Spend My Christmas With A Dalek* by The Go-Gos on the club juke-box... tick. A live-streamed appearance by our dear friends STOCKPORT, at a pagan flute festival on top of a Welsh mountain... tick. Admittance charge – fifteen guineas... tick. What's that, Timberlake? Festive punch? I'll give you a festive punch! Happy – *oof* - Xmas – *thwack* – and a Prosperous – *unghh* – New Year! You scrawny little – *urff* – TICK!

Next month: Carol Decking



'Has Carol Decker left now?'

INTRODUCING....

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

DUCHESS

Who are they?
Duchess are a six-piece, female-fronted percussion-heavy pop band drawing inspiration from African and Latin rhythms. Formed last year and coming together through mutual friends, the band is made up of singer Katie-Louise Herring (*lead vocals*), Will Madgwick (*percussion*), Thomas Beddow (*percussion*), Dan Martin (*percussion*), Steve Bradshaw (*bass*) and Jerry Nickless (*guitar*). They began jamming at Katie's house, gradually adding to their extensive rhythm section and assortment of percussion instruments, including darbuka, agogo, djembe, woodblocks and a giant Taiko drum. Their first gig was on the Jamalot stage at Truck in 2012 ("a baptism of fire but great fun. We played on the Sunday morning, which could have been terrible but we had a good crowd and managed to get people dancing through their hangovers, including ourselves!"). Since then they've gigged continuously, including The Punt, Irregular Folk's Bedouin tent sessions, Truck (again), and Oxjam, as well as further afield, including Y-Not in Derbyshire and a trip to France with fellow local Afropop aficionados Bright Works. They launched their debut CD 'Shakes' / 'South Parade' at the O2 in October.
What do they sound like?
A joyously exuberant pop-friendly take on Calypso, Latin dance and Afropop with a three-man rhythm section underpinning singer Katie's warmly soulful sing-song voice. Duchess are pretty much the definition of "the sound of summer," and a recent Nightshift review suggested they could heal all the world's ills through fun-packed good vibes alone.
What inspires them?
"Having three percussionists mean we draw inspiration from a variety of rhythms from different areas of music. We all have a mutual love of pop music, so we try to mix interesting rhythms with more pop-style melodies."
Career highlight so far:
"Playing live is always a highlight, especially at places like Truck and the O2, but we really enjoyed recording our single and the video to go with it."



And the lowlight:
"Equipment failures always cause us issues, having so many percussionist hitting things really hard. There's often a few quick-fixes going on mid-set."
Their favourite other Oxfordshire act is:
"Has to be Bright Works!"
If they could only keep one album in the world, it would be:
"The only one that we can all probably agree on is Port Issac's Fishermans Friends; if you catch us on a night out, this is what you're likely to hear us singing."
When is their next local gig and what can newcomers expect?
"The Old Fire Station on Sunday 8th December, with Listing Ships and Miraculous Mule. Expect foot-stomping rhythms, catchy melodies and hopefully some dancing!"
Their favourite and least favourite things about Oxford music are:
"The opportunity to play a gig a week and never leave the county, meaning there is always a chance to catch and play with some new and different acts, but also means it's hard to get out of the shire to new audiences."
You might love them if you love:
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ALL OUR YESTERDAYS

20 YEARS AGO

As Jon Spira's *Anyone Can Play Guitar* film showed, **The Nubiles** are one of Oxford's great lost musical secrets. Back in December 1993, they seemed a bit less of a secret as Paul Carrera interviewed them for *Curfew* magazine's front cover feature. Writing that you could tell who'd just been to a Nubiles gig, Paul described what he termed "post-Nubiles syndrome": "people glazed with shock, with a dazed look, as if they'd just been smacked round the head with a plank."
The quartet were one of the most unusual, abrasive and intense bands to come out of Oxford, but their interview found incandescent frontman Tara Milton to be a reserved and modest chap, recounting how his previous band, 5.30, had been "screwed around pretty badly – a classic example of a large record company picking a small band and manipulating them for their own ends," an experience that had seen him go "from limos, world tours and money back to the dole queue and despondency."
The Nubiles formed when Tara met drummer Dan Goddard, previously of The Hyde, along with Italian guitarist Georgio Curetti and guitarist Penny Schueller. "Aggression can be expressed in so many ways," explained Georgio, "a whisper can be loaded with sinister menace," which neatly encapsulated the band's sound and ethos, Tara rejecting punk's kicking down the statues attitude in favour of "lyrics with more pathological and surreal aim." Local music affieciencadoes will recall that the original line-up of The Nubiles found Tara teaming up with a couple of local lads called Gaz Coombes and Danny Goffey. Wonder whatever became of them.

10 YEARS AGO

Coming down from the celebrations for our 100th issue, which featured a series of gigs at venues around Oxford, *Nightshift* listed, as has become traditional, our end of year Top 20 of Oxford songs. Topping the pile in December 2003 was **The Rock Of Travolta**'s 'Everything's Opened Up', the band's only ever vocal track, featuring **Seafood**'s David Line: "paying sullen homage to Sonic Youth, the song growling and purring before ripping its cage apart in one climactic barrage of sonic mayhem." The top 5 songs also included **Radiohead**'s 'Sail To The Moon'; **Sexy Breakfast**'s Walking in the Air'-sampling 'Fade To White; **Suitable Case For Treatment**'s 'Brand New Loafers' and **Bridge**'s 'Harvester', while local favourites **Winnebago Deal**, **Meanwhile Back In Communist Russia** and **Dive Dive** also made their presence felt.
Metalcore heroes **Coma Cai** were the featured interview band, whose singer was called stAN Boa, the odd letter casings being apparently an important thing. They'd just released their EP 'Between One & Six Zeroes', which was picking up Radio 1 airplay, while the band were busy trekking round the UK's toilet venues. Unusually for a metal band they quoted The Smiths and Stone Roses as influences, alongside Deftones and System of a Down: "We're just trying to make it as difficult as possible to pigeonhole us," they claimed.
In a quiet month for gigs, highlights included **Electric Six** at the **Zodiac**, showing how little things change with time, while local names treading the boards included **Phil Freizinger**, **Jeremy**

THIS MONTH IN OXFORD MUSIC HISTORY

Hughes, **Twizz Twangle**, **The Pete Fryer Band** and **Smilex**, showing how little things change with time...

5 YEARS AGO

It was all about **Little Fish** in December 2008. Not only did the band grace the cover of *Nightshift*, talking about their "mad year," which saw the duo supporting **Supergrass** around Europe, recording their debut album in LA with Linda Perry and generally looking for all the world like rock and roll's next big thing before their label spectacularly shat all over them (rewind to The Nubiles' interview fifteen years previously, why don't you?), but they also topped *Nightshift*'s end of year Top 20 with their song 'Darling Dear, fighting off stiff competition from **A Silent Film**'s 'You Will Leave A Mark', **Young Knives**' 'Mummy Light The Fire', **Foals**' 'Olympic Airways' and **Richard Walters**' awesome cover of Daniel Johnston's 'True Love Will Find You In The End'. Elsewhere in the Top 20 were **Youthmovies**, **Stornoway**, **Sharron Kraus**, **Jonquil**, **The Family Machine** and **Mr Shadow**.
On the local gig front, the month's highlight was indisputably two sold-out nights in a row at **the Academy** from **Foals**, who were just starting to make their presence felt as international pop heroes on the back of debut album 'Antidotes'. Handpicked support for each night included chums Youthmovies and Jonquil, and the incredible **Rolo Tomassi**. Elsewhere **Isis** were at **The Regal**, while The risible **Script** had also somehow managed to sell out the Academy, proving that Christmas charity sometimes goes too far.



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DEMOS

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DEMO OF THE MONTH

PAUL BRENNAN

A one-song Christmas special from a chap who's rapidly becoming one of our favourite local heart-on-sleeve singer-songwriters. 'Just A Day' is a perfectly timed shit-on-the-façade-of-festive-spirit lament, a waltzing reminder of Yuletide loneliness with all the trimmings. It's got sleigh bells and a big horn flourish and lines like "Empty bank accounts / Watching the debts mount," as everyone attempts to squeeze every last ounce of specialness out of one random day of the year. Above it all is Paul's warm, fuzzy, sleepy-eyed voice that we've said a few times and will say again, reminds us of Candyskins' Nick Cope and Idlewild's Roddy Woomble in roughly equal parts, as he hopes "you're not alone". It's bathed in cliché for sure – both lyrically and musically, but since this is Christmas we're talking about, comforting cliché is exactly what we crave, right? That and a decent bottle of Shiraz. Wouldn't be Christmas without Shiraz.

TWISTED STATE OF MIND

Back in January this year we reviewed Twisted State of Mind's debut demo without paying too much attention to the people behind it, believing we'd discovered Oxfordshire's answer to Joan Jett. A quick scan of the accompanying letter revealed it was actually a trio of twelve-year-old boys from Witney who easily outclassed wannabe rock heroes twice their age, sounding like a grunged-up Judas Priest. Since then the boys have played the SavFest in New Jersey as well as reaching the ripe old age of 13, but such advanced years haven't mellowed them. Much. Okay, there's one song here, 'Reflections', which is a bit of a soft-centred power ballad, all pretty vocal harmonies, acoustic guitar and gentle organ swell (fnar) that's far closer to The Wanted than Metallica, but elsewhere they're a right nasty bunch of potty-mouthed urchins. 'Bury The Bitch' is a raw slab of swear-y revenge fantasy thrash that might do well to rein its slightly misogynistic tendencies but pulls few punches as cherub-faced Luke Ashby vomits out lines like "I'll mother-fuckin' tell ya something / You tossed me around, kicked me around / Made me feel like a piece of shit," that probably wasn't part of a school poetry project. Demo highlight though is the decidedly old-school metal rumble of 'I Will Be Gone', all apocalyptic

lyrical imagery and frantic, grunged-up power-play. Bad boys, wash your mouths out with soap. More of the same tomorrow, okay, we need you to teach some of the hopeless old duffers further down the page how to rock like proper bastards.

DANIEL KILBY

There are many walks of life where trying very, very hard is a good thing: sport, scientific research and fire fighting for example. The world of singing is a rather more grey area. If you're Henry Rollins for instance, looking like you're about to pop a vein through sheer raging intensity is to be applauded. Elsewhere, well, why not let's all just calm down a bit. Witney's Daniel Kilby here is a prime example of why holding back can be better for everyone. The nominal lead track here, 'Lighthouse', is awash with maudlin drama as Daniel over-emotes – albeit in admirably sonorous tones – over determinedly maudlin piano and solemn strings, the song taking nigh on five minutes to hit its bombastic climax by way of cod-spiritual words of wisdom like "Time is like a knife / Cutting through my mind". It's all a bit like some West End musical producer deciding that Snow Patrol need their own stage tribute but the emotion needs ramping up an extra few notches. But then switch to the far more understated 'Moments' – again, all piano and soft strings, and a bit of cello for extra sadness points – and everything clicks. Daniel's got quite a belter of a voice on him, kind of like Tim Buckley or Dominic Appleton, awash with gothic sensitivity, and one that really doesn't need pushing to its limited to get the full effect.

JESSICA LAW

Here's someone else with a pretty impressive voice, and who'd probably get laughed off *The X-Factor* for being not exactly the same as everyone else. We reviewed Jessica once before, a couple of years back and marvelled at her ability to sound like she was parachuting in from another century completely, whether that was 1940s musical hall, or some 19th Century folk festival. Similar thoughts occur with this latest collection of songs, her voice ranging alarmingly from pure, quavering sweetness to bawdy, shrill drunkenness, often within the space of a single verse. The accusatory 'I've Got Something On You' finds her at her most strident and seemingly inebriated, taking aim at "parsons and lawyers and whorehouse employers / Nuns and policemen and pie-makers too," with a deliciously arcane turn of phrase. The song waltzes with a carefree lack of purpose until it tips into a convenient gin house. When she re-emerges, Jessica has

swayed and swooned further back in time, a pretty mandolin twinkle accompanying a light trad-folk warble that has precisely zero connection with the evils of the modern world. The highlight here though is the musical hall-style 'School For Lost Souls' where Jessica explores her entire range of vocal styles with a natural fluency that suggests she doesn't have to try too hard to hit notes many singers would need a lifetime of tuition to get anywhere near.

THE PURPLE LIGHTS

"Powerful Husky Voice Harmonised With Angelic Backing Vocals, Combined With Upbeat Guitar Melodies, Scintillating Percussion & Drum Kit Rhythms," is how The Purple Lights describe their music, clearly oblivious to the correct use of capital letters, or the fact the descriptions bears precious little resemblance to their actual music. "This punchy musical fusion will groove its way in to your musical membrane leaving you wanting more," they continue, correct letter casing now in place, but possibly a little confused biologically with mention of musical membranes. Maybe they meant mucus membrane, a place the first track here, 'Long Time', seems to have seeped out of, as that "Powerful Husky Voice" groans unconvincingly atop inconsequential guitar jangle, like a throwaway interlude in a pub band's Sunday afternoon set of goodtime blues rocking. For all its attempts to be angelic and carefree it ain't 'alf a miserable old trudge. And it's got bongos on it. As has 'Clown', a similarly life-sucking dirge that heroically fails to marry its disparate musical stylings and ends up a puddle of nothing much other than maybe a discarded attempt by Nickleback to be a bit less overbearing and a bit more sensitive and girly. Dear God, what a thought. Are they really sure they meant their music would leave us wanting more, and not leave us wanting to blow our fucking brains all over the office wall with a twelve bore? As if encroaching winter, bleak, dark mornings and the continued existence of Owen Paterson in a position of authority wasn't depressing enough, these bastards have just stolen twenty minutes of our lives from us. Even more distressing is the fact that theirs is only the third worst demo of the month.

THE GLASSGUNS

"This is not a game for us," announces the Glassguns' letter, ominously, before revealing that the band "have recently relocated to Manchester to take advantage of the city's thriving music scene," in what would rank as cynical careerism of the highest order if their music didn't make a laughing stock of their unselfconscious hubris (they even describe their singer as "a rock god in waiting"). Oh Christ, the music. Must we? The Glassguns claim their cornerstone influences are Led Zep, AC/DC and Aerosmith and they do indeed inhabit similar territory, in much the

same way as maggots and tapeworms exist on the same planet as tigers and dolphins. Hoary old blues-rock riffs are hacked out as if the 1970s had never ended, while Mr Rock God In Waiting hollers, screams and belches with all the élan of a drunken Friday night reveller attempting a spot of Aerosmith karaoke. Not so much love in an elevator as a quick wank behind some wheelie bins. Best bit of the whole wretched exercise is the where they try and get all funky on 'The Ugly Truth', like the deformed lovechild of Ugly Kid Joe and Red Hot Chili Peppers. "The Glassguns are as comfortable on stage as a drunk on a barstool," continues the torrent of self-aggrandising slurry. Good for them; we look forward to watching them fall off the stool and soil themselves in the very near future.

THE DEMO DUMPER

THE OPPONENT

It takes something genuinely special to beat The Glassguns to the bottom of the demo pile, but here it is. With bells on. Or maybe that should be with balls on, since this demo couldn't be more savagely, moronically macho if it dropped its trousers in the middle of the street, clutched its shrivelled little dick in one hand, pumped its other fist in the air and bellowed at some poor passing lady to "fackin' get a load of that!" before swaggering off to join the Brookes University Rugby Club. We genuinely believed music like this died and was buried in an unmarked, unmourned grave sometime around 1990. Most disappointingly of all it comes to us by way of Martin Kestner, who some readers might remember being producer and beatmaker with rather good local hip hop crew Big Speakers a few years back. What he contributes to this fiasco we don't know for certain, maybe a few electronic beats that cower beneath the cataclysmic explosion of hair metal musical diarrhoea that is The Opponent. Incredibly, the whole thing starts off pretty well – ominous electronic drones and portentous narrative about roads to hell and stolen lines from *The Wizard of Oz*. Little did we know that road to hell was a hint towards the sub-AC/DC bilge to come. At their best – sorry, least inexcusable – The Opponent sound like one of those Johnny-come-lately rock bands who teamed up with some rap act or other back in the 90s to try and ride the already collapsing wave of fusion noise, but they've missed the rap bit out and it's little more than cock rock smeared all over overblown hip hop beats. At their worst, the coyly-titled 'ICLYAMTIDN', they're nothing more, nothing less, than a pompous Poison/Motley Crue/Bon Jovi-aping parody of a punchline-free joke of a rock band. "I'd like to fuck you from a distance," wails the singer with all the sexual magnetism of a blocked pub urinal. Go get him, ladies. Preferably while armed with a sizeable pair of garden shears.

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



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+ DJ Bunjy
+ MC Joe Peng

Tues 31st Dec • £10 adv
10pm - 3.30am • over 18s only
Propaganda
vs Trashy
- Prehistoric
New Years Eve

Tues 31st Dec • £10 adv
(£10 adv until 15th December)
10pm - 4am • over 18s only
Switch ft. Shy FX
New Years Eve

Sat 25th Jan 2014 • £15 adv
6.30pm - 10pm
Warpaint

Sat 25th Jan 2014 • £6 adv
7pm - 11.30pm
Upstairs
ft. Wild Swim
In association with BBC Introducing

Tues 28th Jan 2014 • £7 adv
Max Raptor
& Fort Hope

Thurs 30th Jan 2014 • £13.50 adv
Dan Le Sac vs
Scroobius Pip

Weds 5th Feb 2014 • £13.50 adv
6.30pm - 11pm
Mayday Parade
+ Man Overboard + Divided By Friday

Tues 11th Feb 2014 • £18.50 adv
Less Than Jake
& Reel Big Fish
+ Zebrahead

Thurs 13th Feb 2014 • £10 adv
Cash
Payin' Tribute to the Man In Black

Sat 15th Feb 2014 • £6 adv
7pm - 11.30pm
Upstairs ft. Black Hats
In association with BBC Introducing

Sun 16th Feb 2014 • £12.50 adv
Mike Peters
Declaration Tour 2014

Tues 18th Feb 2014 • £10 adv
Twenty One Pilots

Sat 22nd Feb 2014 • £8 adv
7pm - 10pm
Lauren Aquilina

Sat 1st Mar 2014 • £8 adv
6pm - 10pm
Room 94

Mon 3rd Mar 2014 • £11 adv
Temples

Thurs 6th Mar 2014 • £15 adv
We Are Scientists

Sun 9th Mar 2014 • £16.50 adv
The Selector
"35 Years of The Selector"

Weds 12th Mar 2014 • £15 adv
Lissie

Sat 15th Mar 2014 • £10 adv
7pm - 10pm
The Dualers

Mon 17th Mar 2014 • £23 adv
The Stranglers
40th Anniversary Tour

Tues 25th Mar 2014 • £15.50 adv
Metronomy

Thurs 27th Mar 2014 • £14 adv
Katy B

Sun 13th Apr 2014 • £20 adv
Matt Cardle

Sun 13th Apr 2014 • £15 adv
Deaf Havana

Tues 15th Apr 2014 • £20 adv
Alkaline Trio + Bayside

Fri 2nd May 2014 • £15 adv
Rescheduled show • original tickets valid
Wretch 32

Sat 31st May 2014 • £22.50 adv
7pm - 10.30pm
Chas & Dave
Back By Popular Demand



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Tickets for Saturday night shows INCLUDE FREE ENTRY to Propaganda (or £6, £5 NUS/members, £4 NHS on the door)

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190 Cowley Road, Oxford, OX4 1UE • Doors 7pm unless stated
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