

NIGHTSHIFT

Oxford's Music Magazine

Free every
month
Issue 224
March
2014

Desert Storm

Get in the back of the van!
Oxford's mightiest rock warriors
talk tour vans and toilet etiquette

Also in this issue

Festival line-ups announced:

SIMPLE MINDS and **GEORGIE FAME** for
CORNBURY

CRIBS and **WHITE LIES** for **TRUCK**
BURT BACHARACH and **METRONOMY** for
WILDERNESS

plus

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CLOCK**

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NEWS

Nightshift: PO Box 312, Kidlington, OX5 1ZU
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SIMPLE MINDS are one of the headliners of this year's **Cornbury Festival**. With the full line-up due to be announced on Thursday 6th March, Nightshift can exclusively reveal that the Scottish stadium-rock giants will top the bill one night over the weekend of the **4th-6th July** at **Great Tew Country Park**. They will be joined by jazz and r'n'b legend **Georgie Fame**; pre-punk pioneer **Graham Parker**, and Scottish-Swedish folk singer **Nina Nesbitt**. The rest of the line-up is expected to include Cornbury's characteristic mix of big-name stars; cult legends; rising folk, rock and blues stars and TV pop acts. With all early-bird tickets now sold out, tickets for the weekend are on sale through the festival website at www.cornburyfestival.com, where the full line-up will also be revealed.

APPLICATIONS FOR THIS YEAR'S OXFORD PUNT are open until the 10th March. 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 biog 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. The line-up announced on the 15th on the Nightshift forum – nightshift.oxfordmusic.net, and the Oxford Punt 2014 Facebook page. A limited number of all-venue Punt passes are on sale from Truck Store and online at oxfordmusic.net from this month, priced just £8.

WITTSTOCK FESTIVAL hosts a special weekend mini-festival this month as part of its One Gig Closer calendar, building up to the main festival at the Plough Inn in Long Wittenham over the weekend of the 19th-20th July. The weekend takes place at **The Art Bar** on the **22nd-23rd March**, featuring a host of local acts playing in the pub's Backroom venue and front bar. The Saturday features sets from Les Clochards; Agness Pike; Space Heroes of the People; The Relationships; Balloon Ascents; Sinking Witches; Superloose, and Von Braun on the main stage, with acoustic sets from Our Biscuit Selves; Beard of Destiny; Trevor Williams, and Mark Allen Barnes. Moving on to Sunday and One Wing Left; Mary's Garden; Don't Go Plastic; Lost Dogs; STEM; Man Make Fire; Charms Against the Evil Eye and After the Thought play in the Backroom, with True Rumour; Firegazers and Purple May among the acoustic acts in the front room. Both days kick off at 2pm and run



photo: Giulia Brusberti

FOALS played a last-minute hometown show as a warm-up for their national tour last month. The gig, in the smaller upstairs room at the *O2 Academy*, was kept a secret until the day before, with tickets going on sale from the venue box office and online at 10am on the day of the show. Fans queued from 6.30am and the gig was sold out in a matter of minutes. A riotous and emotional show saw **Yannis Philipakkis** crowd-surfing from the stage to bar, where he downed a shot, before surfing back again. As well as their ongoing national tour, *Foals* have been announced as main stage headliners at this year's *Bestival*, alongside *Beck* and *Outkast*. The band play the festival on the *Isle of Wight* on Saturday 6th September. Read the review of the Oxford show in this issue

through til 10pm. Entry is free with donations welcome. All money raised will go towards financing the main festival which this year is raising money for My Life My Choice, and the Young Women's Music Project.

CHARLBURY RIVERSIDE FESTIVAL will take place over the weekend of the 26th-27th July this year, it has been announced. The annual free festival is by far the biggest of its kind in Oxfordshire, attracting some 7,000 music fans over two days last year. No acts confirmed as yet but visit www.riversidefestival.charlbury.com to find out how to play and for news on the event as it's ready.

WOOD FESTIVAL returns in May. The environmentally-friendly festival organised by Truck founders Robin and Joe Bennett takes place at **Braziers Park** over the weekend of the **16th-18th May**. No line-up details have been announced as yet but tickets are on sale now, priced £65, from Truck Store, or via the festival website at www.woodfestival.com.

WHITE LIES AND THE CRIBS are the main headline acts at this year's **Truck Festival**. It is ten years since The Cribbs last played the festival. This year's Truck takes place at its traditional **Hill Farm** setting in Steventon on the **18th-19th July**, featuring live music across six stages, including its successful Veterans and Virgins stage. Other acts so far confirmed include Peace; Stornoway; Andrew WK; Los Campesinos!; Kids in Glass Houses; Swim Deep; Cerebral Ballzy; Itch; Eliza & the Bear; Lonely the Brave; Darlia; Flyte; Nothing But Thieves; Nordic Giant, and Black Moth. Festival organiser James Goodall said, "I think this could be the best Truck on record. We have just unleashed this brilliant line-up but we still have many more things ready to be announced, so watch out." After two sold-out years in a row, early-bird tickets for this year's event sold out in record time. Weekend camping tickets are on sale now, priced £74, from truckfestival.com as well as Truck Store and Rapture in Witney.

was to provide Oxford with a fantastic annual jazz festival, and throughout our five years, we managed to bring some fabulous names to Oxford to perform in some of the city's finest spaces. Our stated aim – to provide inspiring jazz performances within the less-seen spaces of Oxford – was accomplished, with performances from as varied a cast from Soweto Kinch to Norma Winstone, within the Bodleian Library, the Ashmolean Museum and the Randolph Hotel. "However, after many years of hard work, some excellent results and constant effort in the face of repeated cuts in budgets and grants for the arts, we have decided to temporarily put the Oxford Jazz Festival to bed. We'd certainly consider bringing the festival back to Oxford, but not this year."

ASCOTT-UNDER-WYCHWOOD gets its own regular folk club from this month with the launch of the appropriately named **Wychwood Folk Club**. The club will take place on the first and third Saturdays of each month at the Swan in Ascott, with monthly bigger-name acts playing at Tiddy Hall in the village. The first night of the club is the 1st March at the Swan with sets from Bluebird and Rachel Chai. The Ponderosa and Nick Hooper play on the 15th, with Pete Knight's Gigsanner appearing at Tiddy Hall on the 22nd. Folk veteran and

storyteller Richard Digance plays Tiddy Hall on April 26th. For more details on the club, visit www.wychwoodfolkclub.com

LOCAL MUSIC BLOG ONE NOTE FOREVER has signed Birmingham-based shoegazers Mutes to its fledgling record label, following on from the label's debut release by ToLiesel last year. Visit onenoteforever.com for more news.

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.musicinxford.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

OXFORD BANDS looking for members or musicians looking for bands can advertise for free in Nightshift. Simply email your needs in up to 30 words, to nightshift@oxfordmusic.net.



BURT BACHARACH is one of the headliners of this year's **WILDERNESS FESTIVAL**. The legendary Grammy-winning singer and composer tops a line-up that also features headline sets from electro-pop stars **Metronomy** and ethereal pop moodists **London Grammar**. This year's Wilderness Festival, which aims to bridge the gaps between music, art, food and nature, takes place at **Cornbury Country Park** over the weekend of the **7th-10th August**, and also features sets from Jessie Ware, with the Wilderness Orchestra; BBC Sound of 2014 winner Sam Smith; Gregory Porter; Mount Kimble; Connan Mockasin; Submotion Orchestra and Soak. Away from the main stage, there will be a Friends of the Earth busking stage; Bitter Suite, a sensory concert, and a Travelling Folk Barn. Beyond the live music is the usual host of activities, from banquets, late night parties, fire shows and theatre, to art, promenade performances, talks, debates and outdoor pursuits. Tickets for the festival are on sale now, with adult weekend camping tickets at £143.50. Kids under 10 years old get in for just £5. Visit www.wildernessfestival.com.



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Upcoming Events

SUN, MARCH 2ND - AGS CONNOLLY
Album launch show from one of the most authentic country voices in Oxfordshire

MON, MARCH 10TH - SPRING OFFENSIVE
Debut album launch show... pre-order Young Animal Hearts to guarantee entry

SAT, MARCH 15TH - TREVOR MOSS & HANNAH-LOU PLUS BENJAMIN FOLKE-THOMAS
Please note this is a ticketed evening show, tickets are available in-store

A quiet word with Desert Storm



“WE ALL HAVE FULL TIME jobs, so touring is like living the dream in a way. However, the glamorous perception of touring doesn’t always meet the reality. After our first tour our outlook certainly changed as we had never done anything like that before. The experience of travelling around the country every night, gigging, only increased our appetite to do more. We certainly aren’t at the stage where we can consider ourselves experienced, but we certainly know what to expect now from the tour.”

CHRIS WHITE, LEAD guitarist with local stoner-blues-metal titans Desert Storm, is looking forward to his band’s forthcoming tour around the UK with American stoner pioneers Karma To Burn and pondering just how far they’ve come since they formed back in 2007. It’s been an unstoppable rise and rise for the band who have led the charge for Oxford metal in recent times, elevating the ambitions of local heavyweights above and beyond gigs in the city’s smaller venues, garnering national and

international press acclaim and regularly venturing out on the road across the UK and parts of Europe, playing alongside the likes of Orange Goblin, Peter Pan Speedrock and of course regular gig-mates Karma To Burn.

BACK WHEN WE interviewed Desert Storm last, in 2010 as part of *Nightshift’s* metal special issue, they were the bright young stars on the local heavy rock scene. Led by the ferocious, ogre-ish growl of singer Matt Ryan, the band carved out a singularly brutish furrow, fusing classic metal, blues-rock, stoner-rock, psychedelia and even elements of southern gospel into an unholy whole. Backed by brothers Ryan and Elliot Cole, on guitar and drums respectively, bassist Chris Benoist and lead fretmangler Chris White, Matt’s violent and drug-related imagery combined with a wall of sound that could be bludgeoning and monolithic, but equally light-fingered, as they explored rock’s rugged terrain, refusing to be bogged down in one genre, while steeped in the blood,

sweat and more blood of great metal. Now the quintet are considered *the* pivotal rock band in town, touring regularly, releasing three albums, with a fourth on its way, and with brothers Elliot and Ryan running the regular Buried in Smoke nights, providing a hub for local metal and rock bands to play and support out of town acts.

“It’s nice to hear such appraisal for our efforts,” says Matt, “but there are many other bands in the scene who are putting in the work and going places. We might possibly have spurred or influenced other artists, as we are ourselves influenced, but we formed at a time when there was a little lull in the rock and metal scene and now there are many bands who we consider it a privilege to play with. I don’t know how we’re viewed by other bands, but hopefully we encourage bands to take the stage.”

Chris W: “I think we have come a long way in the last four years, and we certainly consider ourselves a solid part of the local metal scene, but there are a lot of other bands doing well, such as Mother Corona,

Prospekt and Undersmile. When it comes to young, local bands starting out I think you’re always going to look up to other bands that are doing well in your home town, like we did with Sextodecimo and Winnebago Deal, so I hope younger bands will look up to us in the same way, and by doing so help to cultivate the next crop of bands emerging on the scene.”

EVIDENCE OF DESERT Storm’s growing status came with the release of their ‘Horizontal Life’ album last year, the most cohesive document yet of their particular brand of sludgy, blackened blues. It was the follow-up to their 2010 release ‘Forked Tongues’, both recorded with renowned local producer Jimmy Hetherington from Suitable Case For Treatment and Komrad. Matt: “The production is tighter on ‘Horizontal Life’, which makes it feel more complete. Musically and lyrically I think we’ve pushed things to heighten and exploit our strengths. The metal is more crushing, blues more groovy and ethereal interludes

more tripped out. Lyrically it’s very similar with exploration and experimentation.”

Elliot: “We felt that ‘Horizontal Life’ was a big step up on all levels. I think we benefited from the first Karma To Burn tour, as it was a chance for us to get tighter with the tracks we were recording.”

What does Jimmy bring to your records? Matt: “Sinister laughing for one! You can hear him at the end of ‘Astral Planes’, cackling away, and on ‘No Slave To Master’, giggling at some bong hits. He’s a total dude and a maestro behind the sound desk, doing us proud with such professional recording, mixing and mastering quality.” Elliot: “Jimmy is a brilliant engineer, very easy to work with, and he’s been part of the local scene for a while now, so he’s got a lot of experience when it comes to recording bands. He’s got some really interesting techniques which I’ve never seen before. He’s also enthusiastic, and patient which is what you need from any engineer.”

NOT ONES TO REST ON THEIR laurels, another full album is already set for release in the summer, but in the meantime Desert Storm have just released a split 10” EP, ‘Nomen Est Omen’, with Dutch rockers Komatsu. They contribute long-time favourites ‘Shadow of an Eagle’ and ‘Word to the Wiseman’; was the plan to get a couple of their best existing songs over to a new audience, rather than record new tracks?

Matt: “We released the record to reach a wider audience certainly, with us plugging the split in the UK, Komatsu doing so in Holland and our distributors doing the same. It opens up the possibility of us reaching fans and doing more shows in Europe with the same benefits applying to Komatsu over here.” Elliot: “It came about from our Dutch booking agent, Justin. When he suggested the idea of a split, we thought it made sense to do it. It was a chance for us to get our music out in Holland, and was also beneficial for Komatsu over here. Initially Justin did want us to record new tracks, but we just couldn’t afford it at the time, so went with the two tracks from ‘Horizontal Life’.”

New songs will soon be available with the new album in the summer; what is that going to sound like? Is there a Desert Storm sound or do you get restless to move on, or is it just doing the same thing but better? Matt: “As with ‘Forked Tongues’ and ‘Horizontal Life’ there will be surprises on there but we’ll be continuing the diverse arrangement of tracks with something to appeal, retaining that thick Desert Storm vibe throughout. Many tracks will

be familiar to our fans who come out to shows but there will be a handful which we’ve never played live featuring on it.” Chris W: “I think that we have a sound of our own that we try to bring out on every record. We like to bring a wide variety of influences to our material. I don’t think that we really have anything to move on to, as we simply want to create music that we like rather than forcing our sound into certain directions. Essentially the aim is always to take what you are doing, and improve it.”

THE ALBUM RELEASE ALSO allows Desert Storm to indulge in their favourite activity, heading out on the road, reacquainting themselves with old chums and gigging compadres Karma To Burn for an 18-date tour. Will they return changed men, like Viking warriors from a voyage across the great grey ocean, and how big will the beards

“Our manager Freek found an elegant solution to the problem of needing the loo when we’re on the move... he simply opened the sliding door on the motorway and urinated out of the van.”

be by the time they finish? Matt: “Think Gandalf the White.” Chris W: “Elliot’s will be massive; Matt and Ryan’s will be ginger, and mine and Chris’ will have started growing.” You’ve been out on tour with a lot of other bands. What sort of stuff can a band like Desert Storm learn from being out on tour with Karma to Burn or Orange Goblin? Matt: “Most bands are like us. We want to party but there comes a time between the long drives and late nights that we can pass out pretty much anywhere. Nine of us in a nine-seater van was particularly educational. The most fun tours have been those when none of us have had to work the following morning, enabling us to enjoy it and still get the sleep in! Touring Holland and Switzerland taught us a thing or two.”

Which band you’ve toured with is the most riotous or decadent? Matt: “Difficult to say... Honky are animals on the road... Karma To Burn bring the noise... Peter Pan Speedrock have suspicious bottles of cola... and Komatsu know how to party!” How different is it touring the UK compared to Europe, the audiences you play to and the way bands are treated? Matt: “Bands are provided for in Europe with greater consideration but the fans are just as wild in Europe as they are in England.

Anyone with a passion for rock and metal is generally going to be a wild one. In Europe a band will receive some guaranteed combination of fee, food, accommodation and drinks whereas in the UK it can sometimes more difficult to secure the necessities.” Given how much time you’ve spent out on tour, are you all hardened tour monsters? Does anyone in the band need to bring a teddy or comfort blanket with them? Matt: “We’re still in training to be veterans but have certainly picked up a trick or two. We normally carry bedding in the bus but that’s because we don’t usually have the luxury of a bed. Nothing a few hearty beverages doesn’t solve. No stuffed animals, but a piss jug suffices for a home comfort.” Chris W: “Chris needs a daily haircut, but apart from that everyone is low maintenance, probably far too low maintenance in fact... anyone

The Club That Cannot Be Named stopped doing shows, and a lot of local bands seemed to call it a day. But as we had just started Desert Storm, it seemed like a good way to get us exposure and make contacts around the country. John at Skeletor saw how well it was going and set his company up half a year later, and with Buried In Smoke and Skeletor, this put Oxford on the map again.” Who’s been your favourite band you’ve put on? Elliot: “We’ve put on a lot of phenomenal bands, but I guess our favourites would have to be Orange Goblin, American Head Charge, Karma To Burn, Honky, Taint, and Saviours. We also had the privilege of supporting all these fine bands.” Do you get the feeling the Oxford scene has fragmented in recent years? So metal and rock shows exist in isolation from the rest of the various sub-scenes?

Matt: “The metal and rock community has always been estranged from the mainstream but it’s always nice to see a more diverse line-up on the occasion with a coalition of those sub-scenes. Eclectic line-ups can be a risk but are rewarding if you enjoy a variety.” Ryan: “You can’t deny that the scene is quite segregated, and bands stick to gigging with others of a similar genre. But that’s a trend we’ve seen around the rest of the UK and Europe, but I guess it comes down to promoters not wanting to take risks. There are other local bands that aren’t metal that we’d like to gig with though, bands like Yellow Fever, Dear Chicago, Spring Offensive, Beta Blocker and the Body Clock, and Message To Bears for example.”

On the local front you see and hear a lot of new acts; who are your tips for punters to check out?

Chris W: “There are probably fifty-plus metal bands in Oxford, and you should check them *all* out and support your local scene, instead of staying at home and listening to the big four again, which you have all heard *sooo* many times! Buried in Smoke and Skeletor are doing a good job, and need people to keep attending if they want great bands to continue to come to Oxford. At other shows we’ve played in the UK, people have gone online and complained that they didn’t like the look of a gig as they hadn’t heard of any of the bands, yet if they haven’t heard them, how can they assume they won’t put on a great show?”

‘Nomen Est Omen’ is out now on Blindsight Records. Desert Storm play at Skeletor’s metal night at the O2 Academy on Saturday 29th March. Visit www.facebook.com/desertstormuk for news and gig dates.

RELEASED

SPRING OFFENSIVE

‘Young Animal Hearts’

(Self-released)

Oxford’s never been known for heavy-handed music. Even Ride’s earliest soundstorms were awash with grace and poise, and the predilection for deftness and dexterity – both musical and lyrical – has carried down through the decades, whether with Radiohead, Foals, Youthmovies and Stornoway, or the latest generation of local stars like Wild Swim and Glass Animals.

None of them, though, have done delicacy so fully as Spring Offensive. To call them light on their pins is like saying Luis Suarez can kick a ball a bit. And so ‘Young Animal Heart’ – self-released after an inventive Pledgemusic campaign – tip-toes in on hushed, almost whispered harmonies and the merest wisp of a guitar spangle. “There is a storm blowing in,” breathes lead singer Lucas Whitworth, but musically it’s a storm that forever hangs just over the horizon, teasing you with flashes of lightning and ominous rumbles of thunder, the deluge never arriving.

Parts of ‘Young Animal Hearts’ will already be familiar to Spring Offensive fans; the brilliantly pensive ‘The River’ dates back to their first mini-album and remains a signature tune, all rising, rousing harmonies and murderously dramatic lyrical imagery, but, characteristically for a band with a restless approach to songwriting, most of it is new. Spring Offensive are a very serious band, earnest and focussed, but that never bogs them down



HUCK & THE XANDER BAND

‘Alexander The Great: A Folk Operatta (Pt.2)’

(Self-released)

Huck’s three-part rock opera, telling the story of Alex, the boy who runs away from an abusive, ultra-religious childhood and hooks up with half-Caddo Indian kid Johnny to indulge in every vice



as they attempt to balance bright, optimistic melodies with inventive textures and lyrics that occasionally sound like they’ve swallowed a compendium of metaphysical poetry. Once in a while – ‘Something Unkind’ for example – they can sound generically Oxfordian, all trebly indie-funk, but from the lush, summery ‘Hengeld’ to the tentative shimmer of ‘No Assets’, far more often they’re as fresh as the thought of summer.

The album closes with its title track, an encapsulation of Spring Offensive’s ability to fuse grand gestures with intricacy and intimacy and a sense of gentle tension that never fully resolves, while oddly retaining a sense of melodic optimism. The band might have moved to London to further their cause, but they remain heart and soul an Oxford band. They’re simply too good to relinquish.

Dale Kattack

his father despises continues on this second EP.

Things were getting a bit tense when we last left the pair at the end of the first EP, but part two starts in relatively upbeat mood with ‘Xander’, the boys hustling tourists for beer money, unafraid of damnation. Things quickly start getting grim though, Alex receiving a letter from his sister, later discovering Johnny dead with a needle hanging out of his arm and his father arriving in town. Musically there’s a great raw blues feel about it all, particularly the EP opener, with its mood swings, from earthy to strident to near hysterical, echoing Patti Smith’s ‘Horses’, while ‘Letter From Louise’ is woozy and timorous, a studiedly stumbling moment of contemplation. By the time Alex has realised the friend he’s chatting to is dead and he’s in police custody, the darker blues tones of Nick Cave have begun to invade the songs and story, though by the end of the EP, Alex is contemplating possible redemption and salvation and musically it’s taken an almost carefree turn. The often disjointed nature of the songs neatly reflects the unravelling lives of the story they tell, and with a third and final part to come, we guess there are more twists to come and darker places to visit. Huck’s poetic lyricism and musical imagination will keep us hanging on to the close.

Dale Kattack

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AGS CONNOLLY

‘How About Now’

(Drumfire)

Anyone who has caught Ags Connolly in the last few years will attest that he has a voice of extraordinary power, capable of transporting you from a dank open mic pub in Witney to the Grand Ole Opry. His songs are deeply rooted in country, full of hardened wisdom and homespun turns of phrase; Ags’ previous release, ‘The Dim and Distant Past’ EP, was a solid demonstration of his songwriting skills – indeed all four songs are present again here, largely unchanged. But with a group of sympathetic country session musicians behind him, Ags has taken a bit of a star turn.

While you could worry that session musicians could suck the soul out of Ags’ simple songs, or embellish them to the nth degree, the musicianship throughout ‘How About Now’ is truly fantastic, lending it a classic, authentic country sound. Lap steels coo, a stand-up bass gently plods, and an electric guitar accents the chords in a manner that would make Luther Perkins proud. Perhaps the best compliment that can be paid to Connolly is to say that many of the songs on ‘How About Now’ sound like country standards – ‘Good Memory for Pain’, ‘Get Out My Mind’, ‘The Dim and Distant Past’ and ‘Trusty Companion’ are all great songs by anyone’s standards, regardless of genre, strongly composed and sharply executed. There are also some deeply personal songs here, dotted with references to particular lovers and old haunts (I never thought I’d hear a shout-out to The Angel in a song); all of this helps to flesh out Ags’ deeply likeable and genuine persona, a man who loves and hurts, with country – and perhaps some Old Hooky – pumping through his veins.

If country music once had a bad rep for perceived flag-waving, finger-pointing, and general backwardness, Ags’ music is full of heart, more ‘Man in Black’ than ‘I Kiss My Baby With My Fist’. These are songs of love and loss from a good ol’ boy, a perfect soundtrack for crying into your beer at the end of the night. ‘How About Now’ is the most assured debut to come out of Oxford in some time, a very strong collection of songs from an artist with a clear handle on his identity.

Tom McKibbin



THE RELATIONSHIPS

‘Phase’

(Big Red Sky)

“I think I’ll retire / To the 1950s / Deep in the Shires / Of the 1950s.” If any band in Oxfordshire could claim to be lost in time and space, it is The Relationships. Together for almost two decades and with personal histories on the local music scene dating back to the early 1980s, they’re a band steeped in warm nostalgia. Those lines from ‘Mullioned Sunshine Windows’, the chiming second song on this their fourth album, are followed by stories of Agatha Christie dancing with Dennis Wheatley, an idyllic imagined past when things were better, more civilised. Because The Relationships rock, but, as the old Val Doonican album title had it, gently.

In their hearts and imaginations The Relationships are living in the sunshine of 1960s California, hanging out with Roger McGuinn and Arthur Lee, or consorting with fellow gentlemen in some grand country house sometime after the war ended. The weary, wistful regret that permeates so many of their songs though

LITTLE BLOOD

‘Little Blood’

(Self-released)

Handy hint: don’t open your album with a song called ‘Everything Is Shit’. It gives snarky gits like us ammunition. Calling it ‘Humanity Is Shit’ instead would get us onside instantly, while ‘Owen Paterson Is a Rancid Little Shit’ would have us leaping off furniture and toasting the band with finest malt whisky.

But what’s done is done and Little Blood must live with the consequences. Ironically that song, which introduces a band of local and not so local veterans whose musical histories go back to the 1980s, is by far their best number, a softly swooning slice of 60s-flavoured breeze-pop that would probably cast off all corporeal ties if it weren’t for the repeated “Everything is shit” lament.

From here we’re into the softest of soft rock territory, tinkling lounge jazz piano and easy grooves laying a smooth base for singer Mike Allen’s desultory croon. Sometimes, as on the relatively lively r’n’b of ‘Winter Stars’, with its driving Hammond, it works, echoes of The Kinks and even The Animals creep in, even as you feel Paul Weller’s admiring gaze looming over the whole thing, while towards the end, on ‘Rip’, Little Blood again cast themselves free of their earthly wanderings for an almost psychedelic flight of fancy.

Too often, sadly, we’re left with a desire to kick their backsides into action as ‘Oxygen’ becomes a background drone only three songs in, the vocals little more than a hum from which discernible words are hard to pick out. ‘Other People’s Lives’ is Van Morrison via Michael Bublé, while ‘Amsterdam’ threatens to teeter fully from slick r’n’b lope into soulless sterility, and ‘Freeland’ descends into mawkish sentimentality.

It isn’t, despite what that opener suggested, shit. As an album ‘Little Blood’ is both solidly orchestrated, and produced to a tee, but looking for life beyond easy cocktail lounge or late-night fireside contemplation and wistful reflection is as hard going as the music is easy.

Dale Kattack



suggests in reality they’re trapped in the Home Counties suburbs. Heartstrings aren’t so much tugged as softly twitched, like the net curtains of the cul-de-sac where Infinity Mansions stands, sad and stately.

Such a building exists in a song of the same name, and again it feels like a building that holds a lifetime of experiences, some good, some bad, all slightly sepia tinted. That feeling of restless

FLIGHTS OF HELIOS

‘Factory’

(Pindrop)

Anyone who’s seen Alejandro Iñárritu’s 2010 film *Biutiful* will have been struck by its claustrophobic bleakness. The ever-excellent Javier Bardem sees his already pretty grim life falling apart when he’s diagnosed with cancer and is consumed by guilt when he inadvertently kills the group of illegal immigrants who work for him. It probably won’t spoil it too much if we mention it doesn’t have a fairytale happy ending. Flights of Helios’ new single, the follow-up to their excellent ‘Star’ from last year, is lyrically based on the film and the song comes close to capturing that sense of claustrophobia and hopelessness, Chris Beard’s frantic, distorted voice possessed of the intensity of a man trying to dig his way out of a blacked-out prison cell with his fingernails. Musically it builds from electronic middle-eastern meditation to an increasingly maniacal march, before being consumed by a gothic grunge quagmire into which it sinks and dies.

So, no happy endings here either, but while Bardem’s character’s life gets worse as the film progresses, Flights of Helios’ music just get better and better.

Dale Kattack



longing rarely leaves ‘Phase’, but it provides a level of comfort that’s not so much inviting as addictive.

While it’s hard to pick a single highlight from an album of songs so refined you imagine they were handcrafted in a garden potting shed by a hermitic artisan, album opener ‘Self Esteem Flying Machine’ is an absolute treat, a gorgeous, swooning shimmer through a form of psychedelic pop so sweetly restrained they must surely have downed their acid tabs with bone china cups of tea rather than anything so crude as beer or whisky. The Relationships don’t just have skills and talent, they have class.

Album closer ‘Installation Day’ addresses “the modern explorer, in a classical scene, trying to discover what all the statues all mean,” urging him to “Put away your maps and spades / Put away Arcadian summer days,” over a crepuscular guitar spangle and it all feels like the last gentleman adventurer finally going quietly into that dark night. But with such dignity and grace does he go, his deeds and discoveries will live long in the memory, much as this album should. The flying machine leaves shortly, get your ticket now.

Dale Kattack



SALVATION BILL

‘Dead Dog’

(Bear on a Bicycle)

Faced with a neighbour’s incessantly barking dog, what would you do? Go mad? Complain? Throw sedative-spiked steaks over the fence? Salvation Bill chose the most far-reaching retribution he could think of... to slay the dreaded beast in song. Salvation Bill is the current (usually) solo project of Ollie Thomas, former frontman of Oxford up-and-comings ute and The Old Grinding Young. If the ‘solo project’ moniker worries you some, don’t let it. In ‘Dead Dog’ Thomas carves his own niche in the alt-folk camp, with a sound far rounder and richer than traditional singer-songwriter fare. Jangly, toe-tapping piano chords and a jaunty beat open the track, which unfolds its wickedly morbid narrative with tongue firmly in-cheek.

It’s Thomas’ voice which steals the show though, meandering through harmony and murmur with an almost plaintive edge, at once recognisable and captivating. Ute received their fare share of praise, yet with Salvation Bill, you feel that Thomas has found a better fit. His gift with narrative, the touch of humour, the irresistible energy, all sounds like a room full of people having fun. Impressive, considering that it’s just one man, being kept awake by a dog.

Sean O'Reilly

G I G G U I D E

SATURDAY 1st
ROOM 94: O2 Academy – A band so lacking in character or musical virtue Room 94 are, like The Silence in *Dr Who*, instantly forgotten the moment their music stops or you stop reading their name. But not as handsome. They’ve recently supported Lawson and Union J. Not sure anything *Nightshift* says can really add to the thrill such information has bestowed on you. They’re now off on a headline to... oh, sorry, what were we talking about? Oh look, a picture of a goat climbing a tree. Cool.
ORANGE VISION: The Wheatsheaf – Bouncy pub-rock from the local band.
PROPAGANDA / TRASHY: O2 Academy – Classic and new indie hits at Propaganda every week, plus kitsch pop, glam and 80s at Trashy every week.
EXTRA-CURRICULAR: The Cellar – Weekly techno, house and bass night.
PEERLESS PIRATES + JACK RHYS DAVIES: The Jericho Tavern – Swashbuckling indie rockabilly with a distinct whiff of the Smiths and finest grog from Peerless Pirates.

Monday 3rd
TEMPLES: O2 Academy
Psychedelia is back! No, wait, it’s never been away. It’s just that sometimes the bands making it get a bit more attention than at others. Right now, the likes of Toy and Hookworms are making swirly lysergic noise well cool again. Temples, from the decidedly unexotic town of Kettering, tend to get lumped in with those bands but they’re far less heavy on the reverb and a more pop-friendly proposition. Singer James Edward Bagshaw, with his corkscrew curls and bejewelled face, is a deadringer for Marc Bolan for starters and musically Temples reach right back to the classic psychedelic pop of The Beatles and Syd Barrett, bringing it all up to speed with the modern age by way of The La’s, The Coral and The Last Shadow Puppets, to a point where they sit more comfortably next to Django Django or Tame Impala. And if all that reads like a list of “bands they owe a debt to,” it’s meant as a recommendation rather than anything disparaging. Cos they’re great. As was proved at last year’s Gathering Festival, and in the likes of ‘Shelter Song’ and ‘Mesmerise’ they’ve already got enough great catchy pop tunes to break out of cult demi-fame into the big, wide world of pop success. And if they don’t, well, it’ll still be a lovely trip.



MARCH
WHAT YOU CALL IT GARAGE?: The Cellar – The monthly garage club night returns to action, tonight with B-III and Naughty Nath, Sharky & George, Dan Fitzgerald and DJ Face, hosted by Macular and Sandman.
SELECTA: The Art Bar – Drum&bass and jungle club night.
W.A.M: Fat Lil’s, Witney – Ska-punk classics covered.
THE ERIN BARDWELL COLLECTIVE: The Swan, Wantage – Reggae and rocksteady from the local outfit.
THE MISSING PERSIANS: James Street Tavern
BLUEBIRD + RACHEL CHAI: The Swan, Ascott-under-Wychwood – Opening night of the new Wychwood Folk Club
SANCTUM: The Varsity Club – Monthly metal club night playing classics and new tunes from across the metal spectrum.

SUNDAY 2nd
AGS CONNOLLY: Truck Store – Witney’s country bard launches his excellent debut album, ‘How About Now’ with an afternoon instore show.
PAPER AEROPLANES: The Art Bar– Breezily melancholic folk-pop from the west Wales duo, variously compared to Fleetwood Mac, The Sundays and The Cranberries, and on tour to promote third album ‘Little Letters’.
ENTRAILS + BASEMENT TORTURE KILLINGS: The Wheatsheaf – Slave To The Grind host reformed Swedish death-metallers Entrails, whose founding guitarist Jimmy Lundgvist is the sole survivor of the original line-up, ploughing a singularly nasty furrow since the early 90s, inspired by Dismember, Entombed and Grave.
MOON LEOPARD + TWIZZ TWANGLE + BEARD OF DESTINY + MATT SEWELL + MAX: Donnington Community Centre (6pm) – Free live acoustic music session hosted by Moon Leopard fellow Jeremy Hughes.

MONDAY 3rd
TEMPLES: O2 Academy – These children are fair and wear flowers in their hair – *see main preview*
MITCH LADDIE: The Art Bar – Bottletop blues, blues-rocking and funk-blues from Geordie guitar maestro Laddie, at only 22 already a veteran of Walter Trout’s band, riding high on the critical acclaim afforded his second album, ‘Burning Bridges’ and mixing original tunes with covers of James Brown and Marvin Gaye.
THE CADILLAC KINGS: The Jericho Tavern – Swinging Louisiana blues, boogie woogie and r’n’b at tonight’s Famous Monday Blues.
McGOLDRICK, McCUSKER & DOYLE: Nettlebed Folk Club – Intimate show from three of the UK’s finest folk musicians, with McGoldrick on flute, whistle and uilleann pipes; McCusker a star on the fiddle and Doyle leading the line on vocals and guitar, the trio having worked with the likes of Mark Knopfler, Joan Baez and Bob Dylan, among others.

TUESDAY 4th
BONOBO: O2 Academy – Trippy downtempo sounds from Simon Green and chums – *see main preview*
JAZZ CLUB: The Art Bar – Free live jazz every Tuesday in the Backroom, tonight with groove-led ensemble The New Jazz Collective.
HELVED RÛM: The Old Fire Station – Improvised electro-acoustic from drummer Julian Chamla and “electroacoustician” Simon Henocq.
DANNY & THE CHAMPIONS OF THE WORLD: Fat Lil’s, Witney – Uplifting Americana and country-rocking in the vein of Tom Petty, Neil Young and The Band from Danny George Wilson and gang.
OPEN MIC NIGHT: The White Rabbit
OPEN MIC NIGHT: James Street Tavern

WEDNESDAY 5th
ENOS + MOTHER CORONA + ABRAHAMA + KOMRAD: The Wheatsheaf – Psychedelic stoner/doom rocking from Brighton’s space-chimp-obsessed heavyweights Enos at tonight’s Buried In Smoke show, the band coming on like a giant rough-hewn collision between Orange Goblin, Electric Wizard, Clutch and Kyuss. Oh yes. Great support from Didcot’s groove-rock monsters Mother Corona, and prog-core heroes Komrad.
SUBVERSE: The Cellar – House, garage, techno and bass club night, with a DJ set from house legend Levon Vincent, whose releases on his Novel Sound label and Deconstruct imprint became instant dancefloor hits. He’s joined on the decks by Harry Scholes, James Shirley and Midnight Mary.

THURSDAY 6th
WE ARE SCIENTISTS: O2 Academy – The irony-heavy Californian indie-punks return to action after an enforced lay-off due to line-up, label and management issues. Now they’re set to release a new album, ‘TV en Français, the long-awaited follow-up to 2010’s ‘Barbara’, and while their infectious, chorus-heavy fuzz-pop, inspired by everyone from Bowie and Weezer to Hall & Oates, is never less than fun, it’s often the witty onstage banter between Keith Murray and Chris Cain that provides the best entertainment.
CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre – Oxford’s longest running and best open mic club night continues to showcase local singers, musicians, poets, storytellers and performance artists every week as it builds towards it 20th anniversary later this year.
THE MIGHTY REDOX: The Wheatsheaf – Free unplugged gig from the local blues-rockers in the downstairs bar.
OPEN MIC NIGHT: The Half Moon
BLUES JAM: The Jack Russell, Marston

FRIDAY 7th
SONS OF BILL + THE DREAMING SPIRES: The Art Bar – Country rocking from blokes whose dad is called Bill. True story – *see main preview*
SWITCH with JOSH BUTLER: O2 Academy – Rising Leeds DJ Josh Butler mans the decks at the O2’s weekly techno and house club night, bringing his own bass-driven style of deep house, best heard on last year’s ‘Got A Feeling’ single for MTA.

SKYLARKIN SOUNDSYSTEM: The Cellar – Reggae, dancehall and bashment club night hosted by Count Skylarkin and tonight featuring a live set from Dub Mafia, reggae siren Eva Lazarus’ well-travelled breakbeat seven-piece, making their Skylarkin debut after playing at Outlook and Boomtown. On the decks, the Count is joined by Roots Manuva producer Wrongtom.
KLUB KAKOFANNEY with FLIGHTS OF HELIOS + BEAVER FUEL + STRING PROJECT: The Wheatsheaf – Spaced-out electro psychedelia crew Flights of Helios launch their new single, ‘Factory’, at tonight’s Klub Kak, joined by potty-mouthed indie-punk lunacists Beaver Fuel.
WHITE MAGIC: The Art Bar – Reggae club night.
BLURD + NOASIS: Fat Lil’s, Witney – Double dose of Britpop tributes.
OSPREY & THE OX4 ALLSTARS + ADY DAVEY: The Wheatsheaf, Didcot
DISCO MUTANTES: The Library – Disco, funk, boogie and house club night.

SATURDAY 8th
THE ANSWER: O2 Academy – The return of

All month
AUDIOGRAFT
Back after last year’s successful month-long festival, Audiograft’s series of concerts, installations and exhibitions in conjunction with Oxford Contemporary Music sets out to build links between sound and location, with the emphasis on experimental music and art. A free launch night at OVADA in Osney on the 12th features food-themed sets from The Sonic Catering Band, preparing their music as they would a meal, via processing, cutting, layering and mixing, machine-made sounds from Marianthi Papalexandri, and Gordon Monohanwho uses the acid energy of fruit and vegetables to create music. On the 12th at the Holywell Music Room Patrick McGinley and Felicity Ford explore field recordings, found objects and spaces, while Liminal brings a new slant on bell ringing and JD Zazie mixes myriad found sounds. Moving onto the Old Fire Station for the 14th and 15th, Jos Zwaanenburg fuses flute and live electronics, while John Grieve provides saxophone-based experimentation. Jerome Noetringer and Lionel Machetti improvise with assorted manipulated objects, from piano frame and mixing desk to microphones and cassettes, while Guy Sherwood and Lynn Loo mix sound and image using projections and loops. Closing the festival on the 29th, back at OVADA, Nathaniel Mann’s Rough Music takes in everything from meat cleavers to Chinese pigeon whistles for some sonic exploration taking folk music as its launch base. For full Audiograft line-up, visit **www.ocmevents.org**.



County Down’s wild’n’hairsty retro rockers, keeping it 1970s with their mix of AC/DC and Thunder, having supported the former on their world tour a few years back. They’re touring to promote last year’s ‘New Horizon’ album, their fourth.
CHARLEE DREW: O2 Academy – Tortuous autotuned r’n’b guff from the Leicester lad.
NICK MULVEY: The Art Bar – Intimate, sprightly acoustic folk music from former Portico Quartet man Nick Mulvey, touring his ‘Fever To The Form’ EP after supporting Laura Marling on tour last year.
LISTING SHIPS + MAIIANS + BIG TROPICS: The Cellar – Nautically-obsessed, electro-heavy post-rock in the vein of Mogwai, Neu! and Tortoise from Listing Ships, back in action with a new drummer, the previous three having exploded. They’re joined by James Cunnings’ new electro band Maiians, and Duchesse/We Aeronauts spin-off Big Tropics.
SIMPLE: The Art Bar – House and techno with Ben UFO.
THE MIGHTY REDOX: The Marsh Harrier
THE NUGGETS: Fat Lil’s, Witney – 60s sounds, from The Beatles and Stones to The Kinks and Small Faces.
STEAMROLLER: The Rock of Gibraltar, Enslow – Heavy-duty blues-rock in the vein of Hendrix and Cream from the local veterans.

SUNDAY 9th
THE SELECTER: O2 Academy – Coventry’s Two-Tone legends return to town, on tour to celebrate 35 years together, still featuring original members Pauline Black and Arthur ‘Gaps’ Hendrickson, playing their classic ‘Too Much Pressure’ album in its entirety, featuring the hits ‘Three Minute Hero’, ‘Too Much Pressure’ and ‘Missing Words’.
THE MARTIN HARLEY BAND: The Art Bar – Folk and blues from the Welsh singer and slide guitarist, out on tour to promote his forthcoming new album, the follow-up to 2012’s ‘Mojo Fix’, having previously supported the likes of Newton Faulkner and G Love & Special Sauce.

MONDAY 10th
SPRING OFFENSIVE: Truck Store – A special, intimate instore album launch gig for ‘Young Animal Hearts’ for the local heroes. It’s free but you’ll need to pre-order the album to nab one. It’s gonna be mental.
DERRIN NAUENDORF BAND: The Jericho Tavern – Australian guitarist who migrated to England to make his career, ending up living and touring round Europe in an old post office van, producing and selling albums without the aid of a record label. Inspired as much by the 60s British folk revival as the likes of Bob Dylan, Tom Waits and Steve Earle.
MARTIN SIMPSON: Nettlebed Folk Club – Masterful traditional folk songsmithery from the veteran acoustic and slide guitarist.

TUESDAY 11th
JAZZ CLUB: The Art Bar – Live jazz from Heavy Dexters, playing jazz-funk covers and originals.
INTRUSION: The Cellar – Monthly goth, industrial, ebm and darkwave club night.
OPEN MIC NIGHT: The White Rabbit
OPEN MIC NIGHT: James Street Tavern

WEDNESDAY 12th
LISSIE: O2 Academy – Low-key Americana and folk run through with slick 70s rock and radio-friendly pop from the Illinois singer-songwriter, back in Oxford for the first time since 2010 to tour her second album, ‘Back To Forever’, her passionate vocal style, all rust and regret, drawing comparisons with Neko Case, Stevie Nicks and Sheryl Crow.



Tuesday 4th
BONOBO: O2 Academy
That tonight’s show is long since sold out is hardly a surprise – Bonobo, aka Simon Green and band, recently sold out two nights at the Sydney Opera House – but it’s a puzzle as to how they’ll even fit in the Academy tonight. Gigs to promote new album ‘The North Borders’ have involved not just guitarist, keyboard player, saxophonist and drummer but a full string section, not to mention new singer Szjerdene Fox, whose lavishly soulful voice rides across the lolling jazz-inflected soundscapes of the album alongside a contribution from the great Erykah Badu. Musically the new album is a continuation of his last outing, the acclaimed ‘Black Sands’, which saw him refine his downtempo wanderings to a tee after 15 years providing trippy afterhours music for clubbers worldwide, and suitably atmospheric background sounds for a multitude of films and TV shows. Having moved to New York to live and record, Bonobo’s sonic storytelling is a serious global business now and it’ll be interesting to see how it fits with a relatively intimate, and packed, setting as this.

AUDIOGRAFT LAUNCH NIGHT: OVADA, Osney – Launch night for this year’s Audiograft festival – *see main preview*
NORTH EAST CORRIDOR + CASSEL + STATIC IN MOTION: The Art Bar – Debut gig from local newcomers Northeast Corridor at tonight’s It’s All About the Music show.
FREERANGE: The Cellar – Drum&bass, hip hop and dubstep club night.

THURSDAY 13th
THE ENGLISH BEAT: O2 Academy – In a good month for veteran ska and punk bands coming to town, Dave Wakeling brings his incarnation of the Birmingham hitmakers back to Oxford, revisiting classic hits like Smokey Robinson’s ‘Tears Of A Clown’, ‘Hands Off... She’s Mine’, ‘Mirror In The Bathroom’ and ‘Too Nice To Talk To’.
PATRICK MCGINLEY & FELICITY FORD + LIMINAL + JD ZAZIE + SYBELLA PERM: The Holywell Music Room – Found sounds, field recording and more as part of Audiograft – *see main preview*
DEEP COVER: The Cellar – Hip hop, reggae and r’n’b night with residents Annex, ROMO and VLVT joined by the in-house hip hop and soul band Reprobate.
THE PETE FRYER BAND: The Wheatsheaf – Free unplugged gig in the downstairs bar from the local blues-rock veteran.
ACTION STATIONS CARNIVAL presents RAMPAGE SOUNDSYSTEM: The Art Bar – Reggae soundsystem.
CATWEAZLE: East Oxford Community Centre
OPEN MIC NIGHT: The Half Moon



Friday 7th

SONS OF BILL / THE DREAMING SPIRES: The Art Bar

Why are Sons of Bill called Sons Of Bill? Given the Virginian quintet’s propensity for warmly romantic country-folk and Americana we hoped it had some secret meaning. Turns out the three founding members of the band, Sam, Abe and James Wilson, are all the sons of a bloke called Bill. Thankfully their music isn’t so prosaic. Tonight being yet another quality show from Empty Room Promotions, who specialise in bringing the best cult American roots acts to town, Sons of Bill’s sound is a heroically dusty form of country-rock and rustic barroom folk-blues. Pitched somewhere between the classic American rock of Tom Petty, the 80s alternative rock of REM, Meat Puppets et al, and the more down-home sounds of Ryan Adams and Steve Earle, they’re almost purpose-made to get bars rocking and grown men weeping into their beer glasses. Something they’ll be doing tonight as they visit the UK to tour new album ‘Sirens’. Local alt.country godfather The Dreaming Spires open the show, the brothers Bennett’s wistful, romantic update of The Band’s classic sound still as true as it was when they formed Goldrush.

BLUES JAM: The Jack Russell, Marston

FRIDAY 14th

BETA BLOCKER & THE BODY CLOCK + BLACK CASINO & THE GHOST + POLEDO: The Jericho Tavern – Daisy Rodgers Music night with noise-pop heaven from both Beta Blocker (see this month’s Introducing feature) and Poledo, each unearthing rare melodic gems from beneath a rich blanket of lo-fi guitar mangling. In between are Candy Says singer/keyboard player Elisa Zoot’s other band Black Casino and the Ghost. A triple measure of your finest musical talents please, landlord.
MEGAN HENWOOD + BALLOON ASCENTS + RUSHIL + ROB LANYON: The Wheatshaeaf – Folk-pop from Megan Henwood at tonight’s It’s All About the Music, alongside rising local indie-folksters Balloon Ascents and earnest rocker Rushil.
JOS ZWAANENBURG & JOHN GRIEVE: The Old Fire Station – Flute and electronics from Zwaanenburg and band as part of Audiograft – *see main preview*
BOSSAPHONIK: The Cellar – Dancefloor Latin, Afrobeat, Balkan beats, global grooves and nu-jazz club night with live bands and residents.
OLD COLOURS + LITTLE ARROWS + THE COOLING PEARLS: The Port Mahon – A night of uneasy folk sounds at the Port, with Old Colours playing their penultimate gig, mixing the airy folk-pop of Laura Marling and The Sundays through a shoegaze mangle. They’re joined by ghostly alt. folkies Little Arrows, and Orcadian-flavoured locals

The Cooling Pearls.

BRINSLEY KAZAK: The Art Bar – Chicago and Detroit house with a deeper house tip from the Louche man.
OX4 ALLSTARS + GRUDLE BAY + BEARD OF DESTINY: Crown & Thistle, Abingdon – Osprey and chums head up tonight’s Skittle Alley night, alongside chilled-out electro-funksters Grudle Bay and one-man blues army Beard of Destiny.
THE MIGHTY FREDOX + MARK ATHERTON & FRIENDS: The James Street Tavern
ZZ TOPS: Fat Lil’s, Witney – Tribute band.
THE PONDEROSA + NICK HOOPER: The Swan, Ascott-under-Wychwood

SATURDAY 15th

TREVOR MOSS & HANNAH LOU + BEJNAMIN FOLKE-THOMAS: Truck Store – Instore show from the lovey-dovey indie-folk duo.
JOHN BRAMWELL: The Art Bar – Morning-after regret and gallows humour abound in John Bramwell’s songs, the I Am Kloot frontman revelling poetically in life’s continual disappointments, Mercury nominations aside. Solo his blend of blues, soul and folk-rock continues to reflect the slate-grey melancholia of his Manchester home – “songs about drink and disaster,” as he describes them. Fans can take the chance to buy his new ‘Live At the Trades’ album, available only at gigs on this current tour.
THE DUALERS: O2 Academy – Ska and reggae from Croydon’s enduring outfit, formed back in 1999 by brothers Tyber and Si Cranstoun, themselves sons of renowned 60s ska DJ Bill Cranstoun. After Top 40 hits in 2004 with ‘Truly Madly Deeply and ‘Kiss On the Lips’, they continue to tour, despite the departure of Si back in 2010.
K-LACURA + GODSPEED + SALVAGE + FLEISCH: The Wheatshaeaf – Single launch for local thrash-core crew K-Lacura and a supporting cast of local heavyweights.
JEROME NOETINGER & LIONEL MACHETTI + GUY SHERWIN & LYNN LOO + RIE NAKAJIMA + DAWN SCARFE: The Old Fire Station – Improvised music from musical objects at Audiograft – *see main preview*
THE KITES + FRACTURE + LIES OF ELIZABETH + ADAM PETER McMILLAN + SEVEN O’CLOCK JUNKIES: The Cellar – Electro-tinged indie-folk from The Kites, rocking blues from Fracture and soulful pop from Lies of Elizabeth among the acts playing tonight’s It’s All About the Music show.
XAIA + THE DUBLINGS: The Jericho Tavern – Live reggae with former-Raggasaurus types Zaia, and pop-friendly dubsters The Dublings.
PROPAGANDA / TRASHY: O2 Academy
FRESH OUT THE BOX: The Cellar – Disco, breaks, beats and house club night.
AFRO-CARIBBEAN NIGHT: The Art Bar
DIRTY EARTH BAND: Fat Lil’s, Witney
RECKLESS SLEEPERS: The Cherry Tree, Steventon – Folksy 60s psychedelic pop.

SUNDAY 16th

THE AUSTRALIAN PINK FLOYD: The New Theatre – Spectacular Floyd tribute.
LES CLOCHARDS + RICH STICKS + PETE MOORE + THE BEDLAM STARES + MOON LEOPARD + BEARD OF DESTINY: The Wheatshaeaf (2.30pm) – Free afternoon of live music in the downstairs bar hosted by Klub Kakofanney.
AMBER RUN: The Cellar – Simpering emotive epic soft rock of the sort that makes Mumford and Sons sound like Behemoth from Nottingham’s musical pantywaists.

MONDAY 17th

THE STRANGLERS + NINE BELOW ZERO: O2 Academy – Classic punk anthems, from ‘No More Heroes’, ‘Peaches’ and ‘Something Better Change’, to more tender masterpieces such as ‘Always The Sun’ and ‘Golden Brown’ from the enduring Men In Black, out on tour to celebrate their 40th anniversary. Great support from British r’n’b pioneers Nine Below Zero.
LOVEABLE ROGUES: O2 Academy – Loveable Rogues, eh? They’re, like, rogues, but, y’know, loveable. Cuddly even. Bunch of geezers, ennit? *Britain’s Got Talent?* Supporting Olly Murs? A little bit whoo, a little bit whay. Use swear words in their songs. Danny Dyer, isn’t it? Jumpers for goalposts. Not as good as Rizzle Kicks. Fuck off.
MARIKA HACKMAN: The Cellar – Delicate, spectral acoustic pop from Brighton singer-songwriter and former Burberry model Marika, out on tour to promote new mini-album ‘That Iron Taste’ after supporting Ethan Johns, Johnny Flynn having recommended her to Trangressive.
RUF RECORDS BLUES CARAVAN TOUR: The Jericho Tavern – The Famous Monday Blues hosts the Ruf Records tour, featuring sets from Albert Castiglia, Christina Skjølberg and Laurence Jones.
CRAOBH RUA: Nettlebed Folk Club – Nettlebed’s long-running folk club celebrates St Patrick’s Night with some traditional Irish music.

Tuesday 18th

MAXIMO PARK / TELEMAN: O2 Academy

Bloody heck, Maximo Park are on their fifth album already? Seems so, with the release of ‘Too Much Information’ this month the Newcastle quintet are now officially rock survivors. Although ‘survivors’ doesn’t really do justice to the band whose fervent cult following is well earned. And it’s not exactly a small cult neither, the band having enjoyed Gold status for their first two albums, 2005’s Mercury-nominated debut ‘A Certain Trigger’ and 2007’s ‘Our Earthly Pleasures’, which sold two million copies worldwide. It’s live though where they work best, frontman Paul Smith in particular possessed of quirky rock star quality, an action-packed, literate anti-hero in the vein of Morrissey or Jarvis Cocker whose onstage mania perfectly reflects the bug-eyed spikiness of the band’s best songs, songs like long-time favourite ‘Apply Some Pressure’, a bona fide indie disco anthem, all post-punk angles and restless pop energy. Early streams of the new album suggest they’re not just surviving, they’re thriving. Great support tonight from Telemán, formed from the ashes of Pete & The Pirates and now headed into more electro-pop territory, something we shall always applaud heartily.



TUESDAY 18th

MAXIMO PARK + TELEMAN: O2 Academy – Ver Park tour their fifth album, ‘Too Much Information’ – *see main preview*
GNARWOLVES + WOAHNOWS + HATEMAIL: The Wheatshaeaf – Brighton’s spindly, frenetic punkers Gnarwolves make a welcome return to town, alongside Plymouth’s Big Scary Monsters-signed angular indie punks The Woaahnows. Bear Trap offshoot Hatefulmail open the show.
JAZZ CLUB: The Art Bar – With The New Jazz Collective.
OPEN MIC NIGHT: The White Rabbit
OPEN MIC NIGHT: James Street Tavern

WEDNESDAY 19th

STORY BOOKS: The Art Bar – Rousing indie balladry and melancholic intensity in the vein of Coldplay and Keane from Kent’s Mumford-signed Story Books, who supported The Rolling Stones in Hyde Park last summer and last seen round these parts opening for Fossil Collective.
ELEMENTS: The Cellar – House, garage and UK hip hop night, aiming to showcase new local and national talent, with live sets from The Reejai Collective and Ill Informed, plus tunes from Effi and Simply Bob among the DJs.
NOE & THE PASTEL FRONTIER: The Wheatshaeaf – Grunge and rock from Noe & the Pastel Frontier at tonight’s Moshka club night.
SPARKY’S SPOTLIGHT JAM: James Street Tavern – Open jam session.

THURSDAY 20th

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

FRIDAY 21st

JOHN COFFEY + BLASTED + HATEMAIL: The Wheatshaeaf – Punk and post-hardcore noise from Utrecht’s John Coffey, inspired by Refused and Every Time I Die and over in the UK to promote their ‘Bright Companions’ album. Great support at tonight’s Buried In Smoke show from Blasted, the frenetic hardcore punk side project of Winnebago Deal’s Ben Perrier.
SLAM CARTEL + BUFFALO SUMMER + AARON KEYLOCK: O2 Academy – Growly, blues-tinged hard rocking from London’s Slam Cartel, drawing a line between Guns’n’Roses, Nirvana and Soundgarden on their album ‘Handful of Dreams’. Support comes from Swansea’s Buffalo Summer, playing southern-fried blues-rock somewhere between Led Zep and Lynyrd Skynyrd, having previously supported Ugly Kid Joe and Skid Row. Rising local bluesman Aaron Keylock opens.
SWITCH with MAK & PASTEMAN: O2 Academy – The Academy’s weekly electronic dance night hosts Leeds’ hottest duo, conjuring a dark but danceable fusion of jungle, house and techno.
THE LONG INSIDERS + THE SHAPES + LUCKY CLUB: The Art Bar – Classic rockabilly and rock’n’roll from The Long Insiders, looking to The Cramps and Suicide as much as early Elvis and Johnny Cash for their sound. 60s rock and soul in the vein of Van Morrison from The Shapes in support.
PAT THOMAS & KÉSIA DÉCOTE: St Michael @ the Northgate – Oxford Improvisers host an evening with local keyboard maestro Pat Thomas and Brazilian pianist Késia Décote

ALL TAMARA’S PARTIES: The Old Fire Station – Tamara Parsons-Baker hosts another intimate night of music and poetry, tonight in the Old Fire Station’s tiny loft venue. As well as wayward folk from Dutch band Galleons, acoustic folk from Megan

Henwood and boozy, bluesy Americana from Francis Pugh & the Whisky Singers, there’s poetry from Luke Kennard and the ever-brilliant poetic skills of compere George Chopping.
SHEDONISM: The Cellar – Count Skylarkin’s Disco Shed continues its indoor activities as we await the sunshine and festival season to kick in. Tonight DJ Format spins rare funk, crazy jazz, old and nu-skool hip hop and more.
CALLIGRAPHY: The Art Bar – House club night.

SATURDAY 22nd

ONE GIG CLOSER WEEKENDER Pt.1: The Art Bar (2pm) – Opening a full weekend of live music in the back room and front bar of the Art Bar, building up to this summer’s Wittstock Festival. Today’s action features a quality line-up of local acts, including Francophile café-pop crew Les Clochards; theatrical trash merchants Agness Pike; synth-pop and acid house duo Space Heroes of the People; tweedy psychedelia stalwarts The Relationships, and rising young indie crew Balloon Ascents, as well as Beard of Destiny; Trev Williams; Mark Allen Barnes; Sinking Witches, Superloose and Von Braun.
PEERLESS PIRATES + HEADCOUNT + GEMMA MOSS: The Wheatshaeaf – Dancing Man’s birthday party, the ubiquitous Leon Stiles inviting swashbuckling indie rockers Peerless Pirates, super-heavyweight post-punkers Headcount and artful electro songstress Gemma Moss along for the celebrations. Come, join him on the dancefloor.
DAMN VANDALS + THE OTHER DRAMAS + LAST RITES + MEGAN JOSEPHY: The Cellar – Dourly angry dark-hewn alt.rocking from Damn Vandals, channelling the likes of Blue Aeroplanes and The Godfathers as they turn their ire into a squalling rock storm.
BRIGHT WORKS + JAZZ HANDS + DUCHESS: The Jericho Tavern – Afro-pop-favoured indie rocking from Brightworks, alongside township jive, Calypso and pop fun from Duchess.
PROPAGANDA / TRASHY: O2 Academy
EXTRA-CURRICULAR: The Cellar
JAMES HOLLINGSWORTH: The Rose & Crown, Charlbury – Acoustic guitar inspired by Andalusian folk music, blues, trance and psychedelia.
PETE KNIGHT’S GIGSPANNER: Tiddy Hall, Ascott-under-Wychwood
STEAMROLLER: The Shepherd’s Hut, Ewelme

SUNDAY 23rd

ONE GIG CLOSER WEEKENDER Pt.2: The Art Bar (2pm) – Second full day of live music building up to Wittstock Festival in July. One Wing Left; Mary’s Garden; Don’t Go Plastic; Lost Dogs; STEM; Man Make Fire; Charms Against the Evil Eye and After the Thought are in the back room, while True Rumour; Fire Gazers and Purple May are among the acoustic acts in the front bar.

MONDAY 24th

SAINT RAYMOND: O2 Academy – Airy, trebly indie pop in the vein of Friendly Fires from Nottingham’s Callum Brown, touring his new single, ‘Young Blood’.
BELLA HARDY, LUCY WARD, JAMES FINDLAY & BRIAN PETERS: Nettlebed Folk Club – Mixture of vocal harmonies, solo and band performance from assorted folk luminaries of songs from the New Penguin Book of English Folk Songs.

TUESDAY 25th

METRONOMY: O2 Academy – Synth-pop ina Devon stylee – *see main preview*
BEEHOOVER + UNDERSMILE + CARAVAN OF WHORES: The Wheatshaeaf – Bass. Drums.



Tuesday 25th

BEEHOOVER / UNDERSMILE / CARAVAN OF WHORES: The Wheatshaeaf

You want sludge? We got sludge! Buckets of the stuff. Another quality booking from Buried In Smoke brings German duo Beehooover to town as they tour their ‘Satan & His Footsoldiers’ release. Having decided they didn’t like any of the guitarists they auditioned, bassist/singer Ingmar Peterson and drummer/singer Claus-Peter Hamisch did what a fair few acts have done and stuck with four strings and plenty of effects pedals. The result is a form of sludgy groove-rock that’s as multi-layered and highly textured as any four-piece out there, super-fuzzed stoner riffs and anthemic, almost stentorian vocals making it all sound twice, thrice, its size. Big enough not to mess with. Avoiding too many of the clichés of the genre, there’s even an element of punk in some of the band’s sound and there’s no arguing with their directness of purpose. Superb local support tonight comes from the witch queens of tectonic doom-drone, Undersmile, taking the likes of Earth, Melvins and Swans into darker, more disturbing territories, and monstrous psychedelic riff merchants Caravan of Whores. It will be loud, it will be heavy, and you *will* love it.

Shouting. Go! – *see main preview*

JAZZ CLUB: The Art Bar – Free live jazz with Alvin Roy & Reeds Unlimited.
OPEN MIC NIGHT: The White Rabbit
OPEN MIC NIGHT: James Street Tavern

WEDNESDAY 26th

BLACK FEATHERS + MATTHEW CARTER + JOHNNY PUGH: The Wheatshaeaf
CATEGORY: OTHER: The Port Mahon – Guitar and bass drones and ambient laptop electronica from Lee Riley, Samuel Roberts and Mr Glick, each playing a solo set before coming together for a collaborative set.
FREERANGE: The Cellar

THURSDAY 27th

KATY B: O2 Academy – Already sold out show from the Peckham songstress, the voice of a thousand dubstep, funky and r’n’b hits a few years back, working with Magnetic Man, Wiley, Jessie Ware and Diplo, before going on to achieve Top 5 success with her debut album, ‘On A Mission’ and the single ‘Lights Out’ with Ms Dynamite. This month she releases its follow-up, ‘Little Red’.
TRAPS + INVISIBLE VEGAS + WEBS & MARIONETTES + THE DEPUTES: The Art Bar – Ballys blues-tinged rocking from Traps,

alongside roadhouse-style rockers Invisible Vegas at tonight's It's All About the Music show.

CHURCH OF THE HEAVY: The Cellar – Metal, punk and hard rock night with tech-core monsters Komrad, plus 13 Burning, Feral Sun, Man Make Fire and Black Tish II.

CATWEAZLE: East Oxford Community Centre

FRIDAY 28th

SUEDE: O2 Academy – A gig that crept into the gig guide just as *Nightshift* was going to press, and a pretty damn special one at that, the reformed 90s indie champs no doubt set to cram the O2 to its rafters, having returned to action in 2010, after quitting in 2003. An initial one-off show at the Royal Albert hall for the Teenage Cancer Trust become an ongoing world tour and last year's 'Bloodsports' album found the band returning to the early form of their first two albums, with their trademark mixture of bravura outsider anthems and tainted-love balladry, a cleaned-up Brett Anderson still one of the 90s most iconic frontmen. There's a new album in the pipeline apparently but for now expect a good mix of new stuff and classic hits like 'The Drowners', 'Trash', 'The Beautiful Ones' and 'Animal Nitrate', plus a whole sweaty heap of fanaticism.

BANKS: O2 Academy – Here's one bank worth

Tuesday 25th

METRONOMY: O2 Academy

Nightshift likes synth-pop. A lot. Metronomy play synth-pop of a kind. QED *Nightshift* likes Metronomy. A lot. Of course Josphe Mount's Devon pop devils have moved on some since we first encountered them, opening for Foals at this same venue back in 2007. Back then they were all jerky post-punk synthabilly craziness with glowing t-shirts and a penchant for Devo and Hot Chip. Three albums on, including Top 30, Mercury-nominated outing 'The English Riviera', their sound has continued to find its own identity, with new single 'I'm Aquarius' bubbling with 70s vibes and sweet cocktail pop backing vocals. Elsewhere there's a restrained, very English form of funk, old skool rave, dreampop and the odd ballad to prove they have plenty of strings to their bow Not that anyone would doubt that given Mount's pedigree as a producer and remixer of everyone from Gorillaz and Goldfrapp to Lady Gaga and Ladytron. Quite simply they're one of the best pop bands we've got and if tonight's show isn't a packed, sweaty barrel of synth-fuelled barrel of fun, we'll take a long walk off the end of Painton pier.



investing in. Did you see what we did there? Did you? Did you see? – *see main preview*

THE WEBB SISTERS + SAM SEMPLE: St John the Evangelist – Another gem of a gig from Empty Room Promotions, this time enticing Kent's divine Webb Sisters (Charley and Hattie) to the suitably ornate environs of St John the Evangelist, the pair's close harmonies, augmented by harp, piano and mandolin conjuring an alternately earthy and rarefied blend of traditional British and American folk music. They've headed out under the own steam after playing as part of Leonard Cohen's backing band, recording with Sting as well as Dixie Chicks' Natalie Maines, and supporting Richard Thompson and Rufus Wainwright.

SWITCH featuring FRICTION & LINGUISTICS: O2 Academy – Big-name drum&bass action at tonight's Switch as Brighton's revered DJ/producer Friction mans the decks. Having worked with Hospital and Metalheadz before founding his own Shogun Audio, he's left a stream of bass club hits in his wake, the latest of which, 'Led Astray', follows remixes for Wretch 32, Maverick Sabre and Example.

MACKA B & THE ROOTS RAGGA BAND: The Cellar – Rasta consciousness from lyrical chief Macka B, making, we think, his Oxford debut after some 30 years making his reputation as one of the UK's finest ever dancehall toasters. Inspired by U-Roy, I-Roy and Prince Far I, he's toured the world with The Wailers, Burning Spear and Lee Perry among others and tonight graces the intimate confines of the Cellar backed by the Roots Ragga Band. On the decks Garvin Dan, Nico D and Hugo Makepeace play party-friendly reggae tunes.

PHYAL + NOE & THE PASTEL FRONTIER: The Wheatsheaf – Punk-metal from Phyal, alongside grungy local newcomers Noe & the Pastel Frontier.

DROPOUT + PERFECT LIFE + IONEYE + JAKABO + BABY MOMMA: The Jericho Tavern – Industrial gothic doominess from Dropout.

SATURDAY 29th

DESERT STORM + PROSPERINO + EVAVOID + OVERLORD + MASIRO: O2 Academy – Effortlessly brutal blues-metal and stoner rocking from this month's *Nightshift* cover stars at Skeletor's monthly metal extravaganza. They're joined by Swansea's stoner crew Prosperino, metal/hard rockers Overlord and mathcore monsters Masiro – *see main interview feature*

ROUGH MUSIC with NATHANIEL MANN: OVADA, Osney – Closing concert of the Audiograft season – *see main preview*

GAPPY TOOTH INDUSTRIES with DEMASK THEYSELF + SEBASTIAN MELMOTH + HALBE MENSCH: The Wheatsheaf – A characteristically eclectic and inventive mix of music at this month's GTI, with vicious death-core from De-Mask Thyself, fast becoming one of the best extreme metal acts in town. They're joined by the difficult-to-describe Sebastian Melmoth, with a mix of post-rock, psychedelia, dirge-rock and acoustic folk-pop. Sometimes in the same song. This month's *Nightshift* Demo of the Monther Halbe Mensch brings his loop pedal and violin-based gothic art-nastiness along for the ride. You should hop on, or is the risk of hearing something new and unusual just too bloody scary?

BIPOLAR SUNSHINE: The Art Bar – Sweetly woozy but cynical soul, pop and hip hop fusion from former Kid British frontman Adis Marchant, back with his solo project, coming in somewhere between

Nightshift listings are free. Deadline for inclusion in the gig guide is 6pm on the 20th of each month - no exceptions. Call 01865 372255 (10am-6pm), or email listings to nightshift@oxfordmusic.net. Gig listings are copyright of Nightshift and may not be reproduced without permission.



Friday 28th

BANKS: O2 Academy

It's admirable if possibly foolish behaviour in this day and age to give your phone number out on the internet, but that's what LA singer Jillian Banks did, claiming she wasn't interested in making contact with fans via the usual Twitter channel. We don't know how many people bothered to give her a call, but hopefully the nutters stayed their dialling fingers. Not that anyone could really dislike Banks. Her sultry electro-soul is quite lovely, managing to steer just the right side of line marked "smooth", with a rich, husky voice that more than holds its own against the atmospheric wows and flutters of electronics and chatter of electronic beats. So far she's worked with producer Jessy Lanza and collaborated with Lil Silva and Oxford's own Totally Enormous Extinct Dinosaurs, who produced her 'Warm Water' single and described it as "baby-making music," while she supported The Weeknd on tour in the States last year. Vocally she credits Fiona Apple and Ellie Goulding as influences, while sounding closer to the likes of Jessie Ware and Erykah Badu, and with the weight of the blogosphere's hype machine already behind her, it looks increasingly likely she'll be up among that company soon enough.

Damon Albarn and Bill Withers, having supported Phoenix, Bastille and Haim on tour.

PROPAGANDA / TRASHY: O2 Academy

EXTRA-CURRICULAR: The Cellar

HOUSE FOUNDATIONS: The Art Bar

SUNDAY 30th

GLEND A HUI SH + PURPLE MAY + TWIZZ TWANGLE + PUPPET MECHANIC + MARK ATHERTON: The Wheatsheaf (2.30pm) – Klub Kakofanney host an afternoon of free live music.

MONDAY 31st

DARLIA: The Cellar – The early-90s alt-rock revival starts here with Blackpool's anthemic Darlia, somehow drawing a line between Nirvana and Sterophonics with their grunge-meets-Britrock sound.

BEN POOLE: The Art Bar – The Haven Club hosts the rising UK blues-rock guitarist, drawing comparisons to Joe Satriani and Joe Bonamassa, winning fans in Bernie Torme and the late Gary Moore along the way.

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FOALS

O2 Academy

It feels like a very long time ago that I promoted a Foals show at the Wheatsheaf, and even longer since I first saw Yannis and Jack’s first band Elizabeth perform at The Cellar, barely eighteen years old (them, not me). It was impossible not to be struck, not so much by their power and technical accomplishment as by an aura of determination and success carried from that band through the bewildering complexity of The Edmund Fitzgerald into today’s pop behemoth. If it feels like a very long time for me, it must feel like a lifetime ago for them. You don’t need me to give you a potted history of Foals’ trajectory from local band

to festival headliner, but such is the size of the Foals machine now that a 24-hours’-notice warm-up show in a 400-capacity venue is one of the hottest Oxford tickets since Radiohead in South Park. The queues apparently started forming at 6.30am for tickets: make no mistake, this feels like an occasion. A lot to live up to in front of an expectant home crowd? Hardly. Foals take shows like this in their stride, and they’re seriously impressive, especially if your recent experience of their live show has been limited to TV festival highlights. More used to having crowds a hundred times bigger than this one eating out of their hands, the

ease with which they command the room is remarkable, with almost the entire audience sitting on the floor practically unbidden during ‘Spanish Sahara’, and happily crowdsurfing Yannis from the back of the room to the front. From their early days as the Battles-aping pop face of Steve Reich rhythms, Foals have expanded their palette to an almost improbable extent. ‘Inhaler’ carries a huge, Mastodon-style riff along with it, bringing much-needed darkness and intensity, while ‘Providence’ has the insistent, panicky urgency of Thee Oh Sees. And on ‘Holy Fire’ these moments sit alongside the post-punk pop perfection of ‘My Number’, the

kind of song that feels like it’s been part of your life for years the second you hear it. From swirling Moog backdrops and crystalline guitars to the marked improvements in Yannis’ vocals, the Foals sound is one that doesn’t get the chance to completely envelop small venues like this anymore. The only crack that shows in the super-slick, outstanding Foals live performance is an emotional one. When Yannis, visibly affected by the experience of playing a hometown show, reminds us that “every one of these songs... we wrote them in Oxford”, the affection is flowing both ways. Foals left Oxford a fantastic band, but they have come back as one of the greatest in the country. *Stuart Fowkes*

BARNEY MORSE BROWN / ALICE REAM

The Port Mahon

When the majority of the audience is sat on the floor (with their legs crossed and hands in their laps) it’s fairly clear what kind of gig you’re in for. It all makes for a nice relaxed atmosphere, but severe buttock deadening is a distinct risk. To say that Alice Ream is a dainty and eccentric proposition is something of an understatement. Onstage she has an awkward and nervous presence, and her lurching parlour songs, by way of jazz, only amplify that impression. Lyrically she’s sometimes a little odd too, ‘We’, for example, clumsily questions life across social strata – from the person with the pen to those that labour with scythes (the grim reaper is possibly the only entity using such tools). That said, she’s in possession of a fine vocal talent that at times sounds like a slightly clipped Kate Bush and at others not entirely dissimilar to Victoria Wood. A little more confidence might lose a little of her whimsical charm, but it would serve her well. Barney Morse Brown appears to suffer from the same nervous approach and actually apologises for his lack of banter and general

miserable approach. In reality, he’s a very funny storyteller and more importantly, a phenomenal folk songwriter. Most of his songs are built from live-looping guitar, cello and voice to build dense but beautiful structures. This approach does mean that his songs take a little while to fully evolve, but there’s no denying that seeing and hearing a song being built layer by layer is fascinating. Then there’s his voice, which when fully layered is exquisite and bordering on the finesse of The Beach Boys in their prime (this is clear on new song ‘Little White Caravan’). There’s a lot of emotion in these songs, and it’s most evident when he’s not tap dancing around his loops and allowing himself time to get lost in the song rather than concentrating on the construction phase. In fact, the straightforward no-loop, anti-supermarket ‘Our Town’ is the most effective song in the set tonight, and results in a warming outbreak of crowd participation. It’s either the way it’s played, or everybody in this room hates supermarkets. It’s probably both. *Sam Shepherd*

OVERLORD / XII BOAR / 13 BURNING

The Port Mahon

Metal is a music of extremes. Nearly all the best bands are too fast, or too slow, or too loud, or too Nordic, or too dressed as decomposing priests, whereas 13 Burning are just too pallidly anonymous to make much impression. There are definitely positives to note, especially the vocalist who has a powerful keening high tenor, like a crooner version of Bruce Dickinson, but then again he also mimes along to the plodding guitar solos whilst looking like George Michael circa 1988, which reduces our good will noticeably. As this is their second gig, we’ll not write them off, but they need to become more...something. More anything. More metal. Now, Aldershot’s XII Boar are not sonically extreme, playing a whisky-marinated mixture of Sabbath riffs and Motorhead growls set against the slack depths of early Mudhoney, but they are extreme in their dedication to head-kicking numbnuts rocking. Which makes them fantastic, obviously. Whether they’re playing stoner thumps, Southern boogie or sloppy half-inched solos, they do it with that winning mixture of total sincerity and cheek-tonguing cabaret

that only great heavy rock bands can pull off. The guitarist also has an LED knuckleduster and the ability to shout “fuck yeah!” with the theatrical timing of a master comedian. This shit is much harder than it looks. Overlord are a young band – we’re informed that their guitarist and vocalist, *Nightshift* writer Tal Fineman, was legally allowed in the venue scant days ago – and they have an awful lot of talent to admire. As yet the overall effect is a little muddled. Entertaining chugs suddenly turn awkwardly introspective, and infectious party-on cowbell parts are abandoned at frustratingly odd junctures. The set is like a Rubik’s cube that might be rearranged into a number of quality tracks, but at the moment is a tantalising jumble, not quite Zep-rock, not quite classic metal, and with uncertain nods towards prog. Their cover of Sabbath’s ‘Electric Funeral’ shows how good they can be when they stick to one track. It’s okay for a song to do one thing well, but lots of Overlord’s song try to do 12 things, and wind up unsure what they want to be. *David Murphy*

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FAT WHITE FAMILY / PHOBOPHOBES

The Art Bar

Unpredictability is a rare and precious thing in rock music these days, which might explain the excitement around Fat White Family. The Brixton six-piece have struck a rich seam of the stuff and are mining it with almost obscene zeal. When tonight’s gig is over the only thing tempering our unfettered glee is knowing that some poor sod is going to have to clear this mess up in the morning.

Openers Phobophobes are a right motley crew, two of whom look like they fell out of the back of The Magic Band’s tourbus back in 1974. Theirs is an understatedly hypnotic mess of psychedelia, drone, gothic garage rock and surf, with a hazy

funk undercurrent and a deceptive intensity, all fronted by a stentorian crooner who fancies himself as a young Jim Morrison. They sound like a cross between Wooden Shjips and lost 80s rockers Wall of Voodoo and on any other occasion they would be the highlight of the night.

Fat White Family are even more of a mismatched mess, and their guitarist looks like Frank Spencer impersonating Che Guevara. All eyes, though, are on singer Lias Saudi, topless and oiled up before the band have even struck the first chord, butt-naked by the time the second number has kicked in, cavorting around the nervous front row, dousing himself and everything else

in the room in a mixture of oil, flour and water. It’s decidedly unsexual and non-threatening, yet no-one dares make eye contact. The man is a shameless exhibitionist and a complete fruitcake for sure, but none of that would matter if the band’s music wasn’t so bloody fantastic. It’s not original as such, but their mutant mix of sinewy rockabilly, hysterical gothic pop, atonal post-punk, stoned country and something nasty from underneath Brixton’s fetid streets makes for fantastic pop theatre. Their opening number is like Patti Smith’s ‘Ghostdance’ re-imagined by a gang of sewer rats. The next, a lurching, seedy bray-along, could be PiL’s ‘Albatross’ rendered darkly

anthemic by Theatre of Hate. Before you’ve a chance to catch your breath you’re nightclubbing with Iggy or heading somewhere filthy and subterranean with Sex Gang Children.

Fat White Family’s debt to The Fall is freely admitted with the sleazy sprawl of set highlight ‘Cream of the Young’ brazenly burgled from ‘Winter’, coming to a close ten minutes too soon. ‘Hot Wet Beef’ burns with hypnotic malevolence and everything seems undercut with a bilious sense of disgust at the world. They bring chaos and leave a sticky mess in their wake, but a reminder too that in some darkened, dingy netherworld, rock music still has the power to shock and surprise. Love this family, just don’t invite them into your home.

Dale Kattack

continues to develop their distinctively hard, vicious, sound.

All that makes for a tough act to follow, and we’re about ready to call it a night when Exist Immortal takes to the stage. However, they manage to hold our attention with their energetic, djenty technical metal, provoking some rare movement in the crowd. After a night of bands using exclusively harsh vocals, it’s great to see vocalist Meyrick de la Fuente bringing some superb cleans into the mix, making for a welcome change. Exist Immortal take from the best parts of the divisive ‘djent’ scene whilst avoiding many of its major pitfalls, with an interesting, original and progressive sound that celebrates technicality without ever becoming too clinical. The result is undoubtedly heavy, but also very melodic and (despite negative connotations in the extreme metal world) accessible.

Tal Fineman

GEORGE EZRA

The Art Bar

George Ezra was voted Number 5 in the BBC Sound Sound of 2014 poll, which doubtless explains tonight’s sold-out crowd, but don’t hold that against him. For starters, being Number 5 means he isn’t Sam Smith, who nabbed top spot, and thus tonight’s gig isn’t an hour of unrestrained musical torpor from the Grand High Chief of Blandismo. Secondly, it’s hardly his fault that some major record label vulture decided he might be The New Jake Bugg; instead it’s a sign that pop hasn’t so much eaten itself but started to chow down on the ever-increasing heap of dung it leaves in its wake, like a musical version of *The Human Centipede*.

No, tonight isn’t an hour of polished, buffed and finely sanded mediocrity. It’s thirty two minutes of not-bad, half decent, nothing special. Not even an encore for the fervent throng down the front. And George isn’t The New Jake Bugg. He’s just another to add to the list of singers-who-sound-like-they’ve-listened-to-a-lot-of-Elliott-Smith-and-Ben-Howard-albums. The lad, only 20 years old, from Bristol and signed to Sony without once stepping inside the bloody BRIT School, certainly has a set of pipes on him, a fulsome holler beyond his

years that gives him an authentic folk-blues feel and allows him to play the entire set without backing band, just his voice and his guitar. His best song is ‘Cassy O’, a jolly rockabilly romp that’s probably the origin of those Bugg comparisons but carries plenty of life of its own, while recent single ‘Budapest’ is husky and soulful in a rootsy fashion, and ‘Did You Hear the Rain?’, if lyrically self-absorbed, mines an even deeper blues to the rest of the set. But while each of those songs reveals a vocal and songwriting talent perfect for mid-afternoon radio play, stripped bare in a live setting Ezra struggles to fully engage the room, his between-song patter too falling short of engaging.

Thrust too soon into the public arena, with the weight of that Sound of 2014 hype hung around him like an albatross, George Ezra can, for now, make the teenage girls down the front sing along and squeal with excitement, and no bugger ever lost money being able to do that, but the truth is, you could hear as good, if not better, down the Catweazle Club any Thursday and such a short set suggests he’s far from the finished article yet. We wish him luck. He’s going to need it.

Dale Kattack

POLICE DOG HOGAN / DREW

HOLCOMB

The Art Bar

The Art Bar is heaving tonight, with a crowd boasting an average age well north of fifty, so at least the bouncers are happy. Whether they’re just here to catch a glimpse of *Guardian* columnist Time Dowling on his banjo is debatable, as the London band have steadily built up a following in their five years on the road.

In contrast to the opening turn, Drew Holcomb, a real Nashville country singer, who, despite his strong voice and air of professional song-crafting, carries a downbeat air about his songs that puts something of a damper on proceedings, Police Dog Hogan radiate a relaxed, feelgood vibe, mixing bluegrass, country, folk and a decidedly metropolitan pop sensibility. The seven members blend together perfectly, with the four-part harmonies a particular treat, no-one making any attempt to grab the limelight. Songwriting is handled by various combinations of members, with some clever wordplay in evidence, such as “I spent the night with a girl from Trebarwith”.

In a contrast to the hangdog expression staring sullenly out

from his *Guardian* photo, Dowling displays the most rock’n’roll moves of the bunch, and the sharpest clothes to boot. Singer and Rhys Ifans lookalike James Studholme has an uncommonly deep voice which seems a little high in the mix, but this is matched on new album ‘From The Land Of Miracles’. On it producer Eliot James (Bloc Party, Kaiser Chiefs) does a fine job of bringing out the subtlety that can get lost with a large band in a small environment. The catchy ‘World Enough’ has potential for a single, with guitarist Pete Robinson’s lead vocal providing a welcome break from Studholme’s low tones, while ‘Shitty White Wine’ shows off their playful side; “A kangaroo on the bottle is never a good sign”.

Fun though all this is, they’re no Pogues, a band who successfully twisted their influences into something absolutely fresh and recognisable. Police Dog Hogan seem to take a more pick and mix approach, but the happy faces tonight seem to set their seal of approval.

Art Lagun

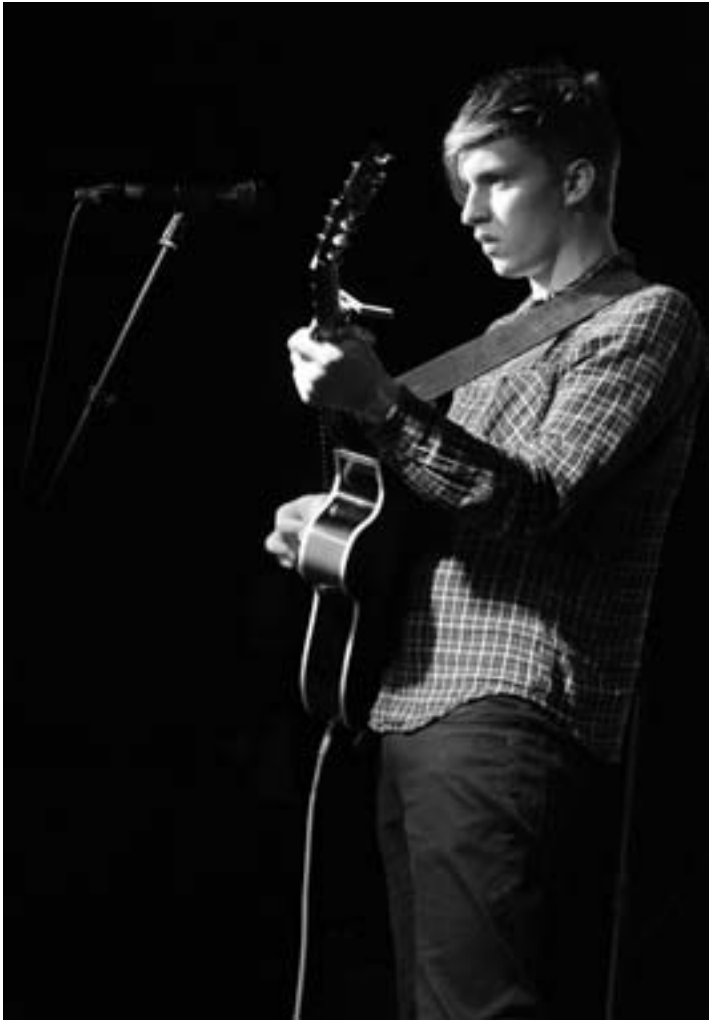


photo: Marc West

THE GRACEFUL SLICKS /

MOIETY

The Wheatsheaf

Moiety’s music is so captivating that hardly anyone has time to notice their bassist’s socks-and-sandals combination. Moiety are all experienced musicians in their own right, with personal histories going back almost to the dawn of Oxford’s music scene and their confidence reflects this. The set’s momentum does falter occasionally with between-songs weather banter or anecdotes from the guitarist’s teaching days, but overall their enthusiasm rubs off on the audience, and ‘Fractions’ – essentially a jam to the tune of Dean Martin’s popularly reappropriated mambo song ‘Sway’ – takes advantage of everyone being on their feet.

On first impressions only one member of The Graceful Slicks got the “psychedelic band” memo and dutifully grew his hair until it was sufficiently poodle-like. Meanwhile natural frontman Alex Abbott looks as indie as anything and the other three look like they’ve been plucked from the bar downstairs to play at the last minute, casual in tees and a plaid shirt. Abbott is the heart and soul of the band; as the set begins he is playing a tambourine as if

his life depends on it. He switches instruments like hot potatoes, at one point trying furiously to get a stylophone to work before eventually losing hope, throwing it to the back of the stage and picking up whatever’s nearest to him to play instead. His technically unnecessary yet captivating energy explains the blood spattered on his guitar’s fretboard, matching that on his plectrum-less right hand.

The Graceful Slicks share lead vocals democratically, a style that keeps things interesting and showcases their melting pot of psychedelic, indie and surf influences (their eclectic image is starting to make sense). Obvious highlights are driving force ‘Bulbul Tarang’ and the slow-building and powerful ‘Rattlesnake’, both showing off the band’s vocal and guitar harmonies. On the other side of the spectrum is cheeky French number ‘Lucky Pierre’, a heart-warming tale of youthful, misguided love, I think. The less bilingual among us have no idea what’s being sung, but everyone is enjoying the groove, which thankfully can’t be lost in translation.

Celina Macdonald

GLASS ANIMALS / WE
AERONAUTS / SALVATION BILL /
CHARLIE CUNNINGHAM

The Jericho Tavern

Tonight’s gig is part of the inaugural Independent Venue Week, and curated by Colin Greenwood and BBC Oxford Introducing, but any of the sold-out crowd expecting a hand-stamp from the Radiohead bassist, or catch to a glimpse of the Greater Bearded Gilyeat, are to be disappointed. Still, the acts they’ve collectively chosen are inspired. Charlie Cunningham offers us four acoustic songs: elegant Paolo Nutini mush-mouth layered over flamenco guitar riffs. It’s precise and freely executed, and a few more dabs of production and he’ll be reeling us in. Having spent some moments earlier in the evening checking out a music video of Salvation Bill (the latest musical incarnation of Ollie Thomas, ex of Ute) appearing to murder a spaniel in a cornfield, we’re half expecting some shock and awe Alice Cooper-esque theatrics on stage. Although, visually, this amounts to a stuffed crow perched on his mic stand we still love his daring and no-holds-barred lyrics, like in ‘London (The Big Smirk)’: “Lift up her dirty skirts and dive into the hairy mess”. The ‘Dead Dog’ turns

out to be about his neighbour’s noisy mutt, a sentiment we can heartily empathise with, but anyone who ends their set in a wolf mask playing an alto sax is a keeper. After all the verve and leftfield vibrancy We Aeronauts feel a tad sleepy, not helped by the absence of sparky singer Anna Wheatley. Drily witty keyboard player James Cuning steps up to the plate though, taking a hefty swing at songs like ‘Distance Learning’, with its cute line, “I’m taking a holiday from taking a holiday”. And so to Glass Animals, part of the latest generation of local next-big-things, with a caravan of underground press buzz, a posse of hipster roadies primping the stage, and the equally lauded Wild Swim in the house checking out a rare hometown performance before Glass Animals head off round the world on tour. The band, made up of Americans David Bayley and Drew McFarlane and Oxford boys Edmund Irwin-Singer and Joe Seaward, met at the University and, now free from the millstone of dissertations and signed to super-producer Paul Epworth’s



Glass Animals photo: Paul Carrera

Wolf Tone label, seem poised to take flight from the off. Bayley’s Mozza-ish arm swinging and Gilmour-style guitar licks hypnotise the crowd as the dark, dreamy post-dubstep electronica slewed between Tricky

and a hazy r’n’b Four Tet. For once all the hype is well founded; Glass Animals have the cool and the confidence, and on this full-on showing, the legs. *Paul Carrera*

WARPAINT
O2 Academy

Given it’s the day before Warpaint entered the top ten of the UK album charts with their eponymous second album, it’s little surprise that the sizeable downstairs part of the O2 is packed to capacity by the time the LA band grace the stage. Inevitably the majority of tonight’s set is indebted to the newer material which has seen the band shift further towards a moody atmospheric trip hop sound, allowing keyboards and synthesisers to take some of the focus away from the guitars. Some of the criticism that has been lumped at the newer songs suggests that the songwriting has suffered at the hands of uber desk-jockey Flood’s sleek production style, but in this live setting the band are really quite bombastic, giving us a set that leans heavily on the livelier of the new songs, as well as encompassing some gems from previous releases. As ever, it’s the vocal interaction between the four band members that really sets Warpaint apart; whether it’s the haunting ‘Billie Holiday’, the fiendish gang-vocals of ‘Composure’ or ‘Love is to Die’, Emily Kokal and co have mastered a style of sing-speak, alternatingly conversational, airy and strident, that leads their songs through emotional peaks and

troughs. Musically, the band is in fine form too, having spent the last few years touring heavily on the back of ‘The Fool’. While it’s not always evident on record, Warpaint are a jam-band at heart, or at least they enjoy locking into bass-led grooves while reverb-heavy guitars intertwine, as is evidenced by some extended instrumental sections tonight. For most of the set the audience seem strangely subdued – respectful and clearly enjoying themselves but perhaps allowing themselves to become too awash in Warpaint’s emotional waters at the sake of an atmosphere. It’s only when the band crank out ‘Undertow’ that they fully snap out of this haze and raise the roof. It’s the song that probably best encapsulates the band’s sound: a bass-led, vocally immaculate, emotionally ambiguous pop song with an almighty wig-out at the end of it to boot. Elsewhere new track ‘Biggy’ is a particular highlight, with a dynamic keyboard lead part allowing the vocals to float delicately atop a gently shuffling rhythm. Encoring with ‘Elephants’, the band ultimately leaves the stage victorious, warpaint smeared but intact. *Tom McKibbin*

KAIROS 4TET
The North Wall

Oxford saxophonist and composer Adam Waldmann’s brilliantly named band, Kairos (it means opportune or supreme moment according to *Nightshift*’s ancient Greek dictionary) have, over their three-album career built a reputation for rhythmically complex but melodically accessible jazz, which has them earned followers outside the jazz world. This is their first gig together since October but there’s no noticeable ring rust. Their trademark style is very much in evidence with much of the responsibility for the shifting time signatures taken by Ivo Neame’s piano and Jasper Høiby’s double bass, two thirds of Phronesis, a band also very much on the rise in the jazz scene, and who, as well also having a Greek name, inhabit not dissimilar territory to Waldman’s band. The telepathy when Neame and Høiby play off one another is not only impressive but also fun; they almost seem to tease one another. Their interplay though is part of the ensemble and never unbalances the music. The subtle and flexible Jon Scott on drums completes a stellar rhythm section which knits well with Waldmann’s confident, yet understated mellow warm tenor and flute-like tone on soprano sax. In what is an organic extension of his

emphasis on melody and his expressive sax playing, Waldmann has moved into songwriting using often enigmatic lyrics from his friend, the actor Rupert Friend, and several numbers feature Swedish singer Emilia Martensson. Her cool, low-key but intimate style sits easily with the band even when Waldman’s tunes dip into other genres, as on the folksy ‘Song for the Open Road’ and ‘Ell’s Bells’, a lullaby-cum-ballad which just stays the right side of sentimentality. The big instrumental feature is all four parts of Waldman’s suite, ‘The 99’, with his sax sometimes lyrical, sometimes slippery, and a typically inventive bass solo from Høiby. Curiously though, Waldmann doesn’t even mention it’s a tribute to the Occupy movement, perhaps nervous of how this might play in north Oxford. The night’s highlight though, is the funky instrumental ‘Russell’s Resurgence’, with Waldman’s sinuous sax and Neame’s piano passing a catchy hook back and forth and a terrific drum solo from Scott, reminiscent of the best of prog. With Kairos 4Tet you don’t get much by way of tonal exploration or uninhibited free jazz, but there’s plenty in what they do, and they do everything with a touch of class. *Colin May*

AOIFE O’DONOVAN
The Art Bar

You’d be forgiven for assuming that Aoife O’Donovan has roots further south than Boston, her vocal style reminiscent more of the southern states, lyrics tumbling easily from her mouth. That’s not to say it’s a lazy styling though, in fact the precision of her vocals is the thing which carries her set from start to finish. Set opener ‘Lay My Burden Down’ features sections which are limited to an infrequent strum of her guitar for accompaniment, in turn showcasing her ability to convey emotion in vocals alone. Gone is some of the heavier instrumentation



photo: Jo Cox

of the album version, and in its place the song is allowed space to breathe, filling the room with its subtlety. It would be easy then to build a set reliant on vocals alone, but she navigates this trap with ease, adding ‘Lovesick Redstick Blues’ (her nod to bluegrass festivals) into the mix. Despite the missing band members she’s still able to give the song a bluegrass vibe. She also pays homage to her roots, the American with the traditional ‘Pretty Polly’, a gruesome murder ballad, and the Irish in ‘Lakes of Ponchartrain’. Elsewhere her New York City home creates the backdrop for ‘Fire Engine’. It’s in this number her potential to cross over into more commercial waters becomes apparent. More pop in its melody, it contrasts with the mournful ‘Tuesday’s Child’, in which Aoife explores the influence of her day of birth. With a cover of Blaze Foley’s ‘Clay Pigeon’ thrown into the mix and a nod to Anne Sexton in ‘Briar Rose’ it’s clear her influences range far and wide, which in turn leads to a diverse set. Coupled with an opening set from local singer Bethany Weimers, who delivers more ghostly numbers from her debut album ‘Harpsichord Row’ as well as newer songs from her forthcoming release, it’s a near perfect evening. With the Bullingdon now rebirthed as The Art Bar, what it’s lost in name it’s made up for in a revamped venue space, which makes seated shows now feel more intimate. *Lisa Ward*

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In local music news influential local post-rockers **Youthmovies** were going on indefinite hiatus, while denying they were splitting up: “touring and shows are on hold, but although we may be spread across the country these days, nothing has changed; we all still get on and enjoy making music together.” A plethora of local releases included a debut CD from young local newcomers called **Desert Storm**, who would quickly become regarded as the leading lights of the Oxford metal scene. “A remarkably fresh take on music that’s as old and heavy as the hills. “ Wonder what became of them. Oh, there they are on this month’s front cover. Duh!



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DEMO OF THE MONTH

HALBER MENSCH

March. It's hardly the depths of winter, yet signs of spring aren't fully apparent. It's a sort of dull, middling mulch of a month. Which is fitting since this a pretty dull, middling mulch of a demo pile. So much so that this one is only top of the pile because there's evidence a bit of time in the studio with a decent producer might bring out some of the nascent ideas we catch glimpses of in what is an otherwise under-formed offering. The basic principle is sound enough: one bloke with a loop pedal, a violin, bass, drums and something approaching a death-metal vocal rasp crossed with a ranting tramp. So the violin gets fed through the loop pedal and everything rumbles nastily along while the man known as Robby Halbermensch barks incoherently amid the ongoing darkness. So far, so good. Problem is, once he's got beyond the minute mark nothing new happens and even the longest of the three tracks here, 'New Cysts', fails to progress. Which is a shame, as there's surely plenty of scope to take such pessimistic, repetitive sounds further into the musical abyss. There is, though, beneath the rumble of bass and flurry of plucked strings on 'Trier', a small female voice, the only discernible line from which is "I understand that everything that used to be beautiful dies," which is exactly the sort of positive message the government should be broadcasting every day as the country fills up with water. Anyway, some neat ideas but as yet no finished product. But in awarding Mr Halbermensch here Demo of the Month we give him the chance to spend a few hours in the studio with Umair Chaudhry, the local master of sinister soundscaping. It's a little like sending Luke off to find Yoda. Let's hope the result is as much fun.

ONLY RAYS

There's a similar feeling about this demo, another experimental effort, this time from a chap called Tim Crombie, who used to be the drummer in a band called Lord Magpie and the Prince of Cats, apparently. It's homemade electronica of the decidedly glitchy variety, and pretty enjoyable stuff, disorientating and hypnotic in equal measures and possibly worthy of listening to in a blacked-out room after some serious bong action. Six tracks over ten minutes finds Tim moving from wobbly electronic randomness, all cut-ups,

Demo of the Month wins a free half day at Silver Street Studios in Reading, courtesy of Umair Chaudhry.
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disjointed beats and future factory chitter chatter on 'Pianohop', which feels like the musical interpretation of trying to manoeuvre a moving walkway with one eye shut and a strobe light going on, merging almost but not completely seamlessly into the likes of 'Kalimboo', with its bamboo vibes, like Japan or The Creatures being chopped about by Future Sound of London, the playfully wowzy 'Unexpected Minute', and the rustling, jarring 'Plaices', all of which might have placed this on top of the pile, but again, like Halber Mensch, you feel the best ideas aren't explored fully, or expanded on, each track doing its neat little trick and moving on before it's had a chance to mess with your sense of balance or comprehension properly. Maybe expand each track and merge them all more fully into a single piece. Do that, give us a ring and we'll be round with the bucket of drugs in the blink of an eye. No doubt one of those third eyes.

JOE TRUBY

Electronic music of a less esoteric bent here, a one-track demo from Mr Truby, 'System Failure' squelching and cavorting along a familiar but not unwelcome path to early-90s trance-house, via Faithless, with just the merest hint of some Lipps Inc-style disco lurking beneath the surface for a few fleeting moments. There's the big breakdown in the middle but mostly it's linear and euphoric mega club/festival field fare that would go down a treat on any given Saturday night between 1989 and last week. Actually, our mood has just improved tenfold in the past six minutes. Time for some pills and a repeat play.

HEY, SLEEPER

Such joviality cannot last as we're quickly plunged back down into an autumnal fog of gloom by Hey, Sleeper, the work of Luke Roberts, a man who quotes such pop jesters as Elliot Smith and Bright Eyes as influences. Now, before you start, a fog of autumnal gloom isn't such a bad place to be, and some of this is rather good, positively pretty, like a sad-eyed kitten even. Best of the lot is the tender, wistful 'Thomas & the Good Book', a reflective folkly lament for something precious now lost – childhood, innocence, girl, kitten, or whatever. It's really rather lovely. Luke has an instantly likeable voice, slightly lispy, not unlike Belle & Sebastian's Stuart Murdoch, and evokes a cool porch/campfire feel at times. Occasionally though, as on 'Playing Cards', or the shambling 'Could You Just' he forgets to include a tune and it all turns into stale, standard strumming and shuffling, sad boy wants nice girl to feel sorry for him and

think he's a poet and fall in love with him. C'mon Luke, we're all essentially alone in this nasty old world, maybe pop down to Joe Truby's disco for a couple of hours. Here's a pill, there's the dancefloor. Maybe you'll meet a nice girl out there.

BALLOON ASCENTS

This lot come highly recommended – by Wheatheaf promoter Joal Shearing no less, a man who knows more than most about what's good and new and fun in local music, but while there are enough signs of life on show the band's inexperience is such they've yet to fully find their own identity. Singer Thomas Roberts has a got a decent voice, pure and plaintive at its best, while the music is simple and lo-fi and nervously mournful with a tendency to meander hazily without achieving any satisfying focus. Which is a bit of a roundabout way of saying they sound quite a lot like assorted bits of Radiohead's recent wanderings. Shuffling beats keep to the shadows beneath starry guitar twinkles on 'Aberration', but it's a slender tune. Similarly the almost jazzy 'Cutout' with the refrain "It wears me out" recalling 'Fake Plastic Trees' a little too readily. Still, they operate well enough within a tight comfort zone and it's only towards the end of '11' that Balloon Ascents sound like a mess, vocals stretched beyond breaking point, guitars flailing in undignified rockist fashion, the whole thing coming a little too close to the "shredded" Radiohead video currently doing the online rounds.

HUMBUG

More middling musical mulch. Everywhere you look on Humbug's Facebook page the phrase Indie Rock screams out at you, but thing is, once upon a time that phrase could mean anything from the shimmering serenity of The House of Love to the tempestuous noise storm of My Bloody Valentine and plenty of odd shapes and sounds in between and beyond. Now it tends to mean stuff like this: a neatly distilled, slightly leaden approximation of something a major record label snapped up in a desperate attempt to have their own version of Oasis back in the 90s. Humbug aren't bad as such, just rather featureless. The singer's pleasant but pedestrian, there's lots of harmonies and every song sounds like it's trying to be an anthem, but however much they aim to be graceful, like on 'The Drop', they always sound like they're dragging themselves to the end of the song, by way of an obligatory guitar solo, as if they've been rendered lame by coming into contact with something Alan McGee hailed as the future of music over the past decade. 'Nights Out' suggests Humbug might have had a passing acquaintance with an old Echo & The Bunnymen album at some point, but ultimately it's not-quite-funky soft rock bluster. Ah well, never mind us and our high standards, no doubt Beady Eye or Shed Seven will be back on tour again soon and will need a support band.

*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.*

AIDEN WRIGLEY

Ooh, bit of a mint theme going on here. From Humbug to Wrigley. We don't just chuck this shit together while watching viral videos of cats playing patter-cake, you know. Okay, we do, and so does Mr Wrigley here by the sounds of it. It is, as we bet you've already guessed because it's the law to have at least one in every demo pile, a one-man-and-his-trusty-guitar jobbie. With the emphasis on the word jobbie in its puerile schoolboy slang sense. Like Hey, Sleeper a couple of demos back, Aiden has an obvious affection for Elliot Smith, but lacks the poetic streak to bring anything new, fun, tragic or vaguely likeable to the table, just a lot of strumming (which, predictably, gets louder and harder the more angry he gets, about nasty bosses, ex-girlfriends or possibly a disobedient pet gerbil) and relentless moaning. Oh Christ, the moaning. The endless fucking moaning. There were dismembered pirates under the ship's surgeon's saw without anaesthetic who made less of a fuss, and probably with a greater sense of melody than this tortuous old trawl through the bin juice of angst that makes up Wrigley's songbook. There you go, old chap. Consider yourself chewed up and spat out, like your minty namesake.

THE DEMO DUMPER

KING KONG MAN

Talking of those shredded videos as we were earlier, we're pretty sure they're meant to be a piss-take, not an instruction manual. You'd hope any band called King Kong Man would be a raging death-core force of nature, not an insipid approximation of the world's most unfunky honky tonk boyband with a line in piano ballads so devoid of melodies, character or cohesion they don't so much resemble actual songs as the musical equivalent of limescale residue, a low-level reminder that things need cleaning up but you can never completely erase the bad stuff. 'Mellow' for example does exactly what its title suggests, waddling along in a mellow, bordering on maudlin, fashion, sounding like an unfunny pisstake of Taylor Swift's 'Never Ever' performed by a drunk-to-the-point-of-comatose Michael Bublé and a few mates whose commitment to singing in key makes West Ham's defence look like a wall of steel. "Flowers and fresh cut grass" moans the singer at one point in 'I Won't Go', to which we can't resist adding "This song is a heap of arse," by way of rhyming reply. "Here's some songs we recorded in August," announce King Kong Man, adding "we recorded them all in two days!" as if that's somehow admirable. Two whole days and you still came up with something indistinct from what our neighbour's spaniel deposits on the pavement in a matter of seconds. You really must work harder next time. Preferably down a uranium mine.



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11pm - 3am • over 18s only
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Sat 8th Mar • £14 adv
6.30pm - 10pm
The Answer

Sat 8th Mar • £6 adv
6.30pm - 10pm
Charlee Drew + Jack Little

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

Weds 12th Mar • £15 adv
Lissie + Norma Jean Martine

Thurs 13th Mar • £16 adv
The English Beat
featuring original vocalist
Dave Wakeling plus very special
guest Roddy Radiation

Fri 14th Mar • £12 adv / £8 NUS
11pm - 3am • over 18s only
Switch ft. MK

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

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

Mon 17th Mar • £10 adv
Loveable Rogues

Tues 18th Mar • £18.50 adv
Maximo Park

Fri 21st Mar • £8 adv / £6 NUS
11pm - 3am • over 18s only
Switch
ft. Mak & Pasteman

Fri 21st Mar • £8 adv
6.30pm - 10pm
Black Bullet Live Presents
Rock Lives
ft. Slam Cartel
+ Buffalo Summer
+ Aaron Keylock

Sat 22nd Mar • £6 adv
7pm - 11.30pm
Upstairs
ft. Racing Glaciers
In association with BBC Introducing
+ Limbo Kids
+ Charlie Cunningham
+ Reichenbach Falls
+ ArtClassSink

Mon 24th Mar • £7 adv
Saint Raymond

Tues 25th Mar • £15.50 adv
Metronomy

Thurs 27th Mar • £14 adv
Katy B

Fri 28th Mar • £11 adv
6.30pm - 10pm
Banks

Fri 28th Mar • £8 adv / £6 NUS
11pm - 3am • over 18s only
Switch ft. Friction
& Linguistics MC

Sat 29th Mar • £7 adv
Skeletor
ft. Desert Storm
+ Prosperina + Evavoid
+ Overlord + Masiro

Fri 4th Apr • £7 adv
6.30pm - 10pm
LostAlone

Tues 8th Apr • £20 adv
Sophie Ellis-Bextor

Fri 11th Apr • £8 adv
6.30pm - 10pm
Black Bullet Live Presents
Martyr de Mona
+ Lest We Forget
+ Dead Mesa + Icon

Sat 12th Apr • £6 adv
7pm - 11.30pm
Upstairs ft. Rabbit
Foot Spasm Band
In association with BBC Introducing
+ Duchess
+ Brickwork Lizards
+ Temple Funk Collective

Sun 13th Apr • £20 adv
Matt Cardle

Sun 13th Apr • £15 adv
Deaf Havana
+ The Maine
+ The People The Poet

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

Tues 15th Apr • £7.50 adv
Jar Music Live Presents...
Ones to Watch
ft. Fortunes + Tom Dibb + Guests

Weds 16th Apr • £8.50 adv
Lanterns On The Lake

Fri 18th Apr • £7 adv
6pm - 10pm
It's All About
The Music Presents...
Fracture + One Wing Left
+ The Kites + Balloon Ascents

Tues 22nd Apr • £20 adv
Magnum

Tues 22nd Apr • £8 adv
Young Kato
+ Pixel Fix

Weds 23rd Apr • £20 adv
7.30pm - 11pm
New Model Army

Fri 25th Apr • £10/£15 adv
7.30pm - 11pm • show starts 8pm
La Chiva Gantiva

Sat 26th Apr • £7 adv
6pm - 11pm
Skeletor –
The New Breed 3
ft. A Killer Amongst Us
+ Fallen From Grace + Sanity Loss
+ Kontek + Godsbane

Thurs 1st May • £11 adv
The Temperance
Movement

Fri 9th May • £12.50 adv
6pm - 10pm
Albert
Hammond Jr

Sat 10th May • £6 adv
7pm - 10pm
Alex Lanyon

Mon 12th May • £10 adv
Augustines

Tues 13th May • £8 adv
Wolf Alice

Thurs 15th May • £16.50 adv
Pentatonix

Weds 21st May • £9 adv
Jungle

Weds 28th May • £10 adv
Bury Tomorrow
+ Napoleon
+ Demoraliser

Fri 30th May • £12 adv / £8 NUS
11pm - 3am • over 18s only
Switch
and Simple
ft. Eats Everything

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

Fri 18th July • £9 adv / £25 VIP
6pm - 10pm
Mike Dignam

Fri 15th Aug • £10 adv
6pm - 11pm
Skeletor presents
Karma To Burn
+ Desert Storm

Sat 13th Sept • £10 adv
6.30pm - 10pm
The Doors Alive

Sat 4th Oct • £13 adv
6.30pm - 10pm • Show starts 7pm
Ultimate Genesis

Thurs 16th Oct • £15 adv
The Orb

Fri 17th Oct • £11 adv
6.30pm - 10pm
Guns2Roses &
Metallica Reloaded

Tickets for Saturday night
shows include free entry
to Propaganda
(or £6, £5 NUS / members,
£4 NHS on the door)

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