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Oxford's Music Magazine

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Issue 222
January
2014**

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NEWS

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THE OXFORD PUNT returns for another musical trip round town in May. The annual showcase of unsigned Oxford talent takes place on **Wednesday 14th May**, featuring 20 or so acts at **The Purple Turtle, The Cellar, The Wheatsheaf, Turl Street Kitchen** and **The White Rabbit**.

Bands or solo acts wanting to play at The Punt can submit demos, either by emailing links to online music (no sound files, please) to nightshift@oxfordmusic.net, or sending CDs to **Nightshift, PO Box 312, Kidlington, OX5 1ZU**. In both cases, please clearly mark your demo PUNT and include both phone and email contact details and a brief bio of the band. Only acts from Oxfordshire may apply; you can't apply if you played The Punt previously and, due to the licensing conditions of all the venues, only bands aged over 18 will be eligible. Deadline for demos is the 10th March, with the line-up announced on the 15th.

As ever, a limited number of all-venue Punt passes will be on sale from February. Running since 1996, The Punt has previously given early exposure to bands such as Young Knives, Stornoway, Fixers and Little Fish as well as Yannis and Jack from Foals' first band Elizabeth, and Hugo Manuel's pre-Chad Valley and Jonquil band, The Modern, while last year's event saw sets from Candy Says, Phil McMinn, Death of Hi-Fi and Agness Pike (pictured).

SPRING OFFENSIVE preview songs from their forthcoming debut album with a one-off Oxford gig this month. The local favourites play at East Oxford Community Centre on Sunday 19th January, building up to the release of 'Young Animal Hearts', which the band have been financing through a Pledgemusic campaign. Visit www.pledgemusic.com/projects/springoffensive for more details.

THE JERICHO TAVERN is among 18 independent venues taking part in the inaugural UK Independent Venue Week from 28th January to 2nd February. Like the annual National Music Store Week, the event hopes to raise awareness of the small provincial live music venues that provide the launch pad for so many of the biggest bands. Other legendary venues participating include Clwb Ifor Bach in Cardiff; Fibbers in York; the Joiners in Southampton; Tunbridge Wells Forum and King Tut's in Glasgow. Each venue will host at least one show that week as part of the festival, which is being backed by PRS For Music and BBC Introducing. Check out the shows lined up for the Tavern and elsewhere at independentvenueweek.com.

DAVE GRIFFITH releases his first book this month alongside an accompanying soundtrack CD. The former-Eeeblee and Witches frontman is putting out 'Sinister A' on Fourier Transform, the record label run by Nightshift scribe and Audioscope organiser Simon Minter. As well as the book and CD, 'Sinister A' comes with three pieces of artwork by one-time Meanwhile, Back In Communist Russia frontwoman Emily Gray. You can order your copy direct from www.fouriertransform.com

NOVEMBER'S AUDIOSCOPE raised £1,500 for Shelter, taking the total the annual mini-festival has raised for the homeless charity to £27,000 since 2001. This year's event, at the Jericho Tavern, featured sets from Califone, Eat Lights Become Lights, The Grumbling Fur and Esben & the Witch among others.

USR HOST THEIR NEXT TWO OXFORD RECORD AND CD FAIRS on Saturday 4th January and Saturday 22nd February, both at St Aldates Parish Centre on Pembroke Street. Visit www.usrfairs.co.uk for future dates.

AS EVER, don't forget to tune into **BBC Oxford Introducing** every Saturday night between 8-9pm on 95.2fm. The dedicated local music show plays the best Oxford releases and demos as well as featuring interviews and sessions with local acts. The show is available to stream or download as a podcast at bbc.co.uk/oxford. Regularly updated local music news is available online at www.musicinoxford.co.uk. The site also features interactive reviews, a photo gallery and gig guide. Nightshift's online form is open to all local music fans and musicians at nightshift.oxfordmusic.net

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OXFORD HIP HOP

Words and photo:Leo Bowder

THINK OF “OXFORD MUSIC” and what springs to mind? Maybe clever tunes made by intense young gents with checked shirts, acoustic guitars or white Telecasters. Perhaps worthy sorts with folky airs. Hip-hop probably doesn’t. In fact the term Oxford hip-hop almost seems like an oxymoron, an anachronism, but why should that be so? Hip hop is the most popular genre in the world but urban music in general only makes a small dent in the local scene, with hip hop in particular having its work cut out to make an impression. Perhaps it’s because in the minds of many it’s intimately entwined with sunnier climes over the Atlantic; NYC in the 80s, the lethal US East Coast/ West Coast beef of the 90s, blazing chronic, low-riders, 40s, Glocks, blunts, pimps and ho’s, or at least the sprawling estates of London. How can music born in such environments possibly translate here; maybe Oxford Dons squaring up to their Cambridge counterparts in late night ‘lecture-offs’ in boisterous and crowded seminar rooms? But hip-hop is so much more than that. Here, in da ‘Ford, it has been tenaciously holding on; weathering the storms of passing fashion, gradually growing in strength.

MAJOR HIP HOP INSPIRATION

Malcolm X made a speech at the Oxford Union in 1964; members of Public Enemy and KRS One have played here, as has Wu Tan Clan’s GZA, while Afrika Bambaataa was down at the Cellar earlier this year. The once ubiquitous Mr ShaoDow made Oxford his home after learning Kung Fu in China, his ‘Look Out There’s a Black Man Coming’ was number 4 in *Nightshift*’s top twenty in 2007, snapping at the heels of Radiohead. Back then we noted “UK hip hop [was] still trying to escape from its American cousin’s shadow”. But is this still true, five years later? Over the years there have been plenty of excellent local hip hop acts, from the likes of Asher Dust, Big Speakers and Flooded Hallways, through rappers Zuby, Chima Anya and ShaoDow to the more recent talents such as Death of Hi-Fi, Rawz and Half Decent, all championed by *Nightshift*, and local producers and rappers have regularly collaborated on each other’s releases, but there’s never



really been what might resemble a cohesive hip hop scene in town, while hip hop acts are a rare spectacle on the local gig circuit.

TO FIND OUT, NIGHTSHIFT

rounded up three of the main movers and shakers of the scene: local producer Laurence Payme Barnes (AKA Astro Snare); BG Records founder, former Baby Gravy drummer and most recently the woman behind Desicable Zee, Zahra Tehrani, and up and coming MC Rhymeskeemz, in the recording suite of Blackbird Ley’s Soundworks Studio and try to find out, and ask them first, what hip hop is and what it means to each of them.

Zahra: “It’s like a pathway, a way of expression that brings young people together with beats and lyrics. It’s trying to bring people out of their comfort zone to express themselves; we’ve brought it to pretty weird places, like museums. Coming from a punk background the beats mean a lot to me, but I like

to switch it up and make it more experimental.”

Astro: “Hip-hop is a culture that crosses loads of borders. Race, creeds and sex; none o’ that matters. It’s just a culture that people follow. We sell the music, but that’s just one commodity; you got break dancers and DJs and graffiti writers. It’s a movement; it affects everyone in today’s culture. You switch on the TV and check out commercials; you’ll hear a break beat, you’ll see some graffiti in the background; it’s everywhere, without you even knowin’”

Rhymeskeemz: “Hip hop is my life and, touching on what Astro was saying, it’s more than just a genre of music. Even though these days it’s changed from what it was; it’s still a way of life. KRS One said ‘rap’s something you do, hip-hop is something you live’. My favourite types of music are reggae, soul and hip-hop, but I think the latter links them together and engages in all types of music.”

So what is UK hip hop?

Zara: “For me it’s spilt up into different bits: you got commercial stuff that used to come out, like Tinchy Stryder, that I wouldn’t really class as hip hop, but then you’ve got people like Roots Manuva. There’s a really innovative scene where people were mixing it up with dubstep and bands. I love it where it really crosses over, like Ghostpoet and Sound of Rum. There’s hip-hop mixed with jazz and weird experimental shit; I’d like to see more of that.”

Astro: “Well, the US is really the catalyst of it all, but it comes from Jamaica; lets be real, with Kool Herc, but the spirit of hip hop is here right now. No one’s really making severe money out of it, but we’re carrying on making it and experimenting with it too; that helps it grow. The sound of it... it’s like a struggle isn’t it? The weather has a very big impact. Jehst has a track called ‘People Under the Weather’; for me that’s the title for the UK! I’ve been under the weather for the last 15 years now; I left America a long time ago. It’s like, ‘we need a cup o’ tea with this here, next to the fire. Run that beat!’”

Rhymeskeemz: “I tend to listen to more US hip-hop from the 90s than anything. Now the BPM has changed, they’re classing 140 as hip-hop. People like Tinie Tempah. But for me the best era of UK hip-hop was when Jehst, Rodney P, Skinnyman were fronting the scene and you had big bookings every week. There’s still good stuff coming through, like Hi Focus records, and I saw Rag and Bone Man at Boomtown festival.”

Zahra: “There is a lot of neglect of the producer: the MC gets all the focus. People think it’s so easy to get a beat, they don’t know the craft that goes behind it. There’s the art and dance culture that goes with it. There’s Dizzy Rascal but there’s so many other artists out there. When Tinie Tempa made that track ‘Pass Out’ he sucked, but everyone loved it because it had that drum’n’bass thing at the end. That’s a good combo, but where is that happening now?”

WHILE UK HIP HOP HAS come on so far since its early days, and brought its own sounds and styles to bear on the original blueprints, where does a city like Oxford come in? Can a place like this really have a strong, healthy hip

hop scene?

Zahra: “I’m trying to encourage young people to get involved; I’m sick of the generation that would rather watch shit on YouTube than go and see a live gig. I’m sick of it when you bring three wicked artists down and its five quid to get in and it’s 14 plus... why are you not there? So I try and put it on where it would never be seen, and get kids to go to somewhere they would never go, such as the Ashmolean. So you get them to think outside the box, to write about a painting, and they came up with some pretty amazing stuff. I’ve been in band since I was 14; we’d have wicked gigs at the Zodiac where you’d know everyone. They all support each other, you’d get excited about *Nightshift* and who’s on it next time. That’s where I’m coming from, but I feel like there’s a lack of unity [now] in the Oxford hip hop scene. I believe if we acted more like the band scene, if we went to each other’s gigs and bought each other’s records, started more of a movement, we’d put it more on the map than it is.”

Astro “There’s loads of writers, MCs and producers on the scene; I need to see more break-dancers. As for Oxford itself, the council won’t support it, won’t allow it. Bands can afford a scene; let’s not forget we’re in Oxford. Hip-hop comes from people who can’t really afford too much. Loads of artists’ been here: KRS One, Public Enemy, GZA. But the reason bands get hyped up, is that this is their town. Radiohead, Supergrass, Foals: these’ll make big money cos they come from money. That’s the difference. But I have a feeling that a big urban name’s gonna come out of these streets.” Zahra: “There’s so much ability, but it’s so divided. When you go over Magdalen bridge it all changes. It’s like Narnia!”

Astro: “The best thing about it is the graffiti on the Cowley Road; when I go there it’s like ‘Yes! What’s up?’ They used to have a map for students and you know where it stops? At the Regal! [now the Christian Life Centre on Magdalen Rd] That’s their image of Oxford and it reflects on everything that’s happening here, especially when it comes to urban music.” Rhymeskeemz: “Oxford hip hop scene is buzzin’ but it’s a bit unhealthy. There’s not one regular hip-hop night in Oxford, period. Wordplay used to do their thing, Beats and Rhymes, and Free Range obviously; big up to them. As I say, it’s buzzin’, but a bit more unity is needed.”

A FINAL QUESTION FOR

Zahra, having been a part of both Oxford’s band scene and a pivotal figure in the hip hop scene, does she think there is anything about Oxford that lends itself to a particular strain of hip hop, and does she think Oxford could have its own distinct sound or style of hip hop, in the way that it tends to produce somewhat academically-minded rock bands?

Zahra: “I think Oxford hip hop sits in a few different spaces. My observation of the scene over the past few years is that there is a pocket for the backpackers, which tends to be a white middle class audience from the north of the city; a group of artists that make music solely for themselves and aren’t too fussed with sharing but manage to get a reasonable online audience; the artists who are from the estates who have tremendous talent, lyrical ability, flow and deliverance but tend to aspire to be a part of what I like to call the sbtv generation that don’t want to pay to go to shows but would rather sit and watch their favourite artists on YouTube, rating ability by views and comments but are quick to judge, diss each other and represent postcodes, and finally the group that are trying to push boundaries, cultivate a new refreshing sound, sell records, do shows, create a community and mash up genres.

“Oxford has the ability to create its own distinct hip hop sound; the level of talent is high and there are lots of artists out there. If more people worked as hard to push themselves out there like the local bands I think there would be more room to show what the hip hop side of the scene has to offer. I believe some producers and MCs are already experimenting working with bands, different styles and ways of writing. Once the sense of community is right between everyone I think it’ll open doors to further collaboration.”

IT SEEMS, THEN, THAT HIP-

hop in Oxford is bubbling under and has been for some time. All of the artists involved in the interview have product ready to go. Zahra has the self-produced Despicable Zee, her roster of young lyricists on BG Records to promote, and is working with Death of Hi-Fi on another. Astro Snare is working with Jonny Steele from the Scribes and Rhymeskeemz (“I got phat beats comin’ for him”) has a large back catalogue still to be released and “a lot of big singles ready to come out”. In the optimistic words of Astro Snare, “the best is yet to come”.

DIG THE NEW BREED

Six local hip hop acts to watch out for...

SONOROUS

One of the most lyrically astute young rappers in town, Sonorous’ laidback but steely delivery carries a conscious political edge, notably on his excellent ‘My Take On Things Chapter 2’, produced by 4th Dimension and mixing Native American samples and motifs into a spooked, wobbly electro swoon that crests on stoned beats as Sonorous raps about... well, pretty much everything.



JACK STACKS

There’s a defiant but fatalistic feel about Jack Stacks’ narratives, which feel at home alongside the likes of Plan B or Mike Skinner on ‘Born To Die’, and given a lush lysergic power by Re-C’s woozily orchestral production.



RE-C & TONEZ

Re-C and Tonez have brought local rappers’ songs to life with their often warm, soulful production and jazzy grooves, most notably Sonorous on tracks like ‘Marge’.

CHUKIE

Angsty and energetic on the mic, Chukie’s staccato flow sits equally well with acoustic guitars or electronic production. His best cut is the dark, industrial drum&bass-inflected ‘Extreme Pain’, vocally produced by Zahra Tehrani, which carries the same menace as American underground hip hop psychos Salem. Its accompanying video was shot in a graveyard.



JOE VERDI

Beatmaker and producer with an ear for a woozy, stoner vibe as he ranges from jazz and soul to r’n’b and minimalist electronica on his showcase beat track compilations.

KNOWLEDGE

Ambient r’n’b flavours, 80s ambient funk and electric piano soundtracks from instrumentalist Knowledge whose easy grooves touch base with Stevie Wonder and Flying Lotus.



RELEASED

SMILEX

‘La Petite Mort’

(Quickfix)

Growing up can be a difficult thing for a band, particular if their appeal lies with being immature. The Beastie Boys managed it brilliantly, while The Ramones somehow got away with never growing up.

Having been together for some 13 years, Smilex are verging on ancient in band years, but teenagerdom is a state in which the band were seemingly born – obsessed with sex and drugs in often all their gory details and musically simple, messy fun with an undercurrent of chaos, particularly in its live incarnation. But what to do next? Keep up such levels of good, unclean fun and risk coming across as the creepy drunk uncle at the disco, or metaphorically don a tweed jacket and start dropping a few ballads in the set? ‘Le Petites Mort’ suggest even Smilex aren’t really sure of the best route.

Album opener ‘9hz’ is a false start, the sleazy headrush of yore replaced with what sounds like churning 80s soft-metal, even typical Smilex lines like “I’ve got no cash but I’m still buying crack / I’m on a highway to hell and I’m not coming back,” sounding more like a disgruntled commuter having an ironic grumble on Twitter, but they’re back into old school territory with ‘Deadman’s Dirge’, a blink-and-miss-it staccato punk flurry, while ‘Wasted Youth’ proves the band can do pretty melodies with some style, while retaining that old griminess.

Smilex are at their best when they chuck everything they seemingly love in the mixer and hope it somehow fits, like on the Prince-fronting-Pere-Ubu fight frenzy of ‘Revive the Revival’, but maybe need to avoid being too cautious: ‘What Is It You Actually Do Again?’ could be a



PEERLESS PIRATES

‘Nelson’s Folly’

(Pirate Music)

There’s something endearingly heroic about Peerless Pirate’s unstinting dedication to their buccaneering image and song titles, as well as



splenetic hardcore bile-frenzy but never really lets rip before they rein it all in again, and ‘Las Valse Macabre’ might have been intended as a horror waltz but is little more than an ungainly, directionless mess that reminds us too much of 90s one-hit, post-grunge also-rans Stiltskin. Such middling hard rock is something Smilex have increasingly had a yearning for but it’s never suited them.

The search for more mature pastures continues through til the end of the album, the epic, almost Pink Floyd-like ‘Please Do Not Feed The Drug Child’ and the pensive, disjointed ‘One Woman Man’, which at least show Smilex are aiming for a breadth of sound rather than rely on too many tried and trusted formulae. As to whether this grown up Smilex are what the world, or at least their fans, desire it seems like a case of damned if they do; damned if they don’t, but maybe, like all kids, they have to be left to forge their own paths and friendships, learn from their mistakes and come out the other end having decided where their true identities lie.

Dale Kattack

their devotion to a style of indie rock that would sound as at home 30 years ago as it does today. The pirate-obsessed quartet have been at it for five years or so now, each new demo or release steadfastly refusing to evolve much more than incrementally from the last, Cliff Adams still casting flamboyantly poetic lyrics to the seven seas in his sonorous, Morrissey-esque voice as sing-song guitar lines cavort with the spirit of Johnny Marr. From ‘Those Heady Days of Decadence’ through to ‘One Over The Eight’, the aim seems to be to party like the grog will never run dry to a rockabilly soundtrack that’s as old and solid as the timbers that make up the ship’s masts.

Thing is, for all the band’s adherence to a tried and trusted formula, they’re undeniably great fun, with a sense of the ridiculous that indie rock, or whatever passes for it nowadays, seemed to forget when people failed to recognise the humour in The Smiths and The Wedding Present.

This ship’s course is sure and it’s not for turning. God speed.

Ian Chesterton

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HOT HOOVES

‘Nutritious Cascades’

(Self released)

Hot Hooves’ third album in as many years is appropriately titled given the nourishment provided to the Oxford music scene by the band’s singer Mac and guitarist Peter Montchiloff that has sustained us for the best part of three decades now. A reminder of the latter guitarist’s legacy has come with the recent release of an overarching Talulah Gosh retrospective, while the former’s promotional activities at the Jericho Tavern allowed many of the bands we love to flourish. Without Mac, it might be reasonable to believe that we’d have a Radiohead, Supergrass and Ride in at best unrecognisable form.

This new, eleven-track effort commences with the wondrously titled ‘Trudgery, Skullduggery, Thievery & Thuggery’, an immediate anthem that welds punk and post-punk stylings and the odd Cardiacs-style squiggle, setting the agenda for an LP that rarely relinquishes the pace, recalling Hüsker Dü’s more melodious moments as it hurtles along.

The stand-out track is ‘Down There for Dancing’, reminiscent of Talulah Gosh’s contemporaries The Wolfhounds, both in musical and vocal delivery, as well as an earlier Hot Hooves number, ‘Serious Business’, while lyrically, the album is always inventive: concluding cut ‘Well Played on the Dumb Front’ provides respite from the upbeat thrash in its opening bars before ascending into a gorgeous swirl of guitars and wobbly keyboard riffs, Esperanto and Pegasus receiving name checks long the way. Presumably it is the winged horse that is being referred to rather than the famous amateur football team of the Fifties made up of players from both Cambridge and Oxford Universities, though in Mac’s lyrical world you never know for sure.

Elsewhere, ‘Move Over’ deploys an Elastica judder and the reputation the band enjoys for incendiary live shows is fully on display. If the Oxford scene can be a polite one at times, this album is an altogether more confrontational proposition, albeit one leavened with the wit that characterises the city’s most notable groups.

Robert Langham



FREE CHOW

‘Asleep With Your Hand In My Mouth’

(Self released)

Sometimes, you just know the title came first. Take *Robert’s Web*, the atrocious 21st Century Carrott’s *Commercial Breakdown* in which comedian Robert Webb introduced ‘net clips with a dead-eyed resignation. Or, consider ‘Jesus In Furs’, Free Chow’s Christmas song: surely the name came first, and the concept of throwing nativity lyrics at The Velvet’s finest bondage anthem later. Either way, it’s great fun, a Benylin-wooze of varispeed tape vocals and cheap guitars which, considering the LP also on offer, is not too sacrilegious.

For ‘Asleep With Your Hand In My Mouth’ is a brutal stream of cheap noise and schoolboy taboo bashing, somewhere between The Butthole Surfers and V/Vm, sliming its way from the ersatz sex waltz of ‘This Is My Scrotum’ to the Stylophone country of ‘Freight Train’, presets goosestepping over common decency with every bar. Childish nonsense, in many ways, but high quality childish nonsense: we love the Chicory Tip bass keys on ‘Don’t Touch Kids’, the *Rocky Horror* meets *Jigsaw* weirdness of the opener, and the fact that jukebox, pukebox rock’n roller



‘PB Party’ manages to make jokes about both Hamlet and putting peanut butter up your arse. When our tabloid media increasingly indulges in ethical paradoxes, denouncing pornography whilst celebrating unceasing titillation, demonising supposed deviants whilst shoving airbrushed teenage midrifts where the actual news used to go, perhaps the only option is to blow a big raspberry, stick two fingers in the air and make an ugly pop song about pederasty. We like this record. We may not always enjoy it, but we like it.

David Murphy

TIGER MENDOZA

‘Monsters & Miracles’

(Self released)

This six-track EP, Tiger Mendoza’s fourth, is tagged as industrial trip-pop, as good a description as any of their mix of buzzing guitars, beats and lo-fi electronics, still featuring a variety of guest vocalists.

Opener ‘Punch Bag’ is not their finest moment. Shuddering Tackhead-style beats make way for Half Decent to contribute a rap of suitable urgency, but it all descends into a bit of a mess, those beats starting to intrude like a hangover. ‘Dawn That Never Comes’ has more of a heavy metal flavour, the female vocal buried under a layer of Black Sabbath-style guitars, never quite decided where it’s heading. ‘Prometheus Unbound’ sees Michael Weatherburn from The Half Rabbits stepping up to the mike, this time producing a curious goth-tinged piece with a hint of paranoia that wanders towards a dense multi-layered ending.

Tiger Mendoza’s debt to 65daysofstatic is a badge worn a little too prominently, the Sheffield band having a much clearer idea of how to create music filled with the noise, spaces and duelling guitars in the right proportions. ‘Corporate Responsibility’ at last sees them achieving something similar, a six-minute journey through a sci-fi landscape held together with a pleasing guitar motif, and should prove to be a live favourite.

To close ‘Just Let Go’ proves to be the EP’s hidden gem. Helena Markou may not be the world’s greatest singer but her voice perfectly suits the poignant, downtempo tale of loss, with the guitars given a well-deserved rest.

There’s no shortage of ambition here but generally too much is thrown into the pot and the various elements end up fighting each other. The band describe themselves as an accident but

on this evidence one that could do with a bit of discipline and direction to turn them into a tighter, more focused unit.

Art Lagun

LR/GW

‘Deeper Steps Into the New Path’

(Self released)

Sound artist Lee Riley, perhaps best known for his past work as Euhedral, has been increasingly active in recent years creating vast swathes of sound armed with all manner of unorthodox (and often self-made) instruments.

For an artist whose recent experiments have involved dragging a guitar through the streets of Oxford and “a piece for bowed metal container and 16 pints of water,” the idea of a stationary set of guitar noise might seem slightly pedestrian but ‘Deeper Steps Into the New Path’ is anything but. Recorded live at the Pegasus Theatre in June, ‘Deeper Steps...’ is – as its name suggests – an aural journey, and, for an improvised work, an impressively well-crafted one at that. Foreboding screeching notes that chime like exotic bird calls give way to waves of overlapping white noise and deep, cavernous sub-bass feedback, whilst reverberating echo and delay helps to create a disorientating sense of pulsating rhythm throughout.

A running commentary for such an impressionistic piece of music would be fairly pointless; suffice it to say that Lee has managed to create a soundscape that is inviting, mysterious, and terrifying in equal measure, and one that makes for a completely immersive experience.

Tom McKibbin

BICYCLES WITH NO

RIDERS

‘Hold You Up To the Light’

(Blindsight)

Umar Chaudhry, formerly of Xmas Lights, has been very busy of late; this marks his third release in as many months and while his music continues to draw from the same morose well that inspires his other bands, Abandon and Monday Morning Sun, Bicycles With No Riders represents a marked shift away from his usual multi-layered approach in favour of a largely acoustic set of songs. In this more intimate context, Umar’s cyclical guitar patterns feel open and expansive where they can occasionally sound weighty and claustrophobic in his Abandon guise.

There is still a grey cloud hanging over these songs, but ‘Hold You Up To the Light’ is a much more accessible listen that allows Umar’s simple arrangements to ring out in all their downtrodden majesty, airy synths and piano occasionally lending proceedings a cinematic splendour. Lyrically, Umar is still struggling with inner demons and themes of regret, but stripped down to just voice and guitar, he is able to balance the moments of dark and light with a deft touch, his guitar playing alternately sparse (‘Good and Evil’) and dense (‘Shatter’) as he finds some common ground between Red House Painters and Jesu. This is still music to soundtrack the cold months, but ‘Hold You Up To the Light’ is more crisp December morning than bleak midwinter.

Tom McKibbin

OVERLORD

‘Authors’

(Self-released)

As befits a young band who have already been cited as one of the best new tech-metal acts in town, Overlord’s debut EP tiptoes in on what sounds like a sweet jazz drum shuffle. Fear not, no sooner has it peeked its head round the door than the riffs have barged past and started upsetting furniture and neighbours alike. Still in their teens Overlord effortlessly show they can hold their own with an almost nonchalant approach to grooves and epic choruses, bringing a sizeable dose of melody into what can be an indulgent sub-genre at times. They can do widdly too - ‘Take You Down’ for example is dominated by an extended journey into guitarist Rhys Williams’ axe hero fantasies as he goes to war with drummer Jake Coles in an intriguing duel, while ‘Ascent’ gallops for the hills to play with every cliché in the metal songbook.

But it’s an old-fashioned sense of melody coupled with a modern dedication to technical exploration that’s the quartet’s strength, particularly on the EP’s title track and the epic sprawl of ‘Switch Off’, singer Tal Fineman eschewing growls or screams in favour of a more straight-down-the-line rock vocal that, if confined to its own comfort zone, brings with it an accessibility that could see the band winning fans beyond the local metal loyalists.

Ian Chesterton

G I G G U I D E

WEDNESDAY 1st

REGRET: Your Head
NAUSEA: Your Stomach
NASTY FATTY BITS: Your Liver
WELL INTENTIONED BUT DOOMED
RESOLVE: The Very Depths of Your Soul

THURSDAY 2nd

CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford
Community Centre – First Catweazle of the new year, showcasing local singers, musicians,

Saturday 18th

WINNEBAGO DEAL / DESERT STORM / FLACK BLAG: The Cellar

Lock up your valuables, take to your fallout shelters and ready yourself for some serious noise and whisky consumption. Winnebago Deal are back. Doubtless with a vengeance. Because vengeance, along with drinking and extreme violence, are staples of Ben Perrier and Ben Thomas's no-frills, no-holds-barred, no-softies-allowed form of punk-metal-hardcore. Long-term *Nightshift* favourites, the duo have been absent for the last couple of years, though Ben has cropped up occasionally with his band Blasted. Previously the two Bens have formed Mondo Generator with QOTSA's Nick Oliveri, but they're at their very best when they are simply Winnebago Deal: an uncompromising headlong charge through the badlands of Black Flag, Motörhead, AC/DC and Minor Threat, one that's seen them handpicked to support Fugazi as well as being produced by Jack Endino. They've not released anything since 2010's 'Career Suicide', but it's live where they not so much shine as scorch the very earth before them. Excellent heavyweight psychedelic blues-metal from Desert Storm in support, as well as an opening set of Black Flag covers from Ben and Ben in their Flack Blag guise.



JANUARY

poets, storytellers and performance artists every Thursday.
OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon
BLUES JAM: The Jack Russell, Marston

FRIDAY 3rd

KLUB KAKOFANNEY with **THE ELEMENTS** + **MOON RABBIT** + **FRACTURE** + **DES BARKUS:** The **Wheatsheaf** – The Klub Kakofanney carnival carousels into the New Year with reggae and dub crew The Elements; Jeremy Hughes' folk-country project Moon Leopard, rockers Fracture and Klub Kak favourite Des Barkus.
SHEDONISM!: The Cellar – Count Skylarkin's legendary travelling Disco Shed pops up in the Cellar, bringing its festival vibes with it, having become an institution at the likes of Latitude, The Big Chill, Truck and even Cornbury.

SATURDAY 4th

YELLOW FEVER + **BRIGHTWORKS** + **DUCHESS:** The **Wheatsheaf** – Something of a perfect storm of afro-pop flavoured local starlets with Yellow Fever's Foals/Bloc Party-inspired indie jinking going up against Brightwork's Mathrobeat township dance-pop and Duchess' ebullient rhythm-heavy Latin and Caribbean-tinged pop. You might try to resist but believe us, you *will* dance.
PROPAGANDA + **TRASHY** + **JACK FM DJs:** **02 Academy** – Three-clubs-in-one session every Saturday, with indie hits at Propaganda; kitsch pop, glam and 80s at Trashy, and dancefloor faves from Jack FM's DJs.
EXTRA CURRICULAR: The Cellar – Weekly techno, house and bass club night.
SHEPHERD'S PIE: Fat Lil's, Witney – Classic heavy rock covers, from AC/DC and Guns'n'Roses to Iron Maiden.
HONOLULU COYBOYS: St Giles Church (6pm) – Tea-dance.

SUNDAY 5th

PHIL FREIZINGER & CHRIS HILLS + **JULES PENZO** + **BEARD OF DESTINY** + **MOON LEOPARD:** Donnington Community Centre (6pm) – Free acoustic session, with veteran flautist Phil Freizinger teaming up with Chris Hills, plus blues troubadour Beard of Destiny and Jeremy Hughes' psychedelic folk act Moon Leopard.

MONDAY 6th

TUESDAY 7th

SPANISH MUSIC NIGHT: The Art Bar – Spanish-flavoured music session in the front bar.
OPEN MIC SESSION: The White Rabbit
OPEN MIC SESSION: James Street Tavern

WEDNESDAY 8th

THURSDAY 9th

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

FRIDAY 10th

BOSSAPHONIK: The Cellar – Latin dancefloor, Balkan beats, world grooves and nu-jazz club night, tonight with a live set from Jardaves por Fuera, mixing up a lively blend of flamenco, rumba, reggae and swing.
THE HEAVY DEXTERS: The Jericho Tavern – Jazz-funk covers, from Herbie Hancock to the James Taylor Quartet, and more.
THE OTHER DRAMAS + **CLAIRE LeMASTER BAND** + **MOMENTO** + **TIM MAYO** + **TOM IVEY:** The **Wheatsheaf** – Wistful folk-pop from The Other Dramas at tonight's It's All About The Music showcase gig.
THE PETE FRYER BAND: The Baytree, Grove – First gig of the year for the local blues-rock stalwart, still going strong after fifty years on the road.

SATURDAY 11th

SONS OF ICARUS + **FIGHTING WOLVES** + **PISTON:** **02 Academy** – Hard rocking from Guildford's velocity rockers Sons of Icarus, recent support to Clutch as well as The Answer and Black Stone Cherry. Support from London heavyweights Fighting Wolves.
SCORDATURA + **BLACK SKIES BURN** + **BLUDGEON** + **SODOMISED CADAVER:** The **Wheatsheaf** – Death metal in the vein of Dying Fetus and Cryptopsy from Scotland's Scordatura at tonight's Slave To The Grind show. They're joined by south Wales black-metallers Sodomised Cadaver and club hosts Black Skies Burn.
NOT TOO SHABBY + **14TEN** + **MONDAY COMA** + **BALLOON ASCENTS:** The **Jericho Tavern** – Blues-rocking from Not Too Shabby, heavy rock from 14Ten, indie-pop from Monday Coma and indie-folk from Balloon Ascents at tonight's It's All About The Music showcase gig.
PROPAGANDA + **TRASHY** + **JACK FM DJs:** **02 Academy**
EXTRA CURRICULAR: The Cellar
THE PETE FRYER BAND: The Cricketers, Temple Cowley

SUNDAY 12th

MONDAY 13th

MISSING PERSIANS: The Jericho Tavern – Laidback acoustic blues-rock and Americana from Missing Persians at the Famous Monday Blues.

TUESDAY 14th

JAZZ CLUB: The Art Bar – Live jazz with Alvin Roy and Reeds Unlimited.

INTRUSION: The Cellar – Goth, industrial, ebm and darkwave club night.
OPEN MIC SESSION: The White Rabbit
OPEN MIC SESSION: James Street Tavern

WEDNESDAY 15th

SPARKY'S JAM NIGHT: James Street Tavern – Open jam night.

THURSDAY 16th

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

FRIDAY 17th

DON'T GO PLASTIC + **BARMY ARMY** + **THE DEPUTEES** + **DIE IN VAIN:** The **Jericho Tavern** – Garage punk from Don't Go Plastic.
MOSHKA: The **Wheatsheaf** – Local bands showcase.
THE MIGHTY REDOX: James Street Tavern – Starting a new year without longstanding

Saturday 25th

WARPAINT: O2 Academy

Weird to think that Warpaint have been together for a full decade as of this year. And to celebrate they're releasing their second album. Given all that time you'd have hoped they'd have come up with a more adventurous title than 'Warpaint'. Never mind, it's the music that matters, and the music is great (though it's a bit sad to remember that when the LA quartet arrived on these shores with their 2010 debut 'The Fool', too many features on them seemed to view that music as secondary to their gender, and the relationships some of the band were in – John Frusciante and James Blake are among their past and present paramours). 'The Fool' revealed the band to be lush, ethereal successors to the likes of Siouxsie & the Banshees and Cocteau Twins at times, the exquisite three-way vocal harmonies of Jenny Lee Lindberg, Emily Kokal and Theresa Wayman layered over heavily reverbed guitars and propulsive basslines that occasionally provoked mention of the G word, though they spread their wings further than that, from the ghostly country-tinged ambience of Mazzy Star, through to the mellower, more melodic side of Nirvana by way of 60s Motown and The Shangri-La's. For their eponymous follow-up the band are promising a more minimalist approach with elements of r'n'b, which might rein in some of their indulgent jam tendencies live. A suitably chilly highlight of the coldest month of the year.



bassist Graham Barlow, the local swamp-blues veterans continue to bring the party vibes.

SATURDAY 18th

WINNEBAGO DEAL + **DESERT STORM** + **FLACK BLAG:** The Cellar – Oxford's very own musical blitzkrieg returns, armed and dangerous – *see main preview*
HOT HOOVES + **MARY BENDYTOY** + **AGNESS PIKE** + **CLAIRE LeMASTER:** The **Jericho Tavern** – One Gig Closer To Wittstock fundraiser for the annual free festival. Tonight's excellent local bill features Husker Du and Guided By Voices-influences indie punkers Hot Hooves, launching their new album, 'Nutritious Cascades', plus gothic steam-punk crew Mary Bendytoy, theatrical thrash merchants Agness Pike and, providing a semblance of calm to proceedings, folk singer Claire LeMaster.
PROPAGANDA + **TRASHY** + **JACK FM DJs:** **02 Academy**
EXTRA CURRICULAR: The Cellar
THE MIGHTY REDOX: The Rock of Gibraltar, Enslow

SUNDAY 19th

SPRING OFFENSIVE: East Oxford
Community Centre – Return to Oxford for the now London-based alt.rockers, building up to the release of their crowd-funded debut album 'Young Animal Hearts', mixing up math-pop, prog, indie grooves and more into a heady brew that's made them one of the locally-born bands most likely to move onto bigger things.
JAMES ARTHUR: The **New Theatre** – When he's not calling rapper Micky Worthless "a fucking queer" (albeit in response to some equally homophobic insult) and attempting to wage a battle of wits with Frankie Boyle (never go into a battle of wits unarmed, old chap), apparently James Arthur is a singer and won a talent show or something. Well done everyone.
PURPLE MAY + **CHRIS ALLSOP** + **RAGDOLL** + **MOIETY** + **THE FIREGAZERS** + **KARL HARRISON:** The **Wheatsheaf** (2.30-7pm) – Klub Kakofanney host their regular monthly afternoon of unplugged music in the Sheaf's downstairs bar.

MONDAY 20th

KING B: The **Jericho Tavern** – Smooth, good-time blues rocking from the local regulars at tonight's Famous Monday Blues.
THE BULLY WEE BAND + **PHIL BEER:** Nettlebed Folk Club – Traditional acoustic folk from the reformed Scottish veterans.

TUESDAY 21st

JAZZ CLUB: The Art Bar – Groove-led live jazz with The New jazz Collective.
OPEN MIC SESSION: The White Rabbit
OPEN MIC SESSION: James Street Tavern

WEDNESDAY 22nd

KAIROS 4TET: The North Wall – Freewheeling, melodic jazz improv from the acclaimed quartet, led by tenor and soprano saxophonist Adam Waldmann, managing to bridge the gap between crossover success and serious jazz credentials, incorporating heavy grooves and elements of world music into their complex but accessible sound.
SUBVERSE: The Cellar



Wednesday 29th

MAX RAPTOR: O2 Academy

Subtlety and understatement probably aren't high up in Max Raptor's vocabulary, but then when you're railing against the system and the world in general, you generally need to shout bloody loudly to be heard. Shouting loudly is something Burton-on-Trent's Max Raptor do excel at. Their brand of rock and roll is brutal and unreconstructed and forged in the fires of punk's political arm. Their songs are all chest-beating anthems, calls to arms that recall The Clash, Therapy? Queens of the Stone Age and in particular New Model Army, with whom they've shared a stage in recent times. Forming in 2006 they supported Billy Talent early on before touring with another of their disputed influences, The Stranglers. Subsequently they've played Download and supported Oceansize and The Futureheads, self-releasing a mini album and a succession of singles along the way. Things are set to step up a gear with the release of their debut album proper, 'Mother's Ruin', and a doubtless rabble-rousing headline tour around the UK. Barricades will be manned, statues kicked down and big, bold choruses sung lustily along to.

THURSDAY 23rd

INVISIBLE VEGAS + **SMALL PACKAGE** + **LIES OF ELIZABETH:** The **Jericho Tavern** – Roadhouse rocking and blues from Invisible Vegas, plus jazz and blues-tinged pop from newcomers Lies of Elizabeth.
DEEP COVER: The Cellar – Hip hop, r'n'b and reggae club night with DJs Joel and Annex and live guests.
CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford
Community Centre
OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon
BLUES JAM: The Jack Russell, Marston

FRIDAY 24th

THE LOST DOGS + **NOISESCAPE**
DISTURBANCE + **RAGGED CLAWS** + **JACK LITTLE:** The **Jericho Tavern**
ROCKSOC: The **Wheatsheaf** – University Rock Society bands night.
AFTER THE THOUGHT + **MAN OF SCIENCE:** The **Port Mahon** – EP launch for Matt Chapman's alternately ambient and uplifting electro project After The Thought.
LUCKY CLUB + **SPINNER FALL** + **EAGLE & WEEKS:** **Castle House, Banbury** – Post-punk and 80s hardcore from Spinner Fall at tonight's Strummer Room Project show.

SATURDAY 25th

WILD SWIM + **BETA BLOCKER** + **THE**



Thursday 30th

DAN LE SAC vs SCROOBIUS PIP: O2 Academy

Back when *Nightshift* first encountered this duo, playing to 20 hardy souls in what was then the Zodiac, we'd never have guessed that a laptop twiddler with a penchant for 8-bit squiggles and 90s breakbeat wrangling, and a beardy spoken-word artist in love with 80s hip hop and hardcore would go on to achieve festival headline status. But rewind to summer 2013 and there they were atop the bill at Truck, having established themselves as one of the most politically engaged and humorous acts around. It was the brilliant, militant 'Thou Shalt Always Kill' that dragged them into the public domain, while more radio- and dancefloor-friendly tracks like 'Get Better' widened their appeal further. The infectious optimism of the latter contrasts starkly with the lyrical themes of self-harm and suicide that recur in their less hit-ready material, but the intricacy of the music – informed by hip hop, acid house and minimalist electronica – and the deft rhyming of the words, never simply resorting to rabble-rousing simplifications, make the pair always compelling, something their playfully interactive live shows only serve to confirm. Heartening to know that all these years after that under-populated Oxford debut, tonight's show should be full to capacity.

BODY CLOCK + THEO BASS + WHALE & MORE WHALE + THE AUREATE ACT: 02 Academy – Gearing up for the release of their debut album later this year, Wild Swim headline tonight's Upstairs show, already causing ripples further afield as they start to crop up in various Ones To Watch for 2014 lists, and deservedly so for their spectral mix of electronica, drama-laden pop and complex atmospherics. Great supporting cast including recent *Nightshift* Demo of the Monthers Beta Blocker and the Body Clock with their lo-fi fuzz-rocking; glitchy experimental electronica chap Theo Bass; Newbury's highly-strung emotive pop types Whale & More Whale, and new young prog-rock explorers The Aureate Act.

WARPAINT: 02 Academy – Atmospheric rocking from LA's post-goth starlets – *see main preview*

GAPPY TOOTH INDUSTRIES with MOLOTOV SEXBOMB + BARRY & THE BEACHCOMBERS + GEMMA MOSS: The Wheatsheaf – Sleazily melodic punk and rock'n'roll from Molotov Sexbomb at the first GTI of 2014, alongside veteran animal-costumed

cabaret hardcore/punk/noise weirdoes Barry & The Beachcombers. Respite comes in the form of sultry gothic songstress Gemma Moss.

SIMPLE: Art Bar – House and techno club night with Maxxi Soundsystem, plus residents.

PROPAGANDA + TRASHY + JACK FM DJs: 02 Academy

EXTRA CURRICULAR: The Cellar

SUNDAY 26th

MONDAY 27th

BROTHERS GROOVE: Art Bar – Blues, rock and funk from the Brummie band at tonight's Haven Club show.

THE MICHAEL KATON BAND: The Jericho Tavern – Raw roadhouse blues-rock, r'n'b and boogie from the Michigan singer and guitarist at tonight's Famous Monday Blues, Katon renowned for his epic, sometimes five-hour sets.

TUESDAY 28th

RUNDFUNK presents BJÖRN STORIG: The Cellar – Berlin-style funk and house club night, tonight with a two-hour set from Björn Störig from Oliver Koletzki's legendary Stil vor Talent label, plus Knightrider and Varkitekt.

JAZZ CLUB: The Art Bar – Live jazz with The Hugh Turner Band.

OPEN MIC SESSION: The White Rabbit

OPEN MIC SESSION: James Street Tavern

WEDNESDAY 29th

MAX RAPTOR + FORT HOPE + ONLY RIVALS: 02 Academy – Chest-thumping punk rock of the old school from the Burton riot squad – *see main preview*

FREERANGE: The Cellar – Drum&bass, hip hop and dubstep club night.

THURSDAY 30th

DAN LE SAC Vs SCROOBIUS PIP: 02 Academy – Never mind the Vs, geeky laptop guy and ranty rhyming guy get on famously – *see main preview*

AOIFE O'DONOVAN + BETHANY WEIMERS: Art Bar – Empty Room Promotions returns for the new year with Massachusetts singer-songwriter Aoife O'Donovan, best known for her work as singer with Crooked Still and trad-folk act Sometymes Why. Her solo songs – one of which has been covered by Alison Krauss – draw on traditional American folk music and folk rock with a sweet, soulful voice. Gothic folk-pop from local singer Bethany Weimers in support.

RUSHIL + ECHOIC + CLAIRE LeMASTER BAND + ROB LANYON + THE LOST ART + FRANCESCA SHAW: The Jericho Tavern – It's All About The Music local bands showcase night.

CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre

OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon

BLUES JAM: The Jack Russell, Marston

FRIDAY 31st

THE OSCILLATION + LISTING SHIPS:

The Cellar – Like, maaan, it's, like, yeah, like wowwwwwww – *see main preview*

SKELEFEST: 02 Academy – Monthly metal night Skeletor hosts an expansive evening of heavy goings on, including sets from towering death metal tyrants Empire Divided; thrash crew K-Lacura; tech-metallers Prospekt, plus Bricks & Mortar; Retribution; Jabroni Sandwich; Dead mesa; Crow's Reign; Lest We Forget and Ignite the Sky.

ONE NIGHT OF ELVIS: The New Theatre – Career-spanning tribute with Lee 'Memphis' King.

GOD SPEED: The Wheatsheaf

HOUSE FOUNDATION: Art Bar – House club night with Kismet and Mark Radford.

THE KITES + FRACTURE + WEBS & MARIONETTES + WAGHORN + ADAM McMILLAN: The Jericho Tavern

STONE WIRE + FOUR WHEEL DRIVE: Fat Lil's, Witney – Hard rocking blues and southern rock in the vein of Black Stone Cherry and The Answer from Stone Wire.

Friday 31st

THE OSCILLATION / LISTING SHIPS: The Cellar

Here at *Nightshift* we're suckers for some serious swirly psychedelia mixed up with a hefty dose of motorik Krautrock, so it's always a pleasure to welcome London's The Oscillation back to town. Previously they've stolen the show at Audioscope and later turned the Wheatsheaf into a mindwarp pavilion with the help of their resident oil wheel projectionist. It's the perfect complement to a band for whom sound and visuals fuse into a lysergic whole and onstage personalities are subsumed wholly to the noise. The band mix krautrock rhythmic intensity, shoegaze dreaminess and electro-ambience into a simultaneously hypnotic, icy and enervating whole that recalls elements of Silver Apples, Spacemen 3, Neu! and The BBC Radiophonic Workshop, designed to provoke a mass outbreak of zonked-out head-nodding amongst the gathered throng. That last Wheatsheaf show featured the live debut from Listing Ships, and they provide support again tonight, this time playing their last show for a while as they bid farewell to yet another drummer (unlike Spinal Tap they don't explode, just go gently into that dark night), and it's a good opportunity to reacquaint yourself with their nautically-themed, electro-heavy brand of instrumental post-rock.



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Empty Room Promotions AMERICANA 2014 ROOTS MUSIC

Tingewick Village Hall, Friday 17th January
**Peter Bruntnell, Neil Halstead
Danny George Wilson**

The Art Bar (The Bullingdon), Thursday 30th January
Aoife O'Donovan (Crooked Still)
+ support

Venue in Oxford (tbc), Friday 7th February
Deep Dark Woods
+ The Trembling Bells

The Art Bar (The Bullingdon), Saturday 8th February
Police Dog Hogan
+ Drew Holcomb

The Art Bar (The Bullingdon), Friday 7th March
Sons of Bill
+ support

Church of St John the Evangelist, Friday 28th March
The Webb Sisters
+ support

Tingewick Village Hall, Friday 25th April
Krista Detor and Dan Stuart

The Art Bar (The Bullingdon), Friday 2nd May
Jace Everett Band
+ support

Tingewick Village Hall, Friday 18th July
Eve Selis
+ Berkley Hart

Unless otherwise stated the doors for all shows will be 7.30pm

Tickets for most shows are also available in store from
The Truck Store, 101 Cowley Road, Oxford
Rapture, Market Sq, Town Centre, Witney

for more information visit our web site
www.empty-rooms.com
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AUDIOSCOPE

The Jericho Tavern

Today is the day *Dr Who* celebrates its 50th anniversary to great fanfare. Here is a character who has spent his life exploring the most outer reaches of time and space, with sometimes difficult, more often triumphant consequences. Audioscope may be a mere 13 years old and enjoys rather less fanfare, but it too is an explorer: of the farthest reaches of sound. The results have been equally difficult and triumphant.

While *The Day Of The Doctor* is an unmissable event, Audioscope isn't available on iPlayer, so we're ensconced in the Jericho for the

duration, wondering who the villains and surprise heroes might be across twelve hours of music. San Diego's **ADAM GNADE** is no stranger to Oxford, having toured and recorded with Youthmovies in the past, but today he's sat solo on stage playing a decidedly understated acoustic set. At his best he sounds VERY INTENSE, as if everything is EXTREMELY SERIOUS and comes infected by STARK IMAGERY as befits his poetic background, but mostly today he sleepy-eyed and reserved, like a much more laid-back Jeffrey Lewis or Daniel Johnston. It's

more likeable than memorable and **SALVATION BILL** – the work of former-Ute and Old Grinding Young chap Ollie Thomas – is more arresting, benefitting from performing solo as he blends dark murder ballads with an uneasy soulfulness and gentle humour, coming on somewhere between Nick Cave and Otis Redding at times and finishing on a song we keep thinking is about to turn into The Cure's '10.15 Saturday Night'. **PYE CORNER** Audio aren't exactly visual but their trippy electronica builds almost imperceptibly to a warm plateau that

requires armchairs and possibly the ingestion of stuff they sadly don't sell over the bar at the Tavern. Stuff that **GRUMBLING FUR** look, and sound, like they've consumed in significant quantities today. The duo, featuring Alexander Tucker, like so many of our favourite Audioscope acts, meld krautrock, psychedelia and electronica into a whole that's at once familiar but unlike any other single act. 'Protogenesis' is euphoric and motorik in the style of Neu!, while 'The Ballad of Roy Batty' is like a *Bladerunner*-obsessed Beta Band, and for all the duo's problems with their onstage sound, the only complaint we have is their set is half as long as it could have been, and they didn't play their fantastic 'Galacticon'.

By contrast **FONDA 500**, who were once a permanent fixture at Truck Festival, continue to confound us with a pleasingly wonky electro rockabilly that's forever spoiled by annoying wannabe-Mark E Smith vocals. A new-look, new-sound **PET MOON** take a bit of getting used to; gone are the luxuriant, soulful vocals of Karina Scuteri, leaving Andrew Mears alone upfront. His new haircut makes us think of Green Gartside, which is appropriate as the band's synth-infused r'n'b reminds us a lot today of Scritti Politti's early-80s hit-making heyday.

ESBEN & THE WITCH add a sizeable chunk of drama into today's bill, sounding at their best when they lay on the witchy excess and tribal beats and avoid getting too close to sounding like All About Eve, but highlight of the whole event, are **EAT LIGHTS BECOME LIGHTS**, whose description in the Audioscope programme as "Krautrock heaven" is pretty spot on, twin percussionists and a nasty old Moog synth burning a path through time and space back to 1970s Dusseldorf by way of The Early Years and Holy Fuck. It's not quite a revelation to match Tom Baker's cameo on BBC1, but it is very much what the doctor ordered.

Dale Kattack

KARINE POLWART

St John the Evangelist

There is perhaps no venue more fitting for Karine Polwart than a church. Whether she's singing about laying grief at an altar in 'Sorry', paying tribute to Christopher Wren (architect of St Paul's Cathedral) in 'King of Birds' or lamenting the sinner who met her demise as a pillar of salt in 'Tears For Lot's Wife', the biblical references are abundant. On top of the biblical tone, we're also treated to songs about people and places. The heartbreaking 'Salter's Road' pays homage to a neighbour, whilst 'Tinsel Show' takes us back to her childhood and the view of her landscape. Still, if there's one track which truly captures the heart of Karine's poetic nature then 'Sticks and Stones' takes the crown, the atmospheric music adding to her exploration of what it means to call somewhere home. Tonight I'm clearly not alone in my adoration of Karine, St John The Evangelist is packed to capacity and despite arriving early, I still find

myself with a back row seat. Yet tonight my love wanes ever so slightly. For all the impressive back catalogue on display at the merch stand, anyone who's seen Polwart since the release of latest album 'Traces' will recognise the set as all too familiar; even the jokes and introductions are re-runs of previous shows. Those fresher to her set no doubt enjoy the intricate harmonies, and the musicianship of Karine with brother Steven and sidekick Inge Thompson. Hopefully they also engage with her more political nature; the digs at Donald Trump in 'Cover Your Eyes' and the exploration of Trident in 'Better Things'. For me however, it's like preaching to the converted, and I'd have welcomed some variation, and an outing of the less played tracks of her earlier years.

Lisa Ward

THE GOGGENHEIM / THE KNIGHTS OF MENTIS / THE MIGHTY REDOX

O2 Academy

After four hundred gigs together, most of them in places you've never heard of, never mind visited, you'd think The Mighty Redox's enthusiasm would have waned, but they seem to be having as good a time as they ever did, singer Sue Smith in particular mining her inner child as she whoops, wails and cavorts about the stage.

Musically the band have one foot in good-time pub boogie, the other in a slightly stranger place, possibly Glastonbury circa 1975, as they go in search of flying teapots, a party band for potheads. They're easily best when they're doing the latter, 'Eternity' a psychedelic blues romp, Sue's witchy vocals atop Phil Freizinger's heavily-flanged guitar and soon-to-be departed Graham Barlow's simple but obstinate bassline. They're less appealing when they dip into wacky cod-ska and Status Quo-like histrionics, as on 'Kick Down the Doors', but the plain daft 'Bullaburra' remains an enduring set highlight, summing up a band whose unwritten motto seems to be "Too busy having fun to care about being cool". Long may it serve them.

The Knights of Mentis are unexpectedly reserved by comparison. Eight-strong and boasting mandolin, banjo, upright bass and fiddle among their array of instrumentation, you feel they should be a bacchanalian spectacle; instead the first half of tonight's set is almost genteel, the band oddly static. They do rouse themselves, scraping a bit of dirt up and into their songs and finding a meeting point between The Pogues' 'Dirty Old Town' and more airy bluegrass, but sandwiched in between The Mighty Redox and The Goggenheim tonight, they need to cut loose more to make an impression.

Ah yes, The Goggenheim; is there any other band around anything like them? Quite simply, no. However hard you try and pin them down, by the time you've come anywhere close, they've moved on to something equally otherworldly or bizarre. There's militant funk, a post-punk-like disregard for the rules of melody; a hefty splash of disco glitziness, some Krautrock insistency and, hell, why not, a bit of opera all in the mix, and that's only the first couple of songs. 'Moth' is the "what-the-hell?" crowd favourite but "There's the carrot,

THE DARKNESS / LOSTALONE

O2 Academy

LostAlone really are trying their hardest to get the crowd in the mood for a bit of rock'n'roll tonight, but they're not meeting with the greatest success. The three piece play a kind of rock music that seems to take cues from all the most popular bands of the last 20 years, from Green Day to Foo Fighters, and although the onstage energy is there, and the music isn't entirely meritless, the resulting set is an unmemorable, generic mush of power chords. Granted, the band are plagued with sound problems, inaudible guitars choked out with bass, and these don't exactly help things, but frontman Steve Battelle is a good performer, and perhaps we can put tonight's performance down to an off night. Of course, opening up for a live act with a reputation like that of The Darkness's is no easy task, and the band quickly demonstrate just why they've earned such a reputation, kicking into a set of newer material, including a memorably different cover of Radiohead's 'Street Spirit (Fade Out)'. This alone would be enough to please most fans, but then they kick back in after around an hour with the whole of 'Permission to Land', the band's most successful and



you're the monkey / Eat the fucking thing" is our personal favourite lyric of the entire year. Grace Exley is the diva cheerleader focus of attention throughout but it's each and every ill-fitting element of the band's sound that makes it the joyous spectacle it is – from Stewart Shape's clattering jazz-time drumming and Richard

Brotherton's Magic Band sax parps to Rowan Allison's restlessly inventive basslines. Seriously, we're spoilt for musical invention in Oxford, but few if any others take such a wayward route as The Goggenheim, while remaining at heart such a perfect pop band.

Dale Kattack

undoubtedly best album, back-to-back, in order – a dream for most fans. Frontman Justin Hawkins conducts the crowd with grandiose pomp, dressed in a ridiculous trademark latex catsuit, delivering his formidable falsettos front and centre throughout, swinging from the lighting rig at one point, and riding through the crowd on a man's shoulders whilst he rips out a guitar solo during 'Love on the Rocks with No Ice'. Meanwhile, the rest of the band throw shapes on stage, powering relentlessly through a tight set of old favourites. By this point, any guilty pleasure emotion has melted away in favour of raucous singing, submitting to the glorious rock'n'roll atmosphere of the evening. The Darkness seem to have shed the resolute lack of credibility they amassed during their brief time in the mainstream limelight a decade ago, before they succumbed to the clichés of substance abuse, megalomania and inter-band squabbling, and they've come back from hibernation a 'proper' rock band, and things will only go up from here.

Tal Fineman



HAPPY MONDAYS

O2 Academy

A few days prior to tonight’s show I hear a radio interview with Bez where he states that he is taking it easy these days. We’re confused then when he bounds on to the stage jester/MC-like thrusting a tribal witch doctor’s stick skywards and ranting about it being “25 years!” (since Madchester classic ‘Bummed’ was released) as a means of introducing the band’s arrival. We’re made up though by his evident energy and enthusiasm; many have questioned Bez’s contribution to the band, but conversely (at least live) the Mondays would not be the same band without him; the highlight tonight is when he crosses his maracas above his head, gurning and silhouetted from behind by a spotlight. Rowetta Satchell is also a welcome inclusion tonight (although she never appeared on the original Hannett-produced album) with her soaring backing vocals providing a much more expansive sound – the complementary duality between that and Shaun Ryder’s slouchy street mumble is perfect and this signature sound is another authentic stamp. Also worthy of a mention is Mark Day’s assured guitar work which carries a lot of the set. Ryder himself hides in the shadows at the rear of the stage and his

sunglasses for most of the set, coming forth only to introduce the band and take the piss out of his brother Paul on bass who swiftly tells him where he can go. His swagger is still there though, as he bobs from side to side confidently. Sensibly the band resists playing the album in track order – always a device which is ill-advised for the live setting. However, like the band themselves we lose count of what’s covered and what’s not, and can only assume they get to every song. Prior to ‘Lazyitis’ Shaun laments that, “Karl Denver’s dead, but it would be good if he could come and do this with us”. The groove is great throughout, though they really hit top gear with ‘Wrote for Luck’. An encore of three top 20 hits, ‘Hallelujah’, ‘Kinky Afro and, obviously, ‘Step On’, shows the Mondays know exactly what the crowd wants and deliver it on a plate. We were, we have to admit, worried the whole thing could have been a car crash event; the Mondays, like The Pogues and Pete Doherty, are never a safe bet against a disaster, but in the end we had no need for such worries, a reliable unit turns up and delivers a competent helping of classics that has the crowd dancing like it’s 1988 all over again. Mission accomplished. *Mark Taylor*

BABY GODZILLA / WOUNDS

The Wheatsheaf

Blood on the walls, footprints on the ceiling. There should be a campaign medal struck for surviving tonight’s co-headlined gig, or at least a small, logo-ed bag from the merch table, to take your teeth home in. The only time Nottingham’s Baby Godzilla appear together on the stage is – backs to the audience – moments before they crash into the first chords of their triple-speed metalcore. From thereon in it’s a hilariously dangerous maelstrom of flying arms, legs, broken mic stands and guitar heads, as they all tear into the audience, cutting a swathe to the door. Between each two-minute track it’s gaffer tape repairs and the sound of a hundred unfit metal fans trying to get their breath before they’re back to the slam-dancing and climbing on top of the bar, culminating with an empty Jagermeister bottle, that had earlier, half full, been handed out, arcing over the moshing heads towards the stage and snuffing out one of the band’s halogen lamps dotted around to light the action.

Dublin’s Wounds, too, are heaven sent and hell bent, and waste no time in re-rousing the rabble. Soon singer Aiden Cooper is being carried shoulder high among them, leading the gang chorus of ‘Dead, Dead, Fucking Dead’, with his mic lead lassooing the Edwardian, brass chandelier, threatening to bring the roof in on us. Brother James Cooper’s formidable riffing is at the core of the band’s recent change in fortunes that has seen them rise from the death of their father, and then James’s three months on life support after falling four storeys from a balcony, to being signed to two of the biggest European and US booking agencies, with the prospect of massive acclaim to come. To these ears they sound like AC/DC if they’d taken up punk instead of rock, a bona fide return to the spirit of a time when The Stooges weren’t going to live beyond the age of twenty five. If only all gigs had this much life; only next time, order more paramedics. *Paul Carrera*

PEACE / DRENGE

O2 Academy

Openers Drenge, from Derbyshire and last seen in Oxford at Gathering Festival back in October, are a duo that create such a depth of noise that you might keep craning your neck during their set expecting to find a third or even fourth band member hiding behind an amp. Singer Eoin Loveless inhabits the stage with a youthful enthusiasm and confidence. He seems at home up there as he delivers lyrics ranging from the dark in songs like ‘Fuckabout’ to the humorous in ‘People in Love Make Me Feel Yuck’. Younger brother Rory is a relentless force behind a mop of hair, his drumming driving the songs along under Eoin’s fuzzy guitar. While the pair only takes up half the stage, they fill the auditorium. For a band that started partly as a joke, they are certainly to be taken seriously now. Eoin introduces ‘Face like a Skull’ with, “If you wanna go mental it’s your last chance”. A challenge this crowd gladly accepts. Peace begin their set with the resonant, catchy guitar of ‘Waste of Paint’, singer Harry Koisser oozing sex appeal in a striped turtle-neck and plaid trousers. “You’re such an animal” he croons. The bright riffing guitars and bouncy basslines keep the crowd

in a constant boisterous ripple. For a band so fresh on the scene, having released their debut album ‘In Love’ earlier this year, their live show is already full of warmly-received sing-along hits. ‘Lovesick’’s killer verse has echoes of The Cure’s ‘Friday I’m in Love’ with a youthful abandon and a yearning to be free of grown-up obligations: “I don’t wanna make no sense / I don’t wanna pay the rent / I wanna get lovesick with you,” which explodes into an upbeat, harmony-fuelled chorus from Harry’s brother Samuel on bass. Quiet ballad ‘Float Forever’ stirs the audience, who join in on every single word. Harry does lapse into rock cliché as he asks how the audience are: “What is it? I can’t hear you!” but there is no doubt that Peace are keeping the audience happy. A powerful encore of the anthemic ‘California Daze’ and the highly-danceable ‘Bloodshake’ showcases the rolling drums of Dominic Boyce and the bright, jangling guitar of Douglas Castle. Peace’s songs are drenched with nostalgic summer vibes; it’s no wonder they are so warmly received on such a cold December night as this. *Celina Macdonald*

BLACK STAR RIDERS /

DEAD DAISIES

O2 Academy

The day before this show, Channel 4 showed a documentary called *50 Years of Excess*. It was basically a retread of every rock and roll Babylon story you’ve ever heard. These tales of depravity (bowls full of coke; groupies full of red snapper, you know the drill) used to seem bold, rebellious and exciting. Maybe it’s in the telling but all of a sudden the relentless rock myths seem so very tired and in need of a good lie down. Dead Daisies may or may not be living the high life, but the kind of rock they peddle is fairly middle of the road. Like Bad Company being actual bad company. It’s all a bit neutered and uninspired. “This is a new song” they declare, and the resulting meander sounds as if it had been written in 1989 by Alice Cooper. They close with a very straight cover of ‘Helter Skelter’ (as Mötley Crüe used to do) and segue into ‘Whole Lotta Love’. This is the sound of a band discarding their cowboy boots and easing into slippers. Rocking chair rather than rock and roll. As a kind of Thin Lizzy reboot, Black Star Riders is a peculiar band in that they’ve chosen not to

go under the name of Thin Lizzy (out of respect to Phil Lynott) but they’re more than happy to play sizable portions of the Lizzy back catalogue. Of course with original Lizzy guitarist Scott Gorham in their ranks, it would be strange if Lizzy didn’t get a look in, but the balance between reliving former glories and breaking new ground is uncomfortable. Frontman Ricky Warwick does a good job at being his own man and filling Lynott’s shoes, and the guitar work for the duelling solos is nothing short of breathtaking. Yet the constant switching between the new and old is a problem; this is a band conflicted by its own history. New songs allude to Lizzy via motifs and signifiers, and old songs *are* Lizzy. There’s no denying that ‘Cowboy Song’ or ‘The Boys Are Back In Town’ aren’t great fun live, but Black Star Riders need to perform a jailbreak of sorts and decide whether they want to embrace the future fully or continue reliving the past. Sure the stories, songs and old glories are important, and deserve retelling but sometimes the sheen is lost with over familiarity and it is time to move on. *Sam Shepherd*

THE ORIGINAL RABBIT FOOT

SPASM BAND

Art Bar

Everyone has a friend or two they know they shouldn’t mix with, friends who lead them astray, even with the most benign intentions. Count Skylarkin and The Original Rabbit Foot Spasm Band are those friends; mix the two together and you’ve got a party you’re going to feel, if not remember, for a while after. Before he’s even welcomed the band onstage, Skylarkin is doing his characteristic party piece of pouring rum down the throats of the throng gathered in front of the stage, just in case the festive spirit wasn’t flowing freely enough already. The Original Rabbit Foot Spasm Band are, of course, the perfect act to play his regular swing, jump and r’n’b parties, even if the current seven-strong incarnation of the band can now be seen sipping water onstage rather than whisky and beer. While such sobriety and professionalism can make you hanker for the riotous chaos of old, as Stuart Murdoch said in his recent *Nightshift* interview, if they’d carried on as they started, they’d all be dead by now. Not that such things matter as Stuart creeps about the stage, hunched over his mic, rasping the words to the sleazy ‘Taxidermy

Man’, like a rakish Louis Armstrong, the three-strong brass and reed line pumping out an ever more heartening noise as the set moves between easy, ebullient swing, like the fleet-footed ‘Birdman of Barley Mow’, to sweeter r’n’b numbers that display both the band’s versatility and Stuart’s increasingly strong voice. It’s timeless stuff of course and rooted in New Orleans’ jazz traditions, but the lyricism is entirely British, and in particular Oxfordshire-orientated – where else would you get references to Eynsham witches or Kenny Vans in a party swing band? This being their traditional pre-Christmas show, we see Tiger Mendoza’s Ian de Quatros take to the stage for a rendition of ‘Blue Christmas’, before they leave us with joyous odes to the booze that remain the heart and soul of their music. “Drink up thy red wine,” hollers Stuart. We’re there with him. “Drink up thy Pernod,” he adds. Oh dear. We’d rather not. But then again, look whose company we’re in again. We know it’s bad for us, and we know it’ll hurt in the morning, but we’re going to do it anyway. *Dale Kattack*

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SOUNDSYSTEM / residents

Sundays
12th HUMOUR TUMOUR - Live stand-up comedy

February
1st TERRAFORMERS - drum'n'bass
2nd HUMOUR TUMOUR - comedy
7th GEORGE EZRA
8th POLICE DOG HOGAN
16th FAT WHITE FAMILY

THE WHEATSHEAF

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Sat 4th January

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Fri 10th January 'IT'S ALL ABOUT THE MUSIC'

CLAIRE LEMASTER

THE OTHER DRAMAS + MOMENTO 8pm/£6

Sat 11th January 'SLAVE TO THE GRIND'

SCORDATURA

BLACK SKIES BURN + BLUDGEON

SODOMIZED CADAVER 8pm/£5

Fri 17th January

MOSHKA

Fri 24th January

ROCKSOC

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DR SHOTOVER - The Desolation of Smeg

Ah, there you are. But... bloody hell – how many of you are there? Is this one of my famed opium flashbacks? Or merely a still from Roger Moore’s finest hour, *The Man Who Haunted Himself*? Oh no, I see what’s happened – I’m still wearing those infernal 3D glasses. Just been to the cinema with Digby and Risinghurst, to view the latest Tolkien-based epic. I’ve had jollier prostate examinations in my time, to be honest. First up, the auditorium was full of snot-faced pre-teenagers eating popcorn with slack jaws and punching idly at their mobile phones with stubby dwarfish digits. Secondly, the film presentation was about fifteen hours long, and bore no resemblance AT ALL to the original manuscript (as shown me by Prof JRRT himself in the back bar at the Turd and Tabby in 1932, I’ll have you know). It was also stuffed with tiresome, ahem, ‘special FX’... what’s that, Custance? CGI? Never heard of it. I’ll tell you what, though – I was gasping for a C.I.G. by the end of the experience. When did they ban smoking in the cinema? Last time I went, the health nuts and milksops could sit on one side and us fun-loving types on the other, the dense fog from our Capstan non-filters and Meerschmumpfs pipes drifting poetically across... It was like the happy smog-filled East End of my pre-war childhood. ‘Lend us a sovereign, guvnor, so I can redeem me little cousin from the pawn shop... Guvnor, GUVNOR, I’m over ‘ere!’ Heady days! Where was I? Ah yes – at ‘the flickers’, in the three-and-ninepenny seats. Rumour has it that Lord Spira is planning a sequel to his masterful cinematic overview of the Oxford music scene. It’s called *Anyone Can Play Golf*, and features clubhouse tales from members of Stockport, The Einstein and Shoals. Well, they need a hobby, these kids, don’t they?? It’s tough at the toppermost of the poppermost. Musical predictions for the coming year? Don’t ask me – I’m staying here in the East Indies Club bar for the foreseeable... possibly for the whole of 2014. Make mine a pint of Old Mirkwood, with a side-order of Orc scratchings. Happy New Sneer!



Next month: Govern-ment Elf Warning

‘Oh my GUARD! It’s someone with a CIGARETTE... on the wrong side of the auditorium!’

INTRODUCING....

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

DESPICABLE ZEE

Who is she?

Despicable Zee is the work of Zahra Tehrani, 25, drummer, producer, music project facilitator and director of both the Oxford Young Women’s Music Project and BG Records. In her teens she was known locally as drummer of electro-punk band and *Nightshift* favourites BabyGravy. “Sick of recording rappers over beats that were ripped off Youtube when I ran the Kate Garrett Studio at the Ark T Centre,” she decided it was time to “put my live drumming skills into an electronic format mixed up with all my musical influences,” and began writing instrumentals for artists on BG Records, which lead her to involve some of those artists in collaborating with her on a solo EP. The self-titled ‘Despicable Zee’ EP was released on BG in November.

What does she sound like?

Zahra’s inventive drumming skills underpin her dark-hued fusion of hip hop, dubstep and almost gothic electro-pop, a mood accentuated by the vocal contributions of Stray Dog – the new singing alias of former-BabyGravy bandmate Iona Rosin – and Casus on the EP’s stand-out tracks, while a host of local singing and rapping luminaries, from Asher Dust, N-Zyme and Chukie, combine on the staccato industrial hip hop of ‘Take It Easy’.

What inspires her?

“Listening to music that encourages me to push boundaries, not limiting myself to what equipment I have but more about how far I can push my ideas with what I’ve got around me. The young people and adults I facilitate projects for are a massive inspiration to the music I produce.”

Career highlight so far:

“When BabyGravy sold out the O2 Academy for our single launch party; we were so young and managed to bring together lots of different upcoming artists, including young bands and rappers, which really created a buzz and platform for what seemed at the time a voiceless part of the music scene.”

And the lowlight:

“Being booked to play the most terrifying bikers pub in Leicester.”



Julia Diamantis

Her favourite other Oxfordshire act is:

“I love Undersmile.”

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

“‘Supa Dupa Fly’ by Missy Elliott. Production by Missy and Timbaland sounded fresh back then and could still hold its ground if it came out now. The visuals were groundbreaking, Missy is a true visionary.”

When is her next local gig and what can newcomers expect?

“I am expecting a baby in January so performing will be put on hold until my new project with Iona debuts in Autumn 2014; we will be going under the name Sow, you can expect vocal looping, drumming and lots of energy.”

Her favourite and least favourite things about Oxford music are:

“My favourite thing has to be the fact that there is a tight network of people that provide promotion, support and exposure to hard working artists and help sustain the high standard of music. My least favourite is the lack of venues for under 18s; when we were growing up there were a lot more opportunities to support our favourite local bands, now the new generation can’t really progress unless they lie about their age or wait till they are 18.”

You might love her if you love:

Creep; Björk; Santigold; Ms Dynamite; Zola Jesus.

Hear it here:

bgrecords.bandcamp.com/album/despicable-zee

ALL OUR YESTERDAYS

20 YEARS AGO

“We just got stoned, turned on the blob light and played whatever came into our heads,” admitted **The Egg**, who graced the front cover of January 1994’s *Curfew* magazine. It saw the hatching of a band who were among the most successful Oxford acts of the 90s, releasing a succession of 12” singles and two albums before not-quite splitting (they exist to this day in a very different form), “starring” alongside Ray Winstone and Kathy Burke in *Nil By Mouth* and soundtracking that Citroen advert with the dancing robot with a mash-up of their ‘Walking Away’ with David Guetta’s ‘Love Don’t Let Me Go’ in 2006.

The band, made up of twins Ned and Maff Scott, from Cornflower Concept, alongside guitarist Mark Revell and bassist Dave Gaydon, originally formed to play a jam set at a friend’s party at the Jericho Tavern before a rave – and pun-packed – review of the gig by *Curfew* encouraged them to keep going, The Egg eventually eclipsing the members’ other bands. That review also inspired the title of the quartet’s debut album, ‘Albumen’. Declaring that they wanted to simply place an egg onstage as statement about so-called faceless dance music, they explained that the creature that lurked within that egg would be “Cold-blooded but hard boiled, a bastard of a creature. Nobody knows who its parents are.” *Curfew* suggested a three-way parentage of Pink Floyd, the Orb and Acid Jazz favourites The Sandals. “It’s life-affirming music,” the band concluded, “funk music is positive music, fluidity is a sexual thing,

and expression of the joy of being.” No-one mentioned the word “hippies”.

10 YEARS AGO

News from January 2004’s *Nightshift* was dominated by the death of **Mackating** singer **Leeroy ‘Slimma’ Golding**, who has passed away in his sleep of natural causes, aged just 43. The son of Sonny ‘Downbeat’ Golding, who ran one of the first reggae soundsystems in Oxford in the 1960s, Leeroy was born in Jamaica before moving here aged 8 and grew up to helm the band who have become one of the most enduring roots acts in Oxford.

Also in the news this month, **Nought** guitarist **James Sedwards** came second in the national Riffathon competition, organised by Led Zep legend Jimmy Page to raise money for African children’s charities. James was presented with a Fender telecaster by Page himself, and remains one of the most innovative guitarists Oxford has produced. His album ‘The Devil was released last month, as well as a collaborative record with Sonic Youth’s **Thurston Moore**. **Eeebleee** were the main featured band in *Nightshift* this month, releasing their new single ‘Apologise’ on Scruffy Bird Records, while former-**Talulah Gosh** singer Amelia Fletcher’s **Tender Trap** released their ‘Cómo te Llamas?’ album. **The Zutons**, **Longview**, **Carina Round** and **Gene** were all in town, while local band names now lost in time included **Face Meets**

THIS MONTH IN OXFORD MUSIC HISTORY

Grill, Sunfly, Red Star Cycle and Last Under the Sun.

5 YEARS AGO

“Get happy!” demanded the front cover of January 2009’s *Nightshift*, introducing ebullient local electro-pop crew **Alphabet Backwards**. The band, who had yet to release anything beyond a couple of demos, were already being played by Huw Stephens and Steve Lamacq. The positivity of their music was reflected in their genial interview which found them simply declaring “We genuinely really enjoy playing, whether on stage or jamming together. We’re all such good mates it helps make a nice atmosphere and if we’re having a giggle, then chances are, other people will too.” Among highlights of a typically quiet January gig calendar was a young lad called **Frank Turner**, just starting to make a bit of an name for himself after leaving Million Dead, and already proclaimed an honorary Oxfordian for his regular appearances in town and at Truck Festival, as well as employing **Dive Dive** chaps Tarrant, Ben and Nigel in his backing band. Next stop the Olympic opening ceremony. Elsewhere **Duke Special**, **Bring Me The Horizon** and **Buzzcocks** were at the **Academy**, while **Little Fish** and **Black Hats** headed up Truck Festival’s **Equitruck** event at the **Jericho Tavern**. Over in the demo pages, **Cyberwhores** were told in no uncertain terms to “fuck off.” Who said the art of music criticism was dead?

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DEMOS

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DEMO OF THE MONTH

JEFF WODE

Named, in case you didn't already know, after an incidental character briefly mentioned in *Withnail & I*, and already hailed as successors to The Cellar Family's local oddball throne, Jeff Wode have managed to have a proper falling out and lost a guitarist since this demo first arrived, but we're sincerely hoping they survive the fracture since we'd happily sit and listen to these three tracks on rotation from now til the end of winter than anything else in the pile that parades itself as "alternative" rock. Mainly cos it's a right royal bloody mess and all the more enjoyable for that. 'Lazy Brown Dog' sounds like a severely stoned one-man protest march against canine companions with its barely coherent megaphone vocals and a lump of slacker punk that doesn't so much propel itself from A to B as stumble through the in door and collapse across the floor to the exit without so much as a by-your-leave. 'Dear David Rose' is similarly ungainly but it's 'Ian Brown Is Not Your Dad' that's the mud-and-bile-coated jewel in this crown, a semi-musical post-pub punch-up on the night bus, all malevolent overdriven sheet metal guitar and slurred vocal brawling packed with an unmistakably aggressive sense of purpose, one that reminds us of Mudhoney's early wigouts. If Jeff Wode survive their falling out and return to metaphorically tossing their orb about, you should learn to love them too. If you don't, they'll come and pull your head off. Because they don't like your head.

THE AUREATE ACT

The Aureate Act don't describe themselves as alternative in any way, shape or form, but they're still far further from anything resembling the mainstream than pretty much anything else in the pile. And that they're all just 16 only goes to amplify their otherness. They're a sort of psychedelic prog band, but not in the stereotypical way we've come to expect. Their first number, 'Snow Scenes and Revolving Trains', starts off as a solemnly hymnal lament that might be a Dick & Dom skit on Gregorian monks and proceeds to become increasingly preposterous from there, all portentously swirling synths and marching snares, moving onto epic guitar bluster. Around

Demo of the Month wins a free half day at Silver Street Studios in Reading, courtesy of Umair Chaudhry. Visit umairchaudhry.co.uk/nightshift

the four and a half minute mark, around the time most songs are brushing their teeth before going to bed, it reaches its first atmospheric breakdown before returning for another dose of even more epic fretplay and further self-contemplation. It's a bit of a jumble but it's all rather engrossing and there's little by way of pointers at to where it's all going next. They probably listened to Yes and ELP, but it's got as much in common with The Legendary Pink Dots or even 60s psych weirdoes HP Lovecraft as anything. Further in, 'Empyre' teases us by dissipating to nothing after a succinct three and a bit minutes, only to re-emerge via some muted clarinet before mining Chrome's crazed off-metal flailing and guitar destruction. 'Avos' takes the meandering path a little too far into murkiness but overall, for all its lack of cohesion – or maybe because of it – they mark themselves out as a very young band with the imagination and will to go and do something pretty special in future.

THE REAPER

Another very young band who need no patronising on account of their tender age, The Reaper already have a couple of albums and some seriously high-profile shows under their belts and make plenty of rock bands twice or thrice their age sound like puny amateurs. This is a one-off new song, called 'Liquid Gold', whose title alone positively screams 1970s, a point in history when even their dads were probably too young to be listening to nasty long-haired rock beasts, and doesn't disappoint as it rumbles in on some serious riffola in the style of Hendrix or Deep Purple before vomiting everything up a couple of notches into full-on metal, pitched at that point where NWOBHM gave way to the first wave of thrash. From here it rises and rises into righteous tech-cum-power-cum-thrash metal by way of a wailing solo and all-round powerhouse rocking, but the real scene-stealer in it all is singer Joey Kenny whose pre-pubescent (and thus female-sounding) voice is seriously quite soulful amid the metal thunder.

CHRIS RYDER

Let's try a little tenderness after all that nasty old noise, shall we? And here's Chris Ryder to provide soothing succour to broken hearts and sensitive souls everywhere. One man and an electric guitar he may be, but in his case we'll stay execution by sarcasm since he has an almost angelically pleading voice to lead his decidedly lachrymose songs through

the loveless wilderness. 'Haunted Man' doesn't steer too far from a well-worn confessional troubadour path but Chris's pure, unforced voice makes for easy balm, while 'These City Lights' feels like little more than a spectral exhalation of air against its minimalist guitar plucking, but it's delicately done and sounds much better than we've probably made it sound. So far, so Jeff Buckley maybe, but Chris even manages to put his own spin on Dylan's 'Girl From The North Country, and if we'll always prefer Johnny Cash's version he adds a slightly desolate edge to its tale of romantic longing. Lovely stuff and a short, simple lesson in how to not get it totally and utterly hopelessly fucking wrong for far too many local strummers and moaners out there.

BRANCHES

Branches are a band who describe themselves as alternative, though to what, we're far from sure and, as we write this, too full of festive goodwill to make facetious suggestions. In fact, the band touch base with so many different musical genres across a mere two songs they might be the single least alternative band in town. Their demo opener, 'Distance', starts off somewhere between fidgety Foals-inspired indie, all wiry, trebly guitars, and boy band hysteria and has us thinking dark, dark thoughts about Bastille, before it goes sort-of metalcore with a shouty intermission, edging it closer to Dive Dive, quickly tiring of this tack and sails off on some ambient dub trip. Bonus points for trying to be eclectic at least. Second song 'Stuck At Sea' starts with what might be the biggest intake of breath in recorded history before bouncing off to play at being an emo band, all elbows and social awkwardness, the incongruous genre-blending diversion here being a reggaefied middle-eight that worryingly gets us to thinking about Sting. Bizarrely, despite reading all that back and seeing we've mentioned both Sting and Bastille, we're not inclined to hunt them down and butcher them with fondue forks. Please tell us we're not mellowing in our dotage.

SMALL TOWN HERO

Claiming to sound a bit like "Green Day with more solos and an English edge", Banbury-Didcot (now that's proper county-spanning) outfit Small Town Hero do pretty much what they promise, for better or worse, depending on your views on anything "inspired" by Green Day. Like Branches before them they manage to be entirely inoffensive while playing a type of music that once, back in the mists of

time, was intended to upset every grown-up within a fifty-mile radius, and played at such a volume they would all hear it. And so they chug and skip along with something approaching gay abandon, like McFly wondering if anyone will get cross if they nick a few old Clash and Ruts riffs and polish them nicely til they shine and don't clash with the new Ikea furniture their dad just spent all afternoon assembling. Dad, meanwhile, smiles benignly at Small Town Hero's merry little pop racket and tries to remember what he did with his old Discharge records.

THE DEMO DUMPER

LITTLE HAITI

In this digital age handwriting and spelling can be seen as arcane irrelevancies, something for old fuddy duddies like *Nightshift* to fret over. Yeah well, if your penmanship is so fucked we can't tell whether you're called Little Haiti or Little Hattie, it's you who's going to get it in the neck. We like the idea of a band called Little Hattie to be honest, and imagine an angel-faced urchin singing sweet nursery rhymes to her dear old nan at Christmas time, possibly while suffering from consumption from working up chimneys since the age of five. We guess it's meant to be Little Haiti though, given the clod-hopping attempt at Latin-flavoured dance-pop slathered across this CD like some noxious form of blueberry and marmite-flavoured jam. Such a taste clash is relevant since Hattie here – we've taken the liberty of deciding the singer is called Hattie even though Hattie is quite patently a sixteen-stone bloke wearing an undersized Fedora – seems to think Latin/Caribbean dance music goes really well with boyband-style soft rock and something UB40 left in the toilet when they last visited the studio. Unlike, say, The Aureate Act, Little Haiti/Hattie obviously know exactly what they're doing when it comes to telling one end of a fretboard from t'other, but such dead-eyed professionalism simply makes the whole lumpen exercise even more excruciatingly cloying than it would have been if it had been an unholy midden made by untutored Victorian urchins with a limb missing. If they attempted to play this festering crock at a proper Haitian carnival they'd quickly find themselves the subjects of a particularly unpleasant voodoo ritual, probably involving human pin cushions. That's if they could even find Haiti on a map. Map reading being another skill the technological age seems to have shunted into the land of Mcfuckery.

*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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