



NIGHTSHIFT

Oxford's Music Magazine

**Free every
month
Issue 241
August
2015**

**"We're not
perfectionists or
slackers, we just
got a bit
side-tracked
by life."**

*Oxford's melancholic
pop veterans on what
they've been doing for
the last eight years.*

Family Machine

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reviewed**

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THE BULLINGDON

AUGUST 2015

Tuesday 4th August
**Jazz at the Bullingdon:
Guitar Summit**
Doors: 8.30pm

Thursday 6th August
**Scout Killers
Filthy Palms
Blame Fate
Blitzkreig City**
Doors: 6pm

Saturday 8th August
Simple
Doors: 11pm

Tuesday 11th August
**Jazz at the Bullingdon:
Hugh Turner Band**
Doors: 8.30pm

Tuesday 18th August
**Jazz at the Bullingdon:
Alvin Roy's Reeds Unlimited**
Doors: 8.30pm

Thursday 20th August
Jungle Brothers
Doors: 7pm

Saturday 22nd August
**Broken Chords
48 Hours**
Doors: 7pm

Saturday 22nd August
Bedrock
*Oxford's Rocking Club Night.
Release Your Inner Dinosaur!*
Doors: 11pm

Tuesday 25th August
**Jazz at the Bullingdon:
Rod Kelly Quartet**
Doors: 8.30pm

Tuesday 1st September
**Jazz at the Bullingdon:
Guitar Summit**
Doors: 8.30pm

Thursday 3rd September
Autobahn
Doors: 7pm

Friday 4th September
Hayes Carll
Doors: 7pm

Sunday 6th September
Andrew Combs Trio
Doors: 7pm

Monday 7th September
Jon Amor & Joel Fisk
Doors: 7pm

Tuesday 8th September
**Jazz at the Bullingdon:
Ewan Baird Group**
Doors: 8.30pm

Thursday 10th September
**The Formidable
Vegetable Sound System**
Doors: 7pm

Monday 14th September
**Marcus Malone
Little Brother Eli**
Doors: 8.30pm

Tuesday 15th September
**Jazz at the Bullingdon:
Heavy Dexters**
Doors: 8.30pm

Thursday 17th September
Sasha McVeigh
Doors: 7pm

Saturday 19th September
Bedrock
*Oxford's Rocking Club Night.
Release Your Inner Dinosaur!*
Doors: 11pm

Saturday 19th September
Royal Pardon 2015
Doors: 12pm

Sunday 20th September
One Gig Fresher
Doors: 2pm

Monday 21st September
Kirk Fletcher
Doors: 8.30pm

Tuesday 22nd September
**Jazz at the Bullingdon:
Stuart Henderson Band**
Doors: 8.30pm

Wednesday 23rd September
Merz & Family Machine
Doors: 7pm

Thursday 24th September
Cardboard Fox
Doors: 7pm

Saturday 26th September
**DUBKASM:
Roots Guidance
Red-I meets Mighty Itals
Hosted by: Donovan Kingjay
Powered by:
Roots Guidance Soundsystem**
Doors: 11pm

Monday 28th September
Grainne Duffy
Doors: 7pm

Tuesday 29th September
**Jazz at the Bullingdon:
Alvin Roy's Reeds Unlimited**
Doors: 8.30pm

Saturday 3rd October
The Pretty Things
Doors: 7pm

Sunday 4th October
The Japanese House
Doors: 7pm

Monday 5th October
**Katie Bradley
Black Market III**
Doors: 7pm

Friday 9th October
Treetop Flyers
Doors: 7pm

Saturday 10th October
Gengahr
Doors: 7pm

Sunday 11th October
The Bohicas
Doors: 7pm

Monday 12th October
Erja Lyytinen
Doors: 7pm

Thursday 15th October
Palace
Doors: 7pm

Friday 16th October
Girls, Guns & Glory
Doors: 7pm

Saturday 17th October
Gentlemens Dub Club
Doors: 9pm

Sunday 18th October
**Gruby Mielzky
Twardy Grunt**
Doors: 7pm

Monday 19th October
Mentulls
Doors: 7pm

Friday 23rd October
**The Corn Potato
String Band**
Doors: 7pm

Saturday 24th October
**Co-Pilgrim
The Shapes
Paul MacClure**
Doors: 7pm

Sunday 25th October
The Ruts DC
Doors: 7pm

Monday 26th October
Bob Malone
Doors: 7pm

Wednesday 28th October
Cattle & Cane
Doors: 7pm

Thursday 29th October
The Ordinary Boys
Doors: 7pm

Friday 30th October
Hollis Brown
Doors: 7pm

Saturday 31st October
Steve'N'Seagulls
Doors: 7pm

Monday 2nd November
The Brew
Doors: 8pm

Friday 6th November
Keston Cobblers Club
Doors: 7pm

Sunday 8th November
Titus Adronicus
Doors: 7pm

Monday 9th November
LUSTS
Doors: 7pm

Thursday 12th November
Grant Sharkey
Doors: 7pm

Saturday 14th November
Dedication 2015
Doors: 5.30pm

Friday 20th November
Balkan Wanderers
Doors: 7pm

Wednesday 25th November
Beans On Toast
Doors: 7pm

Monday 30th November
Chatham County Line
Doors: 7pm

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NEWS

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SEXY BREAKFAST will reform for a one-off show at The Wheatsheaf on Friday 18th September. The band were huge local favourites on the local scene in the early noughties before splitting in 2005, gracing the cover of *Nightshift* and playing at Truck Festival as well as The Punt twice. In the wake of their split the core of the band went on to form Borderville.

Talking to *Nightshift* about the reunion show, singer Joe Swarbrick said, "It's been almost exactly a decade since we played our last ever gig, and while we all went on to other projects nothing has ever quite matched, for me at least, the response we got from playing in such a terribly named band. It was like being in Take That, only on a very local scale. It probably ruined us in a way: the crowds were pretty crazy back then and we'd love to see as many faces from that time back in the crowd at the Wheatsheaf. So mainly we're doing it for the same reason as we always used to: we're shameless attention seekers. We also reformed for [bassist] Phil's wedding two years ago and it was a lot of fun and it's something we've talked about on and off for a little while now.

It's great to be playing for Joal; he did the sound for our first ever proper gig, a Klub Kakofanny night at the Elm Tree, so it feels right that we're doing it like this.

"It should be a lot of fun; we've been going through our recordings and trying to remember the stuff we didn't record. We were just pre-digital in a way, so there's no record of any of our stuff that we didn't release, but I guess if you can remember 2003 then you weren't really there, man."

BLACK CANDY'S reunion show at the Wheatsheaf takes place on Saturday 5th September, not July as stated in last month's *Nightshift*. Sorry, we blame all the drugs we've been taking at festivals this summer.

HELL'S GAZELLES won a slot at this year's Bloodstock Festival after winning the Oxfordshire Metal To The Masses band competition final last month. The local melodic metallers beat off competition from Evavoid, The Reaper and K-Lacura in the final at the O2 Academy and will play on the New Blood stage on Sunday 9th August. Headline acts at the festival, which takes place at Catton Park in Derbyshire over the weekend of the 7th-9th August are Trivium, Rob Zombie and Opeth. Local death/thrash crew Mutagenocide also play on the New Blood Stage on the Friday. Visit www.hellsgazelles.com for more news.

OXFORD CITY FESTIVAL returns for its third annual outing in November. The city-wide music festival takes place over the week of the 23rd-28th November at the O2 Academy, The Cellar, The Bullingdon, The Wheatsheaf and more. Acts confirmed so far for this year's event include cult punk heroes Pete & The Test Tube Babies as well as local acts Balloon Ascents, The Aureate Act, The Mighty Redox and Storyteller. Last year's festival featured over 170 acts. Bands and solo artists wanting to play should contact Mark 'Osprey' O'Brien via the Oxford City Festival page on Facebook.

AIRSTAR release their debut album this month through Bandcamp. The indie rockers' aptly-titled 'Retrospective' is available at airstar.bandcamp.com, having taken a mere decade to be finished. Meanwhile, **SHAKER HEIGHTS** release a new single, 'Body', on Soundcloud this month, with a video, directed by local singer and film-maker Laima Bite, up on Youtube now.

LOCAL WRITERS RAY AND CAROLINE FOULK release *Stealing Dylan From Woodstock* this month. The Jericho-based couple's book tells the story of the first Isle of Wight Festival in 1968, which Ray promoted with his brother Ronnie, and famously featured the first pre-publicised gig by Bob Dylan for seven years – the brothers stealing the legendary singer from under the noses of Woodstock's organisers. The book is published by Medina and is available from Blackwell's

and The Beatnik Albion Bookstore in Jericho, priced £22.95.

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.

OXFORD GIGBOT provides a regular local gig listing update on Twitter ([@oxgigbot](https://twitter.com/oxgigbot)), bringing you new gigs as soon as they go live. They also provide a free weekly listings email. Follow them.

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A Quiet Word With Family Machine



A FEW WEEKS AGO HARPER Lee finally published *Go Set A Watchman*, the follow-up to *To Kill A Mockingbird*, published 55 years previously. In 2013 My Bloody Valentine released ‘mbv’ 22 years after their previous album ‘Loveless’. Compared to such cases, the almost eight years we’ve had to wait for a second Family Machine – ‘Houses That You Lived In’, released this month – is but a blink of an eye, but in the modern musical universe, where careers rise and fall in a matter of months, eight years is a long time. Family Machine aren’t a band in a hurry, though, and it’s not like the band have been completely reclusive since the release of ‘You Are The Family Machine’ at the start of 2008, remaining a regular fixture on the local gig and festival circuit and putting out occasional singles along the way.

THE NEW ALBUM IS WORTH the wait of course. Sweet, sad and subtly magical, occasionally extravagant but mostly intimate and reflective in the way the best Family Machine songs always are. Singer and guitarist Jamie Hyatt writes and sings seemingly with a fine mist of melancholy around him but equally sees the world with a puppyish sense of innocence and

glee. So, for example, the spectral thrum of album highlight ‘Quiet As A Mouse’ indulges in the nervy thrill of wandering round a stranger’s house, looking through all their stuff while secretly hoping to get caught. Equally the sombre, reflective ‘Skeletons & That’ is couched in the language of childhood fears. Much of ‘Houses That You Lived In’ retains that sense of reflection on life, but skewed by its perspective on such classic subject matters. It’s an album informed by significant life changes and the abrupt realities of adulthood, but at its heart is a part of youth that will never, ever die. Oh, just buy yourself a copy – you’ll love it. If you don’t you obviously have no real appreciation of beauty.

BUT BLOODY HELL, EIGHT years – what have Family Machine been doing to excuse such tardiness? Are Jamie, along with bandmates Darren Fellerdale and Neil Durbridge perfectionists or just a bunch of slackers? JAMIE: “Ha! It’s an outrageous amount of time to have passed, and it’s totally unacceptable. “We’re definitely not perfectionists, I think we just got a bit side-tracked by life... that and the fact that we recorded a lot of the album ourselves. I spent a bit of time working out how

to use a computer and all the other bits and pieces you have in a studio too.” NEIL: “We’ve probably written, played and disposed of a couple of albums’ worth since ‘You Are The Family Machine’. Plus we wanted to make sure we could all play the new album on any instruments that happened to be lying around, so that took some time. So what have you *actually* been up to in all that time? JAMIE: “Shit, lots of stuff. Like I say, life, really. I worked for a time in a studio with the late Richard Haines who took pity on me and showed me how to technically work all the stuff I’d been surrounded by for years. “I began promoting again with Beard Museum, putting on bigger and more unusual shows with Richard Walters and the Beard Museum chaps. We put on some great gigs; Keaton Henson at the History of Science Museum, and more recently the Johnny Greenwood show at St John the Evangelist with the London Contemporary Orchestra, to name but two. “I’ve been working on the score for Jon Spira’s new documentary for about a year as well. It’s called *Elstree 1976*, and is about extras or supporting actors on the first *Star Wars* film.

“Then there’s the real life stuff as well; I got married, had a kid, have a new business – all of which changes you a bit and takes up your time.” DARREN: “I started working at the music shop on Cowley Road, took over from Jamie there and had a lot of fun; Christ knows how I ended up managing it! I’ve had some time to put into other projects including composing some overtone singing with our original drummer and working it into a live show, the odd jazz gig and helping out at the Beard Museum of course, but mostly being a godfather to Jamie’s lad; he’s a real handful.”

JAMIE’S RECENT parenthood has been an obvious influence on the tone and lyricism of ‘Houses...’. Does he think it’s changed the way he feels and thinks about life and does that feed into the songs? JAMIE: “Definitely. I’m aware of how amazing my parents are in a way I didn’t properly understand before. I’m fully acquainted with the feeling of complete and utter love for a human without doubt or question. “I’m also more understanding of toddlers having complete meltdowns in the supermarket too. It’s not their fault that they’re tired or need ice cream or don’t like their shoes or

something. “My son Harrison and I worked together on a few songs on this album. We practically wrote the whole of ‘Friends With The Wolves’ together on his toy piano, even though a lot of his work was quite out there – all jazz chords and that.” NEIL: “I definitely hear the influence of Jamie’s family-man status in the new songs. An unintentional – I think – theme of the album is home: comfort, familiarity, security, like a well worn suit or a nice cuppa tea. Plus he’s knackered most of the time, so a lot of the songs are quite slow.”

PARENTHOOD INVARIABLY changes a person’s outlook on life; it’s the most significant sign that you’re now An Adult with all that brings. The album’s title implies an increased sense of mortality.

JAMIE: “It’s definitely about mortality. But it’s about living as well, and the simple small stories that I’ve gathered along the way. The track ‘Houses That You Lived In’ is about inanimate objects missing people. Like a house missing the lives that used to buzz inside it. Or a field you walk through wanting to shout out to you and tell you to look up, get on with it – but being unable to because fields don’t talk let alone shout and probably don’t have such feelings anyway. “‘The Less You Know’ is about a friend who died too early. The battle with disease, the horror of what he had to face all the way to the end. That’s the stuff you don’t need to know about. The stuff I wish I hadn’t been privy to. “‘Skeletons & That’ is about being scared.”

THE GORGEOUSLY mischievous ‘Quiet As A Mouse’ is a departure for Family Machine, featuring as it does, guest vocalist Anna Wheatley from local indie crew We Aeronauts on lead vocals. Was the song written with her in mind? JAMIE: “I wrote and recorded ‘Quiet As A Mouse’ with my vocal all the way through but I had a nagging feeling it would sound better if someone else sang it. We Aeronauts are one of my favourite bands ever, not just in Oxford, and I thought Anna’s voice would be perfect for the song. She came round and sang it at my house in a little bedroom studio. She nailed it straight away. She also sang on another song from the album, ‘A Long Way From Home’. “She’s not in the band but she sometimes sings live with us if she’s around. I like to think we’ve got lots of really lovely friends who do bits and pieces with us when they feel like it. Ian Davenport, from Courtyard Studios, is someone else who feels like one of the band because he’s helped bring both our albums together and produce them

with us.” **THIS INCLUSIVE ATTITUDE** to guest musicians and producers harks back to the title of the band’s debut album, ‘You Are The Family Machine’, and again the trio have recruited a cast of fellow local travellers to contribute to ‘Houses...’, from singer and drummer Cameron AG, renowned cellist Barney Morse-Brown, keyboard virtuoso Seb Reynolds (playing saxophone) and even vintage acid house aficionado Tim Midlen from Manacles of Acid. It all adds up to an album that sounds much more than a self-produced local release. There’s also some great whistling on recent single ‘The Less You Know’; is it a dying art?

“Jamie’s knackered most of the time from being a dad, so a lot of the songs are quite slow.”

JAMIE: “I’m glad you noticed that. Whistling is so underrated. It’s a very inexpensive instrument, very portable and quite easy to learn.” What’s the best whistling on a pop song? JAMIE: “Hmmm... Scorpions – ‘Wind of Change’; Otis Redding – ‘Sitting on the Dock of the Bay’; The Bangles – ‘Walk like an Egyptian’...” NEIL: “Ha! Scorpions! Great tune! Otis is a good one too. I’ve always liked the whistling on Billy Joel’s ‘The Stranger’.” DARREN: “I’d have to disagree that whistling is easy to learn; I’ve never been able to get it to work for me. For which I must say I’ve taken some ridicule for over the years! It doesn’t help that Jamie is a great whistler. Good whistling songs, though: John Lennon’s ‘Jealous Guy’ and Paul Simon’s ‘Me and Julio Down by the Schoolyard’.”

GIVEN THE GULF BETWEEN the two albums’ releases, what do Jamie, Darren and Neil think of ‘Houses That You Lived In’ compared with ‘You Are The Family Machine’? JAMIE: “‘Houses...’ is probably a more cohesive album than ‘You Are ...’. The songs seem to belong together more. “You Are.....’ was all over the place stylistically, which was deliberate but sometimes difficult for the listener. “I suppose the similarities between the two are the songs; I like to keep things simple. I always write on my own, usually jotting ideas down on my phone. I’ll often video a song I’m writing early on so I can remind myself where to put my fingers. Then I just start writing and recording with my computer, just throwing things

about until it feels right. “Once I’ve got a recording with some ideas of parts I give it to the band to play properly. They then write and play the parts better and together we push the arrangements around in rehearsals until its right and we are ready to record. It means that we all write together really, because everyone has input from the rehearsal stage.” NEIL: “Yeah, we turn Jamie’s sketchy Stylophone demos into songs! Actually a lot of the time they’re such good recordings bits of them end up on the Machine for live shows. Oops, was I supposed to mention that? ‘The Less You Know’ has about six melodies running through it and they were all on the original demo.” DARREN: “‘Houses...’ doesn’t try

so hard to be good, I think we pushed our style around a lot more when writing ‘You Are...’ to find out what worked best for us and the songs that we came back to play over again were the simpler, more heartfelt songs. So as Jamie brought us new tunes to work on we gravitated to those that had that feeling. We got a more cohesive album with a theme or story as a result.”

WHAT DOES CARRY OVER from the first album to the new one is the sense of melancholy, either centre stage, or more often lurking at the peripheries. Lachrymose is a word frequently used to describe Family Machine; is that unfair or is it an accurate reflection of the mood of your music? DARREN: “That has been said about us a few times, mainly by one particular journalist... [looks at *Nightshift*]. It’s an excellent word and it’s accurate, although there’s often a positive message hidden in there.” JAMIE: “I do tend to lean to the sadder side of things. I blame that on goth teens and listening to The Cure. I suppose Family Machine do deal in the chilled end of things. But whilst the feel and pace of a lot of our stuff is lachrymose it’s usually tempered with a lyric that is a bit odd or not actually sad at all.”

WHAT ALSO REMAINS A constant in Family Machine is the core of the band. Together for a decade and a half, Jamie, Neil and Darren have stuck it out together, although original drummer Jay Stilwell departed a couple of years ago (he still plays on parts of the album). Is it hard to keep a band together for so long when activities

are sporadic? NEIL: “We’ve had very few periods of doing nothing musical together, but even then we’d still hang out socially. I think you’ve got to be good friends to share what is essentially a hobby for that long. Mostly though, even if we’ve not gigged or recorded for a while, we’ll still have rehearsed. The line-up changes meant extra rehearsals, but it also led to us learning to play a lot of songs in a load of different ways, from completely acoustic three-piece versions up to full band with samplers and backing tracks. That’s a really good way to develop new parts and work out how the recorded version should sound. But it does take time!” DARREN: “Since Jamie, Jay and I formed the band way back when, it’s always seemed to be a friendship first, just hanging out playing music and eating macaroons. Soon Neil came along, firstly as a friend then as a band member and then put the first album together. It’s been easy to stay together because of this bond. In between then and now we’ve always been playing music together so doesn’t feel sporadic to us.” Given your longevity, and in Jamie’s case a local music history that goes back to the early 1990s, with The Daisies and Medal, is there a feeling at all that you’re official elder statesmen of Oxford music? JAMIE: “We’re definitely older but I’m not sure we’re statesmen. It’s kind of odd being around for so long actually; people aren’t really interested in bands that are older than six months anymore, they kind of assume they know what you’re like or they’ve done that already.” NEIL: “They say you can’t go out of fashion... in an odd way I hope that applies to us.” DARREN: “There’s loads of musicians around that are our elders for sure, and I see them having a lot of fun. I hope we’re still enjoying it at their age. We could probably take up the moniker of elder statesmen then.” And will it be another seven years until the third album? JAMIE: “No, we’ll get on with things now... We just slowed down for a bit while we had to do some life stuff. I should have a solo album ready for release for the end of this year or early next year, which will feature songs taken from the *Elstree* score. As a band, we’re all up for making more music. Mind you, you never can tell. If it takes that long, that’s how long it takes.”

‘Houses That You Lived In’ is released on the 14th August. Family Machine play a launch gig at The Bullington on Wednesday 23rd September. Follow the band on Facebook, or hear them at familymachine.bandcamp.com

RELEASED

GIRL POWER

‘Girl Power EP’

(Richter Scale)

One of the more depressing chores here at *Nightshift* while compiling the gig guide is having to find alternative descriptions for bands who describe themselves as hardcore or, worse, post-hardcore, when what we really want to say is “namby pampy big girl’s blouse bedwetter emo shit”. Because it’s closer to the truth than making any mention of the word hardcore.

Thankfully there are bands like Girl Power in town who can proudly stand toe to toe with hardcore as it punches the living daylights out of passing pretenders. This five-song EP glowers in on the back of some East Bay Ray guitar squall and when it’s done and dusted seven and a half minutes later, there’s broken furniture all over the room and the bitter sting of cheap speed in your sinuses. In between is the no-nonsense (because if you start any nonsense they’ll have to stab you) scabrous hardcore punk blitzkrieg that Discharge and later Black Flag brought to an unexpected and slightly nervous world and has remained unchanged for longer than Tyrannosauruses



roamed the earth. Except it’s got sharper teeth and a worse temper. Its breath probably smells worse too, but you won’t get the chance to find out because it’s already left the house and kicked the neighbour’s front door in.

And so the party continues. In the shortest and sharpest of bursts. Until all that’s left is rubble and a lingering sense of rage. So tell us again – compared to Girl Power, are you really a hardcore band? **Dale Kattack**

DAVID ASBOURNE

‘Matter In Motion’

(Self released)

Can digital technology ever be successfully fused to classical culture, or will it always require the human touch to draw a deeper response. David Ashbourne, lead singer of doomy local folk-pop band Samuel Zasada, goes a long way to opening the debate with his solo album, ‘Matter In Motion’.

The album intriguingly starts with some slow, considered piano playing and violin which become augmented by a sci-fi vocal that brings to mind Laurie Anderson’s ‘O Superman’, and continues to pronounce with cold, but reasonable candour on I’m not sure what, even after multiple close listens.

It sets the tone, though, since throughout the album you get the near-future, *Bladerunner*-esque sense that you’ve stumbled in on a room full of A.I. computers and cyborgs, who themselves have chanced upon a set of string quartet instruments and are discovering the quaintness of old time musical emotion.

Tracks like ‘I Sold You And You Sold Me’ and ‘Battling Obstinace’ demonstrate attempts to blend these oil and water components, which ultimately seem content to settle side by side. These are woven between other more urgent, Vangelis-like TV themes and horror whisperings couched in chase sequences (‘Trying To Forget’, and ‘Serious’) which burgeon on their own merits without visuals. Overall, and despite its intended dystopian unease, these nine, fulsome, mostly instrumental pieces are a finely crafted and satisfying body of work.

As for the initial question; my answer is No. Hand played, hand drawn will always break hearts, because it’s what we respond to, and besides, humans are the greatest, most nuanced computers ever created.

Paul Carrera

SEX WITH YOUR X

‘Sex With Your X’

(Self-released)

Beer. Pie and chips and gravy. Proper music, none of this *X Factor* bollocks. Footie on the telly. Stands to reason. Spirit of the Blitz. Beer. Sex With Your X? Yor ‘avin’ a fakkin’ larf, ennit? Beer.

The music of the boozier – solid music, as old as, okay, not the hills, but probably older than most of the houses round here, without too many frills (but always room for an unfancy guitar solo), and knocked out with down to earth humour by decent geezers who know their way around a beer festival and a few blues chords – in so many ways it’s the dark matter that holds the musical universe together. It’s almost invisible as far as the telly or the radio or the music press are concerned, but it’s everywhere, just doing its job, unseen, unnoticed. There are a million bands just like Sex With Your X in existence right now. There’s probably one playing in the pub just up the road from you right now. Even if it is eight in the morning.

Wallingford’s Sex With Your X’s debut album is twelve tracks of gruff, meaty blues’n’grunge rocking somewhere between Nirvana’s dads’ bar band and every pub blues band you’ve ever heard, ever. It’s neither good nor bad; it’s more just there, doing its thing over and over again for 52 minutes, the tune remaining almost heroically the same at every turn.

If *The X-Factor/BGT/Voice* produced acts are musical fast food – vacuous, unsatisfying, gone-in-a-second fluff – then bands like Sex With Your X are the Gregg’s sausage rolls or Fray Bentos tinned pies of music: solid, a recipe that has never changed, and the food you’ll stuff down yourself when there’s nothing decent left in the fridge and you can’t afford a curry. Completely incidentally, this writer is a lifelong vegetarian.

Dale Kattack

Sponsored by



JACK GOLDSTEIN

‘Tonic Of Wilderness’

(Attract Vinyl)

It’s easier these days than ever before for anybody to make music. A computer – even a phone – and some cheap / free / knock-off software (depending on your moral proclivity) and you’re all set. Accordingly, ‘Tonic Of Wilderness’ has the whiff of home recording about it; not only in its chuck-in-the-kitchen-sink production values (although, hey, maybe that’s expensive lo-fi synthesis we’re hearing), but also in a scrapbook hotchpotch approach to collating nine songs / pieces / movements into an album.

Jack Goldstein has quite a rich musical background, not least through fronting fuzzcore grunge types Gunnybunny and the stellar lysergic indie rocker troupe Fixers, but also with more recent forays into experimental areas: John Cage interpretations; collaborations with multi-instrumentalist Steve Beresford. ‘Tonic Of Wilderness’ mixes all of this up and chucks in a spicy dash of head-in-the-clouds weirdness – riffy opener ‘Thuggery Bisque’ giving way to faux(?)-romanticism in ‘Try 2 Love’, avant-prog-pop with ‘Ronnie James Dio Blues’ and even a dash of *musique concrete* with the freeform collage ‘100mph Libber’.

It’s an album that’s riffing on all kinds of things, and it bring to mind a relentlessly fleeting series of works gone by: Beck’s early experiments such as ‘Stereopathic Soul Manure’; Mike Oldfield’s pastorally-rich melodies; Vincent Gallo’s damaged/touching ‘When’; Steve Reich’s minimalist vocal research *à la* ‘Come Out’. It’s playful, imaginative and either heartfelt or hipsterish-cynical – perhaps each listener best decide that. What could be a confusing car crash of styles and sounds is given a sense of lightness and listenability with Goldstein’s undoubtedly prodigious knack for both songs and composition. Yep, anybody can make music: but not anybody can do it with this much skill, and to such pleasing effect.

Simon Minter



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THE WHEATSHEAF

Saturday 1st August – MOSHKA

JUNKIE BRUSH

K-LACURA + AGNESS PIKE 8pm/E5

Thursday 6th August – IT’S ALL ABOUT THE MUSIC

MIDNIGHT RAMBLER

8pm/E6

Friday 7th August – IT’S ALL ABOUT THE MUSIC

LUCY LEAVE

EASTER ISLAND STATUES + THE ILLUMINATI 8pm/E6

Thursday 20th August – BURIED IN SMOKE

SLABDRAGGER

OHHMS + HOGSLAYER 8pm

Friday 21st August – MD PROMOTIONS

NOÉ & THE PASTEL FRONTIER

CALLOW SAINTS + CAMERON AG + LIGHTSPILL 8pm

Thursday 27th August – OXROX

MOTHER CORONA

MORASS OF MOLASSES + ARMCHAIR COMMITTEE

GREENHORN 8pm/E5

Friday 28th August – MD PROMOTIONS

REVELLER

8pm/E5

Saturday 29th August – GAPPY TOOTH INDUSTRIES

CRIME

PIPELINE + LAYLA TUTT 8pm/E4.50

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G I G G U I D E

SATURDAY 1st
IN THE GARDEN: Restore, Manzil Way (*5.30pm*) – Mini festival in aid of Restore, helping people recovering with mental health issues. Bluesy Americana storytellers Huck & the Xander Band headline, joined by eclectic indie crew Balloon Ascents, uptight afropop outfit Bright Works, folk-tinged indie faves The Family Machine, electro-acoustic singer-songwriter Julia Meijer and more.
JUNKIE BRUSH + AGNESS PIKE + K-LACURA: The Wheatsheaf – Moshka club night brings local punk militants Junkie Brush out of hibernation for their first show in two years, their spleen-venting hardcore and clarion-call sense of melody finding a middle ground between The Dead Kennedys and Crass, although there really is nothing middle ground about Junkie Brush. Great support from Agness Pike, bringing a sense of Hammer Horror theatricality and ridiculousness to their shrapnel-sharp thrash, and bullish thrash crew K-Lacura.
WHAT YOU CALL IT, GARAGE?: The Cellar – New and underground garage, bass and grime

Thursday 6th
TREMBLING BELLS: The Cellar
If you judge a band by the company they keep, Glasgow’s Trembling Bells are modern day folk royalty. In recent times they’ve supported The Unthanks and Deep Dark Woods, played back-up to Mike Heron and collaborated extensively with Will Oldham. Originally fêted as torch-bearers for a new wave of psychedelic folk music, they’ve never been easy ones to pin down. Drummer, singer and chief songwriter Alex Neilson comes from a free jazz and improv background, while lead singer Lavinia Blackwell is classically trained and has a voice that can touch on the operatic if not downright banshee-like at times. Together Trembling Bells bring elements of psych and jazz to a traditional folk setting, and if they’ve gradually moved towards a folk-rock mainstream with time – particularly on 2001’s ‘The Constant Pageant’ – their quirky edge remains, folk legends from Scotland and northern England delivered by way of medieval song or sea shanties as well as a powerful folk-rock style that owes as much to The Doors as it does Pentangle or The Incredible String Band.



AUGUST

club night.
STRIKE ONE + MOOGIEMAN & THE MASOCHISTS + VAGUEWORLD + TORN LIKE COLOURS: The Jericho Tavern – It’s All About the Music gig with punk-pop types Strike One, leaning towards the Blink 182 / Green Day scheme of things, plus anti-folk and electro-pop eccentric Moogiemann, and feisty pop-punkers Vaguestworld.
BEER & MUSIC FESTIVAL: The Cornerstone, Didcot (*2pm*) – The Cornerstone’s weekend of beer and live music continues, including a headline set from ambient psych-rock crew Flights of Helios. Joining them are party funksters Funkinsteins, Americana and 60s pop champs The Dreaming Spires, folk-jazz people Kadia, folk collective Band of Hope and more.
FUSED: Fat Lil’s, Witney – Alt.rock covers.
THE PETE FRYER BAND: The Cricketers Arms, Cowley – Blues rocking from the idiosyncratic local guitar veteran.

SUNDAY 2nd
LUKE ALLMOND + FIREGAZERS + MARK BOSLEY & PETE LOCK + COSMOSIS: The Wheatsheaf (*2.30pm*) – Free afternoon of unplugged live music hosted by Klub Kakofanny in the Sheaf’s downstairs bar, including sets from Vaguestworld singer Luke Allmond and Moiety duo Mark Bosley and Pete Lock.
BEER & MUSIC FESTIVAL: The Cornerstone, Didcot (*3pm*) – North-East singer-songwriter Paul Liddell rounds off the Cornerstone’s beer and music weekender, along with local songsmith Drew Milloy, plus an open mic session.
CARDBOARD CASTLE: Como Lounge, Witney

MONDAY 3rd
TUESDAY 4th
GUITAR SUMMIT: The Bullingdon – Jazz guitar fun at tonight’s weekly jazz club.
THEO + DAGS! + VAGUEWORLD: The Library – Tigmus gig with local loops and riffs master Theo creating dense, fidgety noise textures with his layer-upon-layer looping of guitars and drums. He’s joined by Milan’s indie types Dags! and recent *Nightshift* Demo of the Monthers Vaguestworld with their noisy pop-punk.
HOLLYWOOD ENDING: O2 Academy – The Alvin & the Chipmunks of pop-punk head off on a headline tour, making Union J sound like The Dead Kennedys in the process.
OPEN MIC SESSION: James Street Tavern

WEDNESDAY 5th
THURSDAY 6th
TREMBLING BELLS: The Cellar – Glasgow’s

psych-folksters tour their new album – *see main preview*
SCOUT KILLERS + FILTHY PALMS + BLAME FATE + BLITZKRIEG CITY: The Wheatsheaf – Atmospheric, overwrought rocking from Bath/Bristol band Scout Killers, touring their new ‘Stand Your Ground’ EP.
MIDNIGHT RAMBLER: The Wheatsheaf – Acoustic blues and folk-rock.
JAY ELECTRONICA: O2 Academy – Conscious hip hop from the New Orleans rapper and producer and mate of Jay-Z, with whom he has just released ‘Road to Perdition’, having made his name with a fifteen-minute beatless track based on the soundtrack to *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*.
THE MIGHTY REDOX: The Wheatsheaf – Free unplugged show in the Sheaf’s downstairs bar from the swamp-blues-ska-funk stalwarts.
CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre – Oxford’s longest running and best open club night continues to showcase singers, musicians, poets, storytellers and performance artists every week.
OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon
BLUES JAM: The Catherine Wheel, Sandford
ACOUSTIC THURSDAY: Jude the Obscure

FRIDAY 7th
SUPERNORMAL: Braziers Park, Ipsden – Opening day of the artist-curated celebration of the strange and new – *see main preview*
LUCY LEAVE + EASTER ISLAND STATUES + THE ILLUMINATI: The Wheatsheaf – Ramshackle indie/noise newcomers Lucy Leave channel the spirit of The Wedding Present, Jonathan Richman and Hawkwind into new, lo-fi places.
ZUZU + COSMOSIS + JACK LITTLE: O2 Academy – Liverpool’s Zuzu come to town, supported by local Sabbath and Stooges-influenced rockers Cosmosis.
PURE BASHMENT: The Cellar – Platinum Linx present a night of dancehall and reggae summer vibes, with Yellow Youts Sound and CPL.
FREEFALL: Fat Lil’s, Witney

SATURDAY 8th
SUPERNORMAL: Braziers Park, Ipsden – From drone noise to sci-fi disco, it’s all here – *see main preview*
D-FEST: Lockway, Drayton – Drayton’s annual one-day festival moves to a bigger site for a full day of live music and comedy. Topping the bill are Reading’s anthemic power-pop crew Amazons. They’re joined by local sunshiny synth-popsters Alphabet Backwards singer James Hitchman, playing a solo set, Manchester indie people Fruit Tones, Oxford electro/r’n’b star Esther Joy Lane, London girl punks Abjects, Reading shoegazers Palm Honey, folk-pop people Water Pageant, Witney youngsters Three Empty Domes, rockabilly and 60s pop-inspired trio Boon, Wooster and Mew and more.
SIMPLE: The Wheatsheaf – The long-running house and techno club night warm up for their

Simple Weekender.
EXTRA CURRICULAR: The Cellar – House, garage, techno and drum&bass club night, every Saturday.
SIN FICTION + FLOURITE: The Jericho Tavern
NIKKI LOY: The Three Horseshoes, Bampton – First of a series of shows around the county this month from the local jazz-pop and soul singer-songwriter, mixing piano ballads with soulful stompers.

SUNDAY 9th
SUPERNORMAL: Braziers Park, Ipsden
THE PETE FRYER BAND: The Bell, Wantage
SPARKY’S JAM NIGHT: James Street Tavern – Open mic and jam session.

MONDAY 10th
THE ANDRE BISSON BAND: The Jericho Tavern – Blues, swing, r’n’b and soul from the singer and guitarist, playing originals and covers of 60s and 70s classics, from Otis Redding and Wilson Pickett to Stevie Wonder and Sam & Dave.

Friday 7th – Sunday 9th
SUPERNORMAL: Braziers Park
The strange, mutant kid sister in the Oxfordshire festival family, Supernormal celebrates the unusual, the inventive and the downright deranged with infectious enthusiasm. Artist-curated and not for profit, the event started just five years ago but has stamped its identity on this corner of the summer, mixing contemporary art with leftfield music. Among the bigger names on this year’s bill are psychedelic folksters **Trembling Bells**, ethereal 80s soundscapists **AR Kane**, former This Heat drummer and percussive pioneer **Charles Hayward**, and recently reformed weird-pop trio **Ten Benson**. Among a host of acts joining them in the picturesque and intimate setting of Brazier’s Park will be dissonant brutalists **Necro Deathmort** (*pictured*), Italian noisemongers **Father Murphy**, experimental harpist **Rhodri Davies**, atmospheric Irish rhythmists **Woven Skull**, punk-drone crew **Spectres**, Brighton rock malcontents **Lower Slaughter**, experimental singer and artist **Sharon Gal** and Norwegian riff’n’rancour merchants **Arabrot**. Really, there’s too much to cover here, and the real joy of Supernormal is wandering between the various stages, simply discovering sounds and spectacles you’ve never encountered before, whether it’s a live soundtrack of *Nosferatu* by **Deathcount In Silicon Valley** or a **Space Family Robo Disco**. It’s all here and hopefully you’ll return to civilisation a changed person.



TUESDAY 11th
THE HUGH TURNER BAND: The Bullingdon – Funky jazz from Hugh Turner and band at the Bully’s long-running jazz club.
INTRUSION: The Cellar – Monthly goth, industrial, ebm and darkwave club night, with Doktor Joy and Bookhouse.
OPEN MIC SESSION: James Street Tavern

WEDNESDAY 12th
BASS NATION: The Cellar – UK and US hip hop, garage and house club night, with DJ Platinum.
OPEN MIC SESSION: The Fir Tree

THURSDAY 13th
FAIRPORT’S CROPREDY CONVENTION: Cropredy – Fairport Convention’s annual gathering of the clans returns, gradually moving away from its traditional folk roots to take in a wider selection of acts. Today’s bill opens with the traditional Fairport Acoustic set, followed by folk-trance-reggae party starters Dreadzone; Scandinavian Balkan folkdance crew Katzenjammer and a headline set from country legend Emmylou Harris with Rodney Crowell.
POLEDO: The Library – Homecoming show for local noise-pop trio Poledo, tonight launching their new ‘Egg Catpil Ccun Butfli’ EP on Deadbeat & Down Records, the band, now spread between Oxford, Manchester and Sheffield, cranking out a melodic slacker/shoegaze lo-fi noise that flits and crackles between Sonic Youth, Dinosaur Jr, Swervedriver and The Crips.
DEBBIE BOND: Fat Lil’s, Witney – Powerful, soulful blues from the veteran Alabama singer-guitarist, inspired by Bonnie Raitt and Maria Muldaur.
CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre
OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon
BLUES JAM: The Catherine Wheel, Sandford
ACOUSTIC THURSDAY: Jude the Obscure

FRIDAY 14th
FAIRPORT’S CROPREDY CONVENTION: Cropredy – Wretched 80s soul/funk survivors Level 42 head today’s bill, joined by Leith’s favourite sons, The Proclaimers; former-Marillion man Fish, and more.
BOSSAPHONIK: The Cellar – Dancefloor Latin, Afrobeat, Balkan beats, global grooves and nu-jazz club night, tonight with a live set from Bristol’s multicultural eight-piece band Mankala, whose sound spans the grooves of central African soukous, South African township dance, Afrobeat and the juju and tribal polyrhythms of west Africa. They’re fresh from playing Glastonbury and are joined tonight by Kwassa Kwassa DJs plus Bossaphonik host Dan Ofer.
DES BARKUS: James Street Tavern – Album launch gig for the local singer and guitarist, playing a mix of blues, Americana and Tex-Mex sounds.

SATURDAY 15th
FAIRPORT’S CROPREDY CONVENTION: Cropredy – Final day of the festival, and is traditional, it’ll be a full-on Fairport set to top everything off, the English folk-rock pioneers joined by a cast of friends for a run through of favourites old and new, including a rousing singalong of ‘Meet on the Ledge’ at the end. They are joined elsewhere on the bill by blue-eyed soul veteran Paul Carrack; 80s punk-pop heroine Toyah



Thursday 20th
STEVE HARRIS BRITISH LION: O2 Academy
So, what does a multi-millionaire rock musician do with his time while his band are taking a few months off to count their money and contemplate expanding across the solar system now that every human on the planet owns at least three of their albums? Sit by the pool drinking cocktails and snacking on diamonds? Crash a fleet of private helicopters? Buying the football club he’s supported since a child? In Steve Harris’ case he’s decided to head out on a solo tour of the sort of venues he left behind several decades ago. Harris is, of course, bass player with Iron Maiden. But not just bass player. He is the band’s founding member, the only constant part of the line-up since their formation in 1976 (and along with guitarist Dave Murray the only one to appear on every Maiden album), their chief songwriter, sometime producer and video director. He is, in short Mr Iron Maiden, and if you can’t instantly recognise one of his trademark galloping bass lines, you don’t know rock music. So, having turned down the chance to be a professional footballer for West Ham, he set about becoming one of the most successful rockers of all time, and now you get to see him up close and personal as he tours his ‘British Lion’ album with the side project band he formed in the 90s with singer Richard Taylor and guitarist Graham Leslie, leaning more towards the 70s hard rock sounds that influenced Maiden in the first place. A rare treat to see him in such intimate surroundings, so off you trot. Or gallop, if you prefer.

Willcox, and a host of others.
A RELUCTANT ARROW + LOST ART + HUCK: The Cellar – Folk rock from A Reluctant Arrow at tonight’s It’s All About the Music show, with support from eclectic duo Lost Art, classically trained musicians Greg Hooper and Gordo Francis mixing up jazz, prog, showtunes, folk, bossa nova and more into an artfully cohesive whole. Southern gothic bluesman Huck opens the show.
EXTRA CURRICULAR: The Cellar
BREEZE + PUNCHDRUNK MONKEY CLUB + ROBERTO & JUAN: The Jericho Tavern – Rock and indie covers from local function band Breeze at tonight’s It’s All About the Music show, alongside alt.rockers Punchdrunk Monkey Club, and Balloon Ascents side project Roberto & Juan.
SHEPHERD’S PIE: Fat Lil’s, Witney – Hard rock and metal covers, from Maiden and Metallica to Thin Lizzy and Black Sabbath.
HEADINGTON HILLBILLIES: The

Oxfordshire Freeman, Freeland – Bluegrass and Americana from the local troupe.

SUNDAY 16th

MONDAY 17th

TUESDAY 18th

ALVIN ROY & REEDS UNLIMITED: The Bullingdon – Trad jazz, bop and swing with the veteran clarinetist and his Reeds Unlimited band.
OPEN MIC SESSION: James Street Tavern

WEDNESDAY 19th

TANGLED HAIR + ALPHA MALE TEA PARTY + 100 OUNCES: The Cellar – Sweetly melodic mathsy post-grunge pop from Big Scary Monsters-signed crew Tangled Hair. They do loud bits and they do quiet bits, but mostly they just do good bits. Great noisy support from Liverpool’s smash-rock trio Alpha Male Tea Part, back at the Cellar with their fizzing and fuzzing and floral frocks, and a song called ‘You Eat Hummus, Of Course You Listen To Genesis’. Thrash-punk with a smile from LA duo 100 Ounces.

BASS NATION: The Cellar
JACK GOLDSTEIN + BETA BLOCKER & THE BODY CLOCK: The Library – Fixers frontman and all-round musical boundary-pusher

Thursday 20th

JUNGLE BROTHERS: The Bullingdon

Big name hip hop acts coming to town is now such a regular occurrence it’s no longer a novelty, but the more the merrier, and this month it’s the turn of New Yorkers The Jungle Brothers, a band who were more critically lauded than commercially successful in their heyday but have become regarded as one of hip hop’s most pioneering acts with their early fusion of jazz, r’n’b and African music into the genre. The trio of Mike Gee, Afrika Baby Bam and DJ Sammy B released their debut album ‘Straight Out The Jungle’ in 1988 and despite its modest indie success, it earned them a deal with Warners, a deal that helped spawn their classic ‘Done By The Forces Of Nature’, which in turned spawned ‘What U Waiting 4?’, regarded as one of the golden age of hip hop’s high points. ‘Done By...’ owed as much to the likes of Earth Wind & Fire, with its spiritual vibe and heavy grooves, as it did to any rap contemporaries, and the trio’s early move into house set them apart, with the pioneering ‘I’ll House You’ resetting the borders between hip hop and club music. The original trio now seem to be back together after departing or doing their own things over the years, so hopefully a classic set of old faves is in order.



Jack returns to Oxford to launch his new solo album, ‘Tonic Of Wilderness’, his mix and (ill) match of folk, electronica, prog and something strange touching bases with Vincent Gallo, Mike Oldfield, Steve Reich and Beck along the way. Shoegazey noise-pop support from local starlets Beta Blocker.

NIKKI LOY: The Cotswold Arms, Burford

THURSDAY 20th

THE JUNGLE BROTHERS: The Bullingdon – Hip hop goes house in a jazz style from the reformed pioneers – *see main preview*
STEVE HARRIS: O2 Academy – Iron Maiden’s founding father brings the rock – *see main preview*
SLABDRAGGER + OHHMS + HOGSLAYER: The Wheatsheaf - Buried In Smoke metal night with Croydon’s sludgy stoner doom-metallers Slabdragger, plus Canterbury’s progressive doomsters Ohhms, and Cardiff’s sludge-noise brigade Hogslayer.
CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre
OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon
BLUES JAM: The Catherine Wheel, Sandford
ACOUSTIC THURSDAY: Jude the Obscure

FRIDAY 21st

KING OF CATS + BE GOOD + KITSCH: The Cellar – Max Levy returns to Oxford to launch his new album ‘Microwave Oven’, backed up by members of Joanna Gruesome. Support from doo wop, surf-pop and 50s ballad band Be Good, plus a debut outing for Kitsch, formed from the ashes of local faves Kill Murray.
NOE & THE PASTEL FRONTIER + CALLOW SAINTS + CAMERON AG + LIGHTSPILL: The Wheatsheaf – It’s All About the Music show with epic rockers Noe & the Pastel Frontier, indie rockers Callow Saints and bittersweet songsmith Cameron AG.
THE SIMPLE WEEKENDER: Waterstock Meadow – Opening a four-night festival of dance, hosted by long-running local house and techno club Simple, but offering DJs and performances from across the spectrum, from EDM, bass, house and dubstep, to hip hop, reggae, dub, drum&bass and more. Among a host of – mostly local – folks on stage or manning the decks are Zaia, Xavier, House of Roots, Fridge & Bungle, 1210 Zen, Billy Disco, Andy James, DJ Lee, Dan Gascoyne, Em Williams, Deep Cover, David Shannon, Document One, Dr Erzb, Effi Brooks, Hollie May, Leon Sofroniou, Mac White, Man of Science, Rhymeskeemz, Sound Affect, Dublings, Random Character, and many, many more. Four days of dancing and chilling, in a field, in summer. Go wild.
ABSOLUTION: The Wheatsheaf – Power blues from Sudbury’s Absolution.
EXTRA CURRICULAR: The Cellar
HEADINGTON HILLBILLIES: James Street Tavern

SATURDAY 22nd

BALLOON ASCENTS: The Cellar – Genre-bending pop from the rising local stars, taking inspiration from Radiohead and Stornoway but muddying the waters to splendid effect by way of dub, blues and folk-pop and making their case to be the most exciting new young band in Oxfordshire right now.
BROKEN CHORDS + 48 HOURS: The Bullingdon – Classic power trio rocking from Essex/Herts crew Broken Chords, in the vein of



Friday 28th – Sunday 30th

THE BIG FEASTIVAL: Alex James’ Farm, Kingham

Considering it started out as a food festival with a bit of music stuck in the corner, Festival has come on some in the last couple of years, boasting more interesting acts than some dedicated music events. Friday features a headlining DJ set from EDM hitmakers **Groove Armada**, who’ll be joined by 80s synth-pop survivors **Heaven 17**, Festival regular and eclectic rare groove merchant **Norman Jay** amongst others, while Saturday sees talismanic hip hop and grime MC **Dizzee Rascal** atop a bill that also features rapper/producer **Example**, hip hop legend **Grandmaster Flash**, Dublin’s fast-rising folk-pop brothers **Hudson Taylor** and r’n’b songstress **Ella Eyre**. Moving onto Sunday and it’s soul/jazz siren **Paloma Faith** heading up the musical line-up with the likes of UK hip hop godfather **Roots Manuva** and Faithless rapper **Maxi Jazz** bringing some serious groove to proceedings. **The Feeling** are also playing, with **Sophie Ellis Bextor**, and you’d hope she’ll breathe a bit of life into their grey soft rock. Of course, this being Festival, the chefs are as much the star attractions as the music stars, and it’s as much about cookery demonstrations and Q&As as it is about drinking and dancing, and if previous events have shown us, it is possible to spend all day eating cheese. In fact it’s compulsory.

Royal Blood and Rival Sons, the band having played at Download earlier in the year, as well as supporting Bernie Torme on tour.
ONE WING LEFT + STORYTELLER + ICENI: The Wheatsheaf – Album launch gig from local rockers One Wing Left.
BEDROCK: The Bullingdon – Skeletor’s monthly rock and metal club night, playing classic tunes and new releases.
SIMPLE WEEKENDER: Waterstock Meadow – Second day of the weekend dance festival.
EXTRA CURRICULAR: The Cellar

SUNDAY 23rd

SIMPLE WEEKENDER: Waterstock Meadow

MONDAY 24th

SIMPLE WEEKENDER: Waterstock Meadow

TUESDAY 25th

THE ROD KELLY QUARTET: The Bullingdon – Piano jazz and blues at tonight’s free jazz club.
OPEN MIC SESSION: James Street Tavern

WEDNESDAY 26th

BASS NATION: The Cellar
OPEN MIC SESSION: Fir Tree

THURSDAY 27th

MOTHER CORONA + MORASS OF MOLASSES + ARMCHAIR COMMITTEE: The Wheatsheaf – Psychedelic groove-rocking inspired by Sabbath, Electric Wizard and Smashing Pumpkins from Mother Corona, plus stoner, sludge and doom noise from Morass of Molasses at tonight’s OxRox show.
CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre
OPEN MIC SESSION: Half Moon
BLUES JAM: The Catherine Wheel, Sandford
ACOUSTIC THURSDAY: Jude the Obscure

FRIDAY 28th

THE BIG FEASTIVAL: Alex James’s Farm, Kingham – Alex James and Jamie Oliver’s annual food and music festival returns, today’s opening salvo featuring a Groove Armada DJ set, plus Heaven 17 and more – *see main preview*
TOWERSEY FESTIVAL: Thame Showground – First day of the annual folk festival, with sets from Treacherous Orchestra, Kim Churchill, Spooky Men’s Chorale, Salt House, Talisk, The August List, Grace Petrie, Steve Turner and more.
SKYLARKIN’ SOUNDSYSTEM: The Cellar – Reggae, dancehall and rocksteady party tunes from master selector Count Skylarkin, back at the Cellar after a summer of festivals that’s so far taken him to Glastonbury, Cornbury and Carnival.
REVELLER: The Wheatsheaf – Splenetic metalcore rage.
DIRTY VALUABLES: The Jericho Tavern – Grungy melodic metal from the local rockers.
THE TOM IVEY BAND: Como Lounge, Witney

SATURDAY 29th

TOWERSEY FESTIVAL: Thame Showground – Bellowhead top the bill today, joined by a cast of big-named folk acts, including Stornoway, John Smith, Phil Beer, Lisbee Staunton, Brickwork Lizards, Swindlestock, Knights of Mentis and more.

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GAPPY TOOTH INDUSTRIES with CRIME + PIPELINE + LAYLA TUTT: The Wheatsheaf – Mix’n’match triple bill as ever at the monthly GTI get-together, tonight with Oxford/Bristol/Somerset melodic rockers Crime, tipping a collective hat to Death Cab For Cutie, Brand New and Biffy Clyro, plus local alt.rockers Pipeline, and Birmingham’s jarring, inventive acoustic singer-songwriter Layla Tutt.
CONTROL THE STORM + CURVATURE + DED ORSE: The Cellar – OxRox host Reading’s melodic metallers Control The Storm, out on tour to promote their new album after appearing on Bloodstock’s New Blood stage back in 2012.
THE BIG FEASTIVAL: Alex James’s Farm, Kingham – Live sets from Dizzee Rascal, Example, Grandmaster Flash and Ella Eyre at today’s foodie gathering – *see main preview*
PULSE: The Cellar – Jungle and drum&bass club night with Uncle Dugs (Rinse FM), Lazcru, B-III, D-Ranged, Sound Affect , DFace and Snipes.

SUNDAY 30th


THE BIG FEASTIVAL: Alex James’s Farm, Kingham – Final day of the cheese and artisan chutney extravaganza, with live sets from Paloma Faith, The Feeling with Sophie Ellis Bextor, and Roots Manuva – *see main preview*
TOWERSEY FESTIVAL: Thame Showground – Joan Armatrading headlines the third day of the folk festival, with sets from Show of Hands, Sally Barker, Martin Simpson, Andy Cutting and Nancy Kerr, The Travelling Band, Ninebarrow and many more.
THE PETE FRYER BAND: Benson Social Club
BANK HOLIDAY BACCHANALIA: The Town Arms, Wallingford (midday) – All-day bank holiday mini-festival with live sets from The Mark, Man Make Fire, Sex With Your X, Ginhouse, Loosely Blues and more.

MONDAY 31st

TOWERSEY FESTIVAL: Thame Showground – Final day of the festival, with Anxo Lorenzo, Chris While & Julie Matthews, Keston Cobblers Club, Luke Daniels, Roy Bailey, Steamchicken, Slainte and more.

The Cellar

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The Cellar

est. 1999

Home of Oxford's Cutting Edge Music Scene



Frewin Court, Off Cornmarket St, Oxford

LIVE

TRUCK Hill Farm, Steventon

FRIDAY

There are people who believe that Paul McCartney died in 1966 and was replaced by a lookalike. The proof has to do with flowers and backwards records and the fact that “goo goo g’joob” is ancient Etruscan for “the bassist just snuffed it”, or something, but mostly because photos from 1967 look a wee bit different from photos from 1963. But that’s how it works, isn’t it? As time goes by, features shift and alter slightly, whilst the face remains recognisably the same. And whilst Truck 18 is in some ways very different from Truck 8, it isn’t hard to see that it’s clearly the same festival underneath. It may have got bigger in the past decade – haven’t we all? – and has clearly had a bit of cosmetic work done, but what is wonderful over these two days is the realisation that really not much has changed from the great Trucks of yore.

The biggest difference, of course, is that now Truck is part of a boutique festival circuit that it helped to instigate, and as such a third of the bill could have been predicted by anyone with an internet connection and a bit of *nous*, but as ever the greatest discoveries are squirreled away on the smaller, more curated stages. Take the first act we see properly on Friday, London’s **PASSPORT TO STOCKHOLM**, who sing delicate melodies over icily precise electronic percussion in winning style. Considering they are 40% down, and the PA is limbering up for the weekend by making some odd squeaks, it’s an impressive set.

We can imagine **SULKY BOY** checking their emails a few months ago. “Hey, we’re going to play Truck! There’ll be 6,000 people and we’ll be supporting all these cool bands!” What really happens is that they perform to a smattering of people, sitting in the Market stage, idly checking their phones and wondering whether it’s bad that there was an extra bendy pole left over when the tent was pitched. Of course, they could make more of an impact by not playing floppy inoffensive pop that’s a bit like baggy with the attitude, swagger and drugs replaced by some horrible Hale & Pace dungarees. Said dungarees are inexplicably popular amongst punters this year, only outweighed in oddness by the Native American head-dresses that

a number of independent people are sporting: it looks like some wires got crossed in the organisation of a Village People reunion. Still, it’s better than the four guys in Charlie Chan villain get-up, one of whom has come in full yellow-face: Number One Cock.

One of the most interesting additions to the festival is the showcase of up and coming Welsh talent at The Palm City/Gorwelion Horizons tent, or Welsh World as we decide to re-name it. Cruelly hidden from sight by a hessian covered fence, the only clue to its existence is a couple of Palm Trees made from flower pots at the entrance. Inside, it’s fairly quiet, and a refreshing escape from the hoards outside. Over the course of the weekend there’s a diverse and high quality mix of music on offer. The first band we encounter here is **CUT RIBBONS** whose glacial guitar pop is beautiful and elegant. It’s made all the more icy by the stage dressing, which appears to be a castle battlement crafted from Glacier mints. The festival outside might have grown, but in this one little tent, there’s a distinct reminder of Truck’s roots, when the likes of Vic 20 would entertain a handful of baked locals. It’s a place we retire to regularly whenever the crowds or predictable main stage gestures are getting too much. They also have a giant wooden ghetto blaster, which wins them points, as does **HANNAH GRACE**, a singer who edges towards blues fire and soul sultriness, but without losing sight of the bullseye of good tunes. She would do well at Cornbury.

We shy away from the Most Improved award here at *Nightshift*, as it either looks like a snide backhand or a sop for rubbish musicians who don’t have the decency to give up and concentrate on procreation or move somewhere else. Praise is deserved for **ORANGE VISION**, though. When we first saw them they were trading in pseudo-baggy and infuriating wackiness, but nowadays they use driving indie-funk basslines as the jumping-off point for woozy, reverb-drenched flights which send half the crowded Virgins stage into a misty reverie and half into a dancing trance.

Going to festivals always makes us feel old, but it’s amplified by **AGS CONNOLLY**’s good old



days number, ‘When Country Was Proud’, which starts with someone holding a CD. CDs still feel new-fangled to some people, since in the chorus poor old Ags tries to put his CD “on the turntable”, which can’t have gone well. Still, this lyrical slip is the one single criticism we can make of an excellent set by a naturally gifted musician who knows exactly when embellishments get in the way of a song, and when to give his rich melancholic voice space to communicate. Truck has had its fair share of Americana over the years, but Ags’ country isn’t alt or nu or avant, it’s just fantastic.

Similarly keeping the local flag proudly aloft on the Virgins stage are the frankly glorious **DEATH OF HI-FI**, who have tempered their dark and brooding hip hop with some lighter, slinkier songs, pick of which is ‘Roses And Guns’, wherein punchdrunk electro synths stumble through the picture window of Portishead’s refined drawing room. Top cabaret marks for featuring a lightning quick costume change on a small stage, and throwing flowers to the crowd with download codes attached.

In the past, the main stage at Truck has featured some surprisingly slight acts. For every Fixers or Bellowhead, there’s been some wispy indie band

or subtle American strummer who, although sometimes good, have got lost on the breeze. This year, the promoters have worked out just what people want, rightly or wrongly, from a festival main stage. Take **THE BOHICAS**. Nobody knows who they are, we suspect, but they go down a storm with their broad-stroke thumping pop, and chunky melodies that seem to fall somewhere between XTC and Bryan Adams. The power goes off mid-song, and everyone hangs around cheering till it’s back on, which is as much evidence of winning the crowd over as we can imagine. They’re quite good. Pity, really, we were hoping we’d be able to just say they were Bohollocks.

After buying some food from the ever-lovely Rotary Club, we are accosted by a wandering woman from the church snack stall: “You know what goes really well with chips? Sweets!” Full marks for dedicated sales patter, but you don’t have to be Jay Rayner to know it’s not true. Her culinary error comes back to us for **NEON WALTZ**, who are the musical equivalent of a Haribo melting over a spud, having ill advisedly taken the harmonies, the electric piano and the rootsiness from The Band and melded them with Flowered Up’s brash proto-Britpop. How on earth is this any good? Nay, rather delightful?



Perhaps because, in pop, character and ideas trump showing off and artisanal moustache stylists every time. We especially love the singer, a vat-grown Micky Dolenz mini-me who looks as though he literally just got out of bed... and that his bed was made of temazepam and dumplings.

Speaking of character, back at Gorwelion Horizons a trio called **HMS MORRIS** provide one of the best sets of the weekend, despite not being sailors waving hankies. Their synth-based pop is held together by charm and Blu Tack, and provides warm fuzzy memories of vintage bookings on the old Trailer Park stage. One of them is a cute pop powerhouse, what you’d get if Gwen Stefani had been given away free with Coco Pops; one of them is a keyboard player with a croupier’s hat, a bushy beard and a glorious falsetto; the other is a drummer tight enough to keep it all together, but sensitive enough to keep the songs bubbly fresh. A highlight is a gorgeous plinky skank with lashings of twangy guitar, like Vienna Ditto in dub (and in Welsh), but it’s all wonderful. **SWNAMI** who come afterwards are pretty good, too, in the vein of early Foals, and it’s a pity that so few people see it.

Perhaps they were all queuing for the toilet. What happened, Truck,

has Steventon been hit by Dutch Bog Disease or something? The only downside to a lovely festival is the acute lack of portaloos. At one point we take a walk along the entire length of the campsite to try to find a short toilet line, and it couldn’t be done. Mind you, one in five tents have a bunch of Truckers sitting outside, and a bit of eavesdropping reveals that lots of them are planning on sitting about killing time until Clean Bandit come on. That’s the spirit, kids: stick to bands that have been on telly adverts, otherwise you might see something new and exciting, which would hurt your little heads.

We’re not sure whether Aberystwyth’s **MELLT** have an infuriating Google-maximising spelling, or whether it’s just Welsh, but they’re worth a visit, with strong basslines pulling sweetly against bookish new wave vocals, something in the ballpark of The Lemonheads, with Sebadoh as jovial groundskeepers. They’re good, although may not have quite found that magic ingredient to be truly special. Speaking of ingredients, beware of the coffee stall, where an espresso is a pound, and an Americano is two; just to check, the difference is still *some water*, right? Thank Christ they don’t sell squash.

Whilst the hordes are on the move,



looking for a good spot for **CLEAN BANDIT**, we’ve already found the best one: a long way away, watching **GHOSTPOET**. He really is an impressive performer, delivering his vocals in a deep, authoritative sprechgesang which is half Harlem Renaissance and half Blue Aeroplanes, with occasional sidesteps into Isaac Hayes cream and honey or Jarvis Cocker’s dramatic gasps. The band is top notch, but keeps to an approachable blues churn in the vein of mid-90s PJ Harvey, to highlight the vocals but not at the expense of an immersive groove. Add some liberal dubby FX and sweetly bitter backing vocals that bring to mind Martina Topley-Bird, and you have probably the most understated yet hypnotic show of the weekend.

Understated not being a term we’re likely to use in relation to **FAT WHITE FAMILY**. The programme this year tries to triangulate all the acts on the bill against other bands, which is fine, but some of the choices are a bit odd – and, also, are there really people on site who have never heard of Basement Jaxx but who are *au fait* with the long and varied career of Audio Bullys? Apparently Fat Whites are “for fans of The Wytches/ Hookworms/ TRAAMS”, which just about works, although we would have offered “Marc Almond/ The Country

Teasers/ guilt and greasy residues”. The show doesn’t come close to their infamous Bully outing a couple of years ago, but their wheedling, sleazy slow-burns please the crowd as much as their onstage charm alienates the security and engineers. It’s also fun to imagine the hip young things going wild to ‘I Am Mark E Smith’ reacting in the same way to the Mancunian goblin overlord himself.

Time is a cruel mistress, particularly if a stage is running mysteriously behind schedule. As anyone that has seen **AUGUSTINES** over the last few years will attest they are one of the most incredible live bands around at the moment. Sadly, with their stage time cut short, and as good as the likes of ‘Chapel Song’ and ‘Cruel City’ are, they barely have enough time to get into their stride and form a bond with the audience. Yet as their set closes, Augustines still manage to connect with a heartfelt call and response, giving the festival one of the most rousing moments of the weekend.

Also running late are **SLAVES** over in the Barn. With some people queuing for over two hours just to not get in, the scheduling of one of the year’s hottest bands in such a small stage seems short sighted. If the intention is to create a buzz by making this some kind of

photos: Sam Shepherd, except Charlatans, by Marc West

exclusive performance, it backfires spectacularly. In the chart of gripes we hear over the weekend in second place behind “lack of toilets”, is “Not seeing Slaves and queued for hours”. When they finally take to the stage it’s clear to see why they’re probably the most anticipated act of the weekend. Their energy is infectious and drives the Barn to levels of excitement last seen when Foals played here. Ridiculously good fun.

Why does Tim Burgess look like your funny uncle who’s come to a family picnic disguised as Andy Warhol? It’s a question that nags throughout **THE CHARLATANS’** set. The band trudges a little, taking songs at a leisurely pace when some of them would benefit from a bit of fire: ‘North Country Boy’ is a Madchester Dylan sneer, and ‘Just When You’re Thinkin’ Things Over’ is imbued with classic Stones strut, and needs to be presented with more vitriol. It’s certainly not a bad set, and a long way from the lackadaisical effort of Evan Dando years ago, but it sends us into the night feeling quietly satisfied rather than electrified by rock ‘n’ roll.

SATURDAY

Musically, Sunday starts slowly, but then perhaps Sundays always should. **WALLFLOWER** are a sonically muscular emoid bunch, let down by some kidney-rippingly bad vocals; **FOX CHAPEL** make pleasant enough pop, that might have forgettably inaugurated some T4 all-dayer a few years ago; **SAFE TO SWIM** are rhythmically very strong, all rubbery goth indie that closely resembles Placebo, which is fine so long as you don’t mind things that sound like Placebo. To stave off boredom we invent the game Gaffer Tape Vs. Jaffa Cake, the rules to which we sadly can’t tell you until you get a special tattoo and give us your house.

So, it’s back to the reliable Gorwelion Horizons stage, who keep delivering strong acts on Saturday, although they seem to have cheated and sneaked a few non-Welsh musicians in, such as London-based Ugandan **HAULA**. She has an outstanding contemporary soul voice and a commanding but not over-egged stage presence, which makes her set a pleasure. Musically she leans on r’n’b, both in its contemporary sense, and the original coinage: there’s a tasty moment when the band drop into a Chickenshack type blues glide that really suits her delivery. Sometimes the backing gets sterile and sessiony, and the lyrics tend towards the platitudinous, but it’s a strong showing all the same. Closing song ‘Freedom’ gets a glorious main stage singalong reaction from the crowd; apparently she has a following in Wantage, somewhat oddly.

ALLUSONDRUGS are a messy potage of Mudhoney riffs, twitchy Biffy Clyro vocals, windswept guitar lines and half-inched Blur tunes is fun, but we love the fact that at any one point one of them is going off on a freakout, but at no point all of them are. They’re simply intriguing. “I like herpes more than I like Im Bru”, they announce unexpectedly, which is a thousand times more worth saying than, “Truck fest, how ya doing?”, you have to admit.

Walking past the Veterans stage (no Virgins left after the first day, which is how all good festivals should be), we intend to skip **THE SHAPES**, but are drawn in by the magnetic power of their classic pop, which is grown up without being washed out. We then go and see **THE MAGIC GANG** just in case they sound like The Magic Band, which is the sort of logic you end up with having decided to skip lunch due to queues and fall back on beer. They don’t. In fact, they sound like The Housemartins, Weezer and very, very well-behaved young men. We rather enjoy it, but they’re hardly kicking out the jams; in fact, they’d probably be considered limp by the WI who made the jams.

More veterans, **FLOWERS OF HELL** endear themselves to us immediately by being notably relaxed and sounding like The Velvet Underground with extra fiddle and trumpet, and then they prove us right by playing a really great cover of “Heroin” with extra fiddle and trumpet. And then they honour Czech dissident freaks Plastic People Of The Universe, which should happen more often. And, all this whilst the engineer has left a vintage soul CD playing on the PA throughout. They probably thought it was messages from the ether.

Yet again Gorwelion comes up trumps, with ultra-super-mega-perky indie pop outfit **SEAZOO**, who are blessed with an infections sense of fun, a knowledge of how catchy tunes work, relentlessly bouncy basslines, and a synth made out of a doll’s head that goes whoolly-weep in a seemingly random fashion. They do a song which sounds like Free’s ‘Alright Now’ played by excited Care Bears. They are superb. Oxford promoters Swiss Concrete should be brought back for one night, just to book this colour-saturated joy of a band, where they could raise many a flagon of speed-laced Tizer; hell, play them loud enough, they could raise the spectre of John Peel, his Ooberman T-shirt barely creased by the afterlife.

Hoping to strike gold twice, we return to Gorwelion for **VIOLET SKIES**. She shares some ground with Haula, not least an impressive larynx, but



Temples



her electronic torch songs are just too studio-smooth and her onstage drama the stuff of Eurovision heats. If she stopped trying so desperately to affect, she could be someone to watch, though.

It’s funny to think of **ALPHABET BACKWARDS** being classed as Veterans, because they still act like naughty kids, leaping around the stage and trying to get people to wind up the security guy. This is pop, not as youthful rebellion, but as childish fun, like The Red Hand Gang getting hopped up on tartrazine. All this, and their playing is inch perfect too, never missing the opportunity for maximum bounciness. The keyboards are a wee bit too quiet, but this is balanced by Steph’s ultra-summery Sandie Shaw dress. They are ten times more fun than **SUMMER CAMP**, whom we’d just watched briefly, not to mention summerier and camper.

Decidedly unsummery in any way, shape or form **CASSELS** possess a political vim and vigour rare these days. Of course, songs about the privatisation of the NHS or the concept of not having children as a form of population control are all well and good, but if the songs aren’t there, it’s just sloganeering. Fortunately wry observations are married to fizzing hardcore fury which gives them a powerful cutting edge that not even the

clanging reverb of the Barn can ruin.

“Who likes Saint Raymond?” asks the visibly refreshed singer of soft-centred hardcore Leeds lads **BRAWLERS**. “I mean, we’ve never heard of them, and we only ask because we just stole their fucking beer”. He then proceeds to share said bevvies with the crowd. Now accessories to the crime, we have no choice but to give up and enjoy the band, which despite being musclier and much louder and far, far more tattooed is actually a good analogue to Alphabet Backwards: they are working very hard for you to have a good time, and are not worried about anything else. Pop music, in other words.

PEASANTS KING finish off the Gorwelion stage. Shouldn’t there be an apostrophe in that name somewhere? Hell, don’t bother answering, we gave up after finding no fewer than 19 errors on the first page of the Truck programme alone. Peasants King make a decent Britrock sound, but it all feels a bit old hat, from the guy playing a separate floor tom - *so* 2008 - on up. Perhaps at the other end of the festival we’d have got more from them, but on the home straight we need more to grab us.

KING PLEASURE AND THE BISCUIT BOYS, are a band that would absolutely slay the crowd at

King Pleasure & the Biscuit Boys



Public Service Broadcasting



Cornbury. It’s old school rock and roll played with a grin and the band’s clear love of their craft and the history of the music they play turns their set into another of the highlights of the weekend. It’s impossible to take your eyes off of double-bass player, Shark Von Schtoop, who is perhaps the most energetic performer at the festival. Their cover of ‘Tequila’ is huge crowd pleaser and culminates in a gigantic conga line, and presumably a huge queue at the bar.

PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING’s appearance on the main stage is an interesting proposition. Having to perform in bright sunlight, the band are stripped of their usual film visuals and we’re intrigued to find out how they will cope. With two pairs of extra hands on samples, their sound is expanded significantly. ‘Spitfire’ positively roars over the Truck audience and sounds totally rejuvenated. They’ve also got a satellite stage prop that initially looks like a *Blue Peter* project. When the LEDs light up, it still looks like a *Blue Peter* project. The addition of an astronaut and a full brass section for ‘Gagarin’ and ‘Everest’ is a nice touch, and proves that the band is not just a one trick pony.

On the mainstage, **TEMPLES** are suffering with technical difficulties, some of which seem to be stemming

from the tassels on James Bagshaw’s jacket. The result of these problems is that the band plays a single note for the first five minutes of the set. Whether this foray into near drone territory is deliberate is uncertain, but it’s possibly their finest moment. Once they get rolling however, their blend of 60s rock and psychedelic tones reaches for the stars, or more specifically, the heart of the sun. The band are probably at their most effective this afternoon when Bagshaw stops singing and the band concentrates fully on creating surprisingly forceful wiggled out expositions.

Tellingly, **BO NINGEN** are the only act for whom the programme compiler couldn’t find any other bands to reference. Perhaps we shouldn’t compare them to musicians, but to forces of nature. With arcane hand gestures, manically garbled lyrics and streaming hair entangled in fretboards, the quartet look like demon witches, the bassist and vocalist particularly looking like someone has shoved some haunted coathangers into a black windsock. Although they start somewhat tentatively, they soon explode, and the set concludes with waves of coruscating noise and a bass wielded like a sacramental axe. The silly fake snow machines that have been infuriating us all day in the Barn are

Basement Jaxx



Bo Ningen



left off for the entirety of the set: fun time is over, mortals, taste the ritual.

Psych-punk noise still ringing in our ears we grab another pint or two and head back to the Market stage for **PETER HOOK & THE LIGHT**. Now, Joy Division are one of the truly great British bands, New Order are not short of a classic or two, and Peter Hook’s aggressively melodic bass playing was a big part of that, but sadly his voice is just rubbish, in the least interesting way possible. We only keep from dropping off by imagining that we’re watching Peter Cook & The Light (“She’s lost control again, Dud”. “Bloody Greta Garbo!”). This music deserves celebrating, but this slightly moribund trot through the back catalogue isn’t the best method to do so.

A far more welcome *hors d’oeuvre* to the headline set comes from Truck favourite **PINEY GIR**, in a sugary whirlwind of pirouetting skeletons and lollipop percussion and a polka dot frock and kids onstage and a bumblebee costume and synchronised tambourines and girlpop and field mice and grins and the glorious “Greetings, Salutations, Goodbye” and not enough synths.

BASEMENT JAXX are billed as Truck’s “first festival headliner”,

which seems like splitting hairs and evidence of one contract clause too many, but blimey, they don’t half bring things to a conclusion. The band has taken the concept of a “soul revue”, and run with it to create a “house panto”. There are guys in gorilla suits and a couple of girls done up like the Tweedledum and Tweedledee of soul sisterhood, and a huge woman with a huge voice getting all gospel pop on us whilst looking uncannily like the fortune teller from *Monkey Island*. The single segue of a show contains hits and equally interesting connecting material, reliably banging beats, an interestingly stripped back ‘Romeo’ and even a timbales solo. The band never revisited on the dense layered intrigue of their debut LP - in a reminder how experimental they were, *The Wire* listed ‘Remedy’ in their top 20 releases of 1999, just above Captain Beethart and The Fall! – and we never expected anything other than crowd-pleasing from this set, but it is still a beautifully put together show and a barrelful of fun. What else should we have expected from the people who had psychotic monkeys run amok over Gary Numan riffs and now have a video featuring a twerkbot? First festival headliner? Job most emphatically done.

Words: David Murphy and Sam Shepherd.

CORNBURY FESTIVAL

Great Tew

FRIDAY

Chairs. Row upon row upon row of chairs. Thousands of them. There they are in long, neat rows across Cornbury’s main Pleasant Valley arena, from the beer tent at the back, to within a dozen metres of the main stage, like troops at the Battle of Waterloo. Even when there are breaks in the action and the arena is relatively quiet, the chair army sits in malevolent anticipation, ready to block your way through the field with a round of beers or an urgent journey to the loo.

And there, to the left of the arena, like lords and generals overseeing the conflict from on high – and safe from the blood and mud and general oomska (as if Cornbury would ever have oomska) – is the festival’s VIP pavilion, a structure that wouldn’t shame a Roman emperor. Is that Orlando Bloom we spy? He was a prince once, albeit of a fictional realm. And was that Sienna Miller who just glided by? She’s royalty as far as the movie world goes. No sign of our lord and master David Cameron this year, though. Maybe he’s too busy smashing a fox cub’s skull in with the hammer he bought with the money he stole from a passing orphan earlier in the week.

Over in the campsite, in the centre of a circle of tents, is a full-length dining table complete with candelabra; it looks like The Last Supper if it’d been organised by Liberate. Toto, I don’t think we’re at Download any more.

OF COURSE NOT, WE’RE BACK at Cornbury again. Poshstock as its regulars dub it. People do festivals differently here, but if it’s going to take something special to get some of those people up and out of their chairs, it’s still really all about the music. And fret not, that something special is heading towards Great Tew, with bells on.

FIRST THOUGH, MAKING A return trip to Cornbury are **POLICE DOG HOGAN**, exactly the sort of band you’d call on to get a party started. Maybe they’re better suited to a cosy indoor venue at an hour when everyone’s sunk a few and lost their inhibitions, but even here in a field late-afternoon their Pogues-y folk-punk and footstomping bluegrass, all run through with a sense of humour that ranges from wry to plain daft, is infectious. On the Riverside stage are **SHEENA**, who are introduced as punk rock, but are most definitely not punk at all. Their songs are pretty well crafted, but it’s the vocalist we’re most taken by, who croons in a strangely intriguing manner that is somewhere

between Neil Hannon and Phil Oakey.

THERE’S NO DOUBTING LARKIN POE’S credentials. Having toured as backing musicians with Elvis Costello, they’re well honed and almost too smooth, particularly when the voices of the Lovell sisters begin to snake around each other with effortless elegance. As the weekend progresses, the presence of country-inspired bands begins to get a bit wearing, but Larkin Poe’s song writing and way with a tune (their take on ‘Bang Bang (My Baby Shot Me Down)’ is positively haunting) sets the bar impossibly high early on.

THE FESTIVAL SITE AT GREAT Tew is undeniably stunning, acres of beautiful scenery as far as the eye can see. So it seems unfortunate that for part of Friday evening it’s being encroached by landfill of the indie variety. First up are **THE FRATELLIS** a band who have one great song, but as catchy as it might be, ‘Chelsea Dagger’ just isn’t enough to carry an entire set. Following them on the main stage are **RAZORLIGHT**, a band so vapid that they threaten to suck all the life from the festival before it’s really got going. From a distance we can hear them doing that one about America and briefly consider booking an emergency flight to the States just to make sure we’re completely out of earshot. When Johnny Borrell appears on the campsite a little later for a sing song we consider pushing him into the fire as retribution for ruining the peace and quiet.

WRAPPING UP THE SONGBIRD stage are cockney geezers **CHAS & DAVE**. They seem insistent on playing new material, but thankfully most of it sounds like the old material, and it’s the old material that everyone is here to hear. Yes, it’s a shame when performers are trapped by their own hits, but when you’re sunburned, three sheets to the wind, and need nothing more than a knees up and a jar of welhks, only ‘Snooker Loopy’, ‘Rabbit’, and ‘Margate’ will do the trick. ‘Ave a banana.

SATURDAY

There’s a serious country flavour to Saturday afternoon. Following the self-effacing **HANK WANGFORD** there’s **WARD THOMAS**. Formed by twin sisters Lizzy and Catherine, they channel the Nashville sound with considerable aplomb, despite having grown up on a farm in Hampshire. However, songs like ‘Town Called Ugly’ are a little over polished and lack the grit to get the more grizzled country fans on board.

Martha Reeves



Roger Hodgson



Similarly, **THE SHIRES**, whose best song of the afternoon is their cover of Fleetwood Mac’s ‘Dreams’, prove to be quite a hit, and the Rapture tent is inundated with punters buying their albums after their set.

ORDINARILY HAVING A cover as your best song is a sign that your songwriting isn’t quite up to scratch. When covers are all you do, that’s a different story. It’s easy to sneer at covers bands, but **HOPE AND GLORY’S** set of feelgood ska – from Laurel Aitken to Bad Manners and Madness – is undeniably one of the highlights of the entire festival, and the crowd reaction is startling. The band has what is possibly the largest audience we’ve ever seen at the Riverside Stage moonstomping for the duration of their set. Whilst they might not register on the Richter Scale like Madness managed on their triumphant return in Finsbury Park, it’s quite possible that there were more than a few ripples on the cups of tea being served up in the Tea For Tew tent when the band launch into ‘One Step Beyond’.

ON THE MAIN STAGE BLUE are running late. Rumours of a running order squabble sulk abound, and such rumours are far more entertaining than the probable truth, which is that they’re stuck in traffic, and considerably more entertaining

than their actual set when it happens. They turn up, prance around to a backing tape and look thoroughly disinterested throughout their entire performance. ‘One Love’ just about elicits a response from the audience, but the truth is that Blue suck. **LULU’S** set begins in bizarre fashion with the singer apparently more concerned with playing to her granddaughter than anyone in the audience. Her requests to bring the youngster to the front continue well into her set, which is at best lumpen. For someone famed for her vocals, she’s surprisingly quiet and seems to be off her game. Even ‘Shout’ is more of a whimper than we’re expecting. Someone whose voice has held up far better is the very legendary **MARTHA REEVES**. Despite the tendency for meandering into drawn-out arrangements, and moments when the backing singers sound like a pair of owls trapped in a crockery shop, the set consists of a series of songs that defined an era, including ‘Nowhere To Run’ and ‘Heatwave’, and to hear them sung with such conviction is astounding. It’s a little like an exercise in audio archaeology, and at times, it is breathtaking.

SIMILARLY BREATHTAKING is **TOM JONES**. Age has not withered his voice although it has turned him a peculiar shade of orange. Peculiar arrangements of his classics

Chas (Dave not shown)



Billy Ocean



might have rankled with some in the audience, but it’s actually quite refreshing to hear ‘It’s Not Unusual’ re-tooled as a Parisian salsa. One thing never changes though, and that’s those vocal chords. The timeless strains of ‘Green, Green Grass Of Home’ cut through the air like a knife, although the real highlights of a genuinely astonishing set are an imperious take on Leonard Cohen’s ‘Tower of Sound’ and a cover of Gillian Welch’s ‘Elvis Presley Blues’. Tom’s been on top of the showbiz game for night on 50 years now and tonight’s performance shows you exactly why that’s so. We love discovering new music here at *Nightshift*, but sometimes it’s worth witnessing a legendary old hand to remember how it should be done. At the age of 75, Tom Jones is still a master of song.

SUNDAY

There are apparently far more songs about fish than we ever imagined, and most all of them are sung by **FISHWIVES CHOIR**. We’ll admit we were expecting something a little more choral, in line with Fisherman’s Friends but there’s a full band with the Wives, which takes things in a slightly different direction. All this talk of fishies on dishes at this hour does manage to make us feel a little queasy though.

SEVERAL PINTS OF everything they’ve got down at the nearby Falkland Arms later we’ve regained our appetites and after lunch it’s time for what turns out to be not just the highlight of the weekend, but possibly the best set Cornbury has seen in its twelve year history. **TREVOR HORN** has worked with some serious greats in his time, and a lot of them seem to be onstage with him today, not least Lol Creme who plays guitar and exchanges casually funny banter with Horn throughout the set, which starts and ends with a pair of Frankie Goes To Hollywood hits, alongside a brace of Horn’s own Buggles classics - ‘Plastic Age’ and, of course, ‘Video Killed The Radio Star’. And then on comes Stewart Copeland. Stewart Fucking Copeland! For one song – The Police’s ‘Message In a Bottle’. By God the man knows how to hit a drum kit. Anyone here fancy a quick singalong to Tatu? Here you go - ‘All The Things She Said’ belted out by seemingly the entire arena. It doesn’t get much better than this. **EXCEPT IT DOES. ON COMES SEAL. SEAL!** All the way from LA (where he’s just finished recording his fifth album with Horn), to sing Grace Jones’ ‘Slave To the Rhythm’. He’s having the absolute time of his life by the look of it, leaping into the front row, to emerge moments later adorned with a garland of flowers and sending

Felice Brothers



Trevor Horn



plenty of the ladies in the vicinity into raptures. He sings ‘Kiss From a Rose’ and ‘Crazy’ and that’s pretty much how everyone goes. This could have been a hacked-out set of old standards by a bunch of superannuated old mates with one eye on their private swimming pools, but instead it’s the perfect festival party, and for once, every single person in the arena is up and out of their seats. **PITY THE MAN WHO MUST** follow that. **JACK SAVORETTI** is in possession of a quite phenomenal voice, but for some reason it doesn’t seem to be cutting through today. Like a Joe Cocker lite, his vocals possess a gravelly low end that really impresses, but whether it’s the fact these Leonard Cohen-inspired songs are being performed in a sunny field or that he’s not particularly feeling it today, or simply that he’s following Trevor Horn onstage, there’s a distinct lack of intensity to his set today. Bums have either returned to seats or wandered off in search of either food or Joss Stone. **SUPERTRAMP ARE FAMOUSLY** a favourite of Cornbury regular Jeremy Clarkson but it’s uncertain whether or not he’s here for **ROGER HODGSON’S** set. With songs like ‘Dreamer’ and ‘The Logical Song’ it’s a set that certainly has plenty of crowd pleasers, but

over the course of an hour, things do begin to flag a little for all but the most hardcore of Supertramp fans. **BILLY OCEAN**, though, like Tom Jones before him, knows how to work a crowd. Certainly his appearance is startling – his face framed by snow white beard and dreads – and once he’s got over talking about Jesus, he’s off into a litany of hits, from ‘Get Out of My Dreams and Into My Car’ to ‘Loverboy’ and onto ‘Caribbean Queen’, bringing Cornbury to its feet again for ‘When The Going Gets Tough, The Tough Get Going’. Which is exactly the sort of thing you’d expect from an old master like Billy. **CLOSING THE FESTIVAL IS A** hard task, after three days of relative debauchery (or as much debauchery as is possible at Cornbury – there’s a snuff shortage at The Falkland Arms) a band needs to find a balance that sums up the enjoyment of the experience and the relative sadness that it’s all over for another year. **THE FELICE BROTHERS** just about find a happy medium. Their country rock sums up the main musical themes of the weekend, but the likes of ‘White Limo’ pack enough of a punch to get people up and dancing for the last time. Or at least tapping their feet whilst sat in their chairs.

Dale Kattack and Sam Shepherd

photo: Leo Bowder



CHRONIXX O2 Academy

It looks like someone has been studying the ‘Bob Marley Guide to Onstage Behaviour’: jog on the spot; shake locks; throw head back; hand to side of head, etc. Chronixx certainly has the moves down. Though this rootsical whippersnapper was born a full eleven years after Marley’s untimely demise, many suggest he is the true heir to Bob’s natty crown. The sense of legacy is further heightened when we discover Dennis Brown’s daughter is in the front row:

reggae royalty visits the dreaming spires. Oxford has long been host to various roots veterans, but it is unusual to have such a current mega star passing by; at only 22, but with his ‘Dread and Terrible’ EP in the US Billboard reggae Top 10 for 42 weeks, Chronixx is very much the genre’s man of the moment. So what’s all the fuss about? For a start, the voice. Chronixx (apparently his name derives from his singing dad, Chronicles, rather than the US slang for strong ‘erb)

has been blessed with sweet sounding tenor tones. He is also, admittedly, rather photogenic and knows how to work a crowd. Additionally – and crucial to his success – he not only harks back to his musical predecessors (he’s made Jacob Miller’s ‘Tenement Yard’ his own and plays Ini Kamoze’s ‘World A Reggae’) but also updates the Rasta message and makes it still relevant, as evidenced by the amount of dread elders in attendance.

For two hours he is non-stop; the pace slackens when he harangues us with an anti-colonialist rant during ‘Capture Land’: this is the Reparation UK Tour after all. Similarly, in a dubby segment in his smash hit ‘Here Comes Trouble’, he informs us, in his patois drawl, “Moses was a ganja man,” and, “Jesus was a Rasta...” Be that as it may, it gives his band – the formidable Zincfence Redemption – a rare chance to chill out a bit. Chronnix: dread, indeed, but by no means terrible.

Leo Bowder

THE AUREATE ACT / THE RELATIONSHIPS / LUCY LEAVE

The Bullingdon

Initial impressions can be as misleading as they are off-putting. Barely a handful of gigs old, Lucy Leave look a mess (think mismatched trendy teachers getting together for an end-of-term revue and hoping the kids won’t throw furniture at them), and initially at least sound equally slipshod, with lyrics like “The Solar System is so far away” (it really isn’t), but at the point where we’re considering giving up, they hit a groove, dig deep and keep digging until we’re mesmerised; suddenly it’s Neu!, The Wedding Present and The Modern Lovers jamming it out after a couple of fat ones. They break the spell eventually but only to head off into some nasty grunge noise number that comes with an oddly sweet undertone. Glad we stuck around. Hopefully they will too. The Relationships have stuck around for as long as we can remember. They’re twenty years old

this month but have collective histories going back much further. What other local band could get away with an opening song that namechecks Gordon Giltrap, Robin Trower and Brinsley Schwartz, before singing about meeting Mike Oldfield on Richard Branson’s lawn. Tonight’s set is all new material, but in its own sweet way, the song remains the same as far as The Relationships are concerned – a very English take on 60s West Coast psychedelic folk-pop. There’s a genteel humour to the songs, a quirky politeness, as if Julian Cope has grown up to be a librarian rather than a crazy shamen. “We are the guardians of eccentricity / The woolly-hatted aristocracy,” chimes avuncular, tweed-wearing fontman Richard Ramage, once again marking him out as The Bard of Cowley Road, much as the band are the keepers of a pop flame that will never, ever burn out.

If The Relationships are old hands with a firm hand on the tiller, The Aureate Act sound like they have only the vaguest idea where they might be heading, and frankly they don’t care too much about it. Which makes them all the more intriguing, particularly for such a young band. Somewhere at the heart of what they’re doing they’re a prog band, but they’re rather more Van Der Graaf Generator than Genesis, with an engaging intensity that might have something to do with the singer/keyboard player looking like a young Jaz Coleman from Killing Joke. His vocals are more often than not indecipherable, verging on operatic, and if they don’t always fit snugly into the band’s uneasy melding of Radiohead and Marillion at times, it’s all part of the grand plan to keep you guessing. Either by design or happy accident, The Aureate Act are one of the most off the wall bands in town right now, and whichever strange path they head off down next, we’re more than happy to follow, just to see where it all leads.

Dale Kattack

IRREGULAR FOLK SUMMER SESSIONS

The Perch, Binsey

One of Oxford’s many riverside watering holes, The Perch is noted as being one of the first places Lewis Carroll gave public readings of *Alice in Wonderland*. Appropriate really, since if Alice had fallen down the rabbit hole and found herself in a music festival rather than a surreal fantasy land, Irregular Folk would probably be that festival.

What sets it apart, aside from Irregular Folk’s excellent programming, which has over the years managed to define its own eponymous genre, is the attention to detail. Artists are individually baked their own cakes; the venue is dressed from top to bottom with vintage ephemera doubtless plundered from hours of car boot/charity shop scouring; it all takes on the feel of a special event, not just another show. Take **Tina Turner Tea Lady** – part comedy, part cabaret, she imagines a world in which a long-retired Tina Turner returns to the stage as a lascivious tea lady on the prowl for a

new man. Cue puns along the lines of ‘We don’t need no Caffè Nero’ and a set that closes with half the audience led on an enforced conga out of the venue. It shouldn’t work, but it really does.

Elsewhere, **Bastardgeist** belies his confrontational artist name with 90s-era Warp beats augmented by a thumb piano fed through a load of effects, doubtless the first time a thumb piano has gone glitch. **C. Duncan**, about to head out for a summer seeing them play various festivals, are lovely fresh-faced Scottish boys pouring out neatly-constructed if somewhat polite anthems that are perfect for a summer afternoon.

Lowpines are one of the most classically folk-ish of the artists, and come as this year’s highlight for us. Honest and evocative songwriting with stark, measured arrangements, every song strikes home with a purity and quality that you just don’t come across too often.



Lowpines photo: Giulia Brunsberti

Saturday night headliner **Laura Moody** is unfortunately unwell, so at just a few hours’ notice, local hero **Salvation Bill** jets in to save the day. It’s a barnstorming performance of new and old, with some of his newer material decidedly louder and more aggressive, but tempered with the same unique sense of humour that indicates that in the unlikely event of his beautiful voice and outstanding songwriting not paying off, there might be an alternative career in stand-up.

On Sunday, the last word goes to **The Little Unsaid**, combining strings, crushed velvet and a sense of lyrical pomposity to come across as the previously-untrodden middle ground between Nick Cave and Belle and Sebastian.

Perhaps the greatest compliment we can pay to Irregular Folk is that after two days of Summer Sessions, we completely and instinctively understand what irregular folk constitutes, and we want more of it. **Stuart Fowkes**

THE AUGUST LIST

Abingdon Unicorn Theatre

August List, august environs. By their own admission, Martin and Kerraleigh Child are more accustomed to playing “sticky” rooms – places like the Camden Monarch, where their set was apparently once rudely interrupted by a drunken loon standing in front of the stage attempting to piss on a DVD. Given tonight’s polite, mild-mannered audience of 50- and 60-somethings sipping their wine (your average theatre-going crowd, basically), the chances of a repeat are fairly slim.

Ideally suited to the simultaneously confessional and powerfully dramatic nature of The August List’s dusky, gothic Americana, the setting induces the duo to begin with a spellbinding un-amped debut live performance of the first song they ever wrote together. It’s followed by a truly stunning version of The Diamond Family Archive’s ‘Big Black Dog’ that completely eclipses the original and ranks as the most jaw-dropping thing I’ve witnessed all year.

We may be seated, but songs about infidelity (‘Wooden Trunk Blues’), Armageddon (‘Red Light On The Tower’) and being under surveillance by sinister omniscient birds (‘High Town Crow’) ensure that we’re certainly not sitting comfortably.

After the interval, the couple whet our appetite for the follow-up to last year’s ‘O Hinterland’ with ‘Old Rip’, which – like fellow newbie ‘Connie Converse’ – betrays a lyrical obsession with absenteeism. It’s easily the equal of both their older material and an array of covers that include The White Stripes’ ‘Hotel Yorba’ and ‘Acid Tongue’ by Jenny Lewis, the artist who first inspired them to play music together. An encore of ‘Cigarettes, Whiskey And Wild,

Wild Women’, which they confess to having learned from YouTube footage of Peter Sellers performing with the Muppets, prompts an improbably rambunctious mass singalong. Reviewing their album launch gig back in October, I was moved to brand The August List the best band in Oxfordshire – and it’s a verdict that tonight’s gig convincingly corroborates. Little matter that they hail from Dorset (rather than Devon as is mistakenly announced before they make their entrance); they’re ours to keep now.

Ben Woolhead

KID KIN / GHOSTS IN THE PHOTOGRAPHS / THE BECKONING FAIR ONES / COSMOSIS

Oxford Wheatsheaf

All you really need to know about Cosmosis is that they appear to have listened to Black Sabbath’s entire back catalogue and decided that the one song on which all their own should be modelled is ‘Planet Caravan’. Seriously, who does that? And the less said about their mauling of Iggy Pop’s ‘The Passenger’, the better.

This may be The Beckoning Fair Ones’ debut gig, but their members, while nervy, are hardly novices, having assembled from the ashes of local favourites Deer Chicago, Dallas Don’t and Big Tropics. Collectively, they sound little like any of their previous outfits, marrying scratchy riffs with almost playful synths in a way that makes them infuriatingly unclassifiable, albeit perhaps distant cousins (twice removed) of The Dismemberment Plan.

Ex-Dallas Don’t man Niall seems to be consciously reining in his rage, though the barked declaration “I’ve got a condition” in the penultimate track indicates a barely suppressed fury still bubbling away under the surface. Just as there can’t be many other saxophone-playing drummers in Oxford, there can’t be many vocalists who would write a song about meeting former Inverness Caledonian Thistle striker Billy McKay on a train.

With their spaced-out visuals, sound reminiscent of Explosions In The Sky and a guitarist who bears a distinct resemblance to Stuart Braithwaite, Ghosts In The Photographs have clearly missed the *Pitchfork* memo that said post-rock is once again tragically uncool.

A good thing they did, though, as – despite relying on a few clichés – they nevertheless bring a welcome dash of brawn and brute force to a musical style that can all too often be a sterile and exclusively cerebral affair. Thunder has been rumbling all afternoon, and Ghosts In The Photographs are well suited to soundtracking gathering storms.

Last time I saw Kid Kin, at the White Rabbit as part of last year’s Punt, the volume levels were such that they pinned you to the wall like a 600lb gorilla angrily demanding your dinner money. Tonight, the dials aren’t quite set to Brain-liquidising, which, if initially a disappointment, does allow the dynamic subtleties of the multi-instrumentalist noisenik’s music (as well as an affinity with Maiians) to shine through. Songs are deftly constructed before our very eyes, but, rather like watching a talented chef at work, you don’t always want to see how a delicious dish is made. As tasty as the live performances he serves up are, you can’t help but wonder whether they wouldn’t benefit from the greater visual stimulus that projections would provide.

Ben Woolhead



EARL SIXTEEN / WAYNE MCARTHUR & THE UNIVERSAL PLAYERS / JAMATONE / DESTA*NATION

The Bullingdon

Tonight is a musical tribute to David Norland: Makating bassist, producer, sound engineer, local community radio station founder, studio manager, in fact one man musical force of nature, who sadly died of cancer last year, aged 40. That this gig is all a bit last minute and seemingly disorganised, and yet hangs together as something rather

wonderful, is very much in the spirit of the man it commemorates. First up are Desta*Nation, featuring David’s brother Daniel, spinning the vinyl on the decks in the corner, with MC-ing from Dubwiser’s Jonas Torrance and Wayne McArthur, whose roots tunes have long graced many a speaker stack. The action then moves to the Bully’s stage

where Jamatone – another well established Oxford reggae band – put the grooves down with some help from Makating’s Lorraine on vocals and Hugo Makepeace on percussion. Next up is Wayne again, now with his long term band the Universal Players, a veteran unit, playing ‘Poor Man’s Prayer’, ‘Roots

Criteria’ and ‘Universal Harmony’, amongst others. Earl 16, the regular vocalist with 90s dub/dance pioneers Dreadzone, and also responsible for Leftfield’s hit single ‘Release the Pressure’, before they morphed into a techno juggernaut, is also a successful foundation roots vocalist in his own right, one whose single, ‘Malcolm X’ came out in 1975. His stage name derives from when a producer, unimpressed by his real name, Earl Daley, asked his age. He went on to work with Scientist, Lee Perry and King Jammy in Jamaica, then Mad Professor and many others after moving to the UK in 1985. It is these roots staples that he revisits tonight with Wayne’s band, performing ‘Reggae Music’, ‘Declaration of Rights’, ‘Milk and Honey’ and John Holt’s ‘Ali Baba’ (also covered by Dreadzone). With one of the sweetest and most instantly recognisable voices of the genre, Earl has a lightness of touch that comes with making a living from his voice for the last four decades. Earl had a bit of musical history with David and is keen to pay his respects with more of the same. “It’s just a quick ting,” he reminds us more than once and it is clear that even though everyone knows the music, there’s not been much in the way of rehearsals. However, seeing, and hearing, one of the true greats of the roots and culture scene up close and with such an array of local talent is a fitting commemoration, and we are pleased to hear this may become a regular event.

Leo Bowder

CONAN / DIESEL KING / DEAD EXISTENCE / THE MIDNIGHT GHOST TRAIN

The Wheatsheaf

Tonight is the 4th July. An appropriate date given that openers The Midnight Ghost Train are as American as morbid obesity, singer Steve Moss introducing the band in his distinctive Kansas howl before launching into some good old fashioned rock and roll. His enthusiasm gets the better of him and he immediately breaks a string, but after this false start the band give a headline-worthy performances, and while the riffs themselves are a little indistinct from one another the sheer energy they bring makes for an impressive opening gambit. If The Midnight Ghost Train aim to get the crowd moving, London’s Dead Existence want to leave them a hollow, weeping mess. The band are well-known for their torturous sludge-doom racket and tonight they are in fine form, playing songs from cheerily titled new album ‘Endless Misery’. Dual guitars twist discordant notes around each other while singer Jake Harding screams sweet nothings at the audience about the hopelessness of life and the pointlessness

of your dreams and aspirations. Sludge doesn’t come much bleaker than this, and the contortions of Harding’s face as he espouses such hatred is a reflection of the horrible racket these guys make. Diesel King aren’t messing around either and their pugilistic, mid-tempo sludge is the perfect precursor to Conan’s self-styled caveman battle doom. Due to the crowded stage, hulking frontman Mark O’Regan performs from the crowd for the most part which makes it difficult to see him, but judging by the intensity of his booming voice and the occasional flailing of limbs up at the front it’s safe to assume he’s in his element as tracks from their recent album ‘Concrete Burial’ slay with brutal intensity. Conan are currently the kings of the UK doom scene and after a triumphant US tour and having played pretty much every metal festival in the world, it’s great (if somewhat surreal) to finally have them playing in Oxford. People had joked before the gig about their concerns for the structural integrity of the building at the moment

when Conan eventually launch into their drop-F mini epics, and there’s no doubt that the room shakes as the trio open with ‘Crown of Talons’, although the volume is thoughtfully considered for the size of the room, leaving the crowd severely shaken but not actually deaf. Conan’s musical formula is all about economy; no note is extraneous, no word distorts the simplicity of the message being delivered, which means there is absolutely no chaff. What most impresses in a live setting is the sheer density of their sound, and just when you think they can’t get any lower they drop a note that is almost inaudible, hitting you with nothing but pure low-end frequencies. The alternating low and high screams of Chris Fielding and Jon Davies complement each other perfectly as new drummer Rich Lewis locks in with the almighty groove of the riffs. ‘Foehammer’ provides a brief uptempo moment before the devastating duo of ‘Hawk as Weapon’ and ‘Battle in the Swamp’ gets the entire room’s heads nodding in unison. The band ends on perhaps their slowest and bleakest song, ‘Krull’: the song that best encapsulates the band’s entire ethos: slow doom, feedback, lyrics about mythological monsters, and a feeling of complete and utter devastation.

Tom McKibbin

INTRODUCING....

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

Z A I A

Who are they?

Formed in 2013, east Oxford reggae band Zaia (Amy MacKown – *vocals*; David Tomlinson – *bass/vocals*; Patrick Bolton – *keyboards*; Paul Williams – *saxophone*; Leo Petrokofsky – *trumpet*; James Bolton – *drums*, and Josh Hughes – *guitar*) got together as school kids, united by a love of reggae, originally as Raggasaurus ten years ago. When Raggasaurus singer Khaled decided to lay down the mic, the rest of the band continued jamming and writing new tunes together, waiting for the right singer to come along... “and then we met Amy; it’s all gone from there!” Zaia released their debut EP, ‘Challenge 145’ last month and featured in *Nightshift*’s reggae scene feature in July’s issue. They also played at Carnival as well as a supporting Lee Scratch Perry at the O2 Academy, and playing at the Punt in May. They are currently in the process of writing their first album.

What do they sound like?

Soulful, bass-heavy dub reggae dance, one ideally suited to the great outdoors at the height of summer, but capable of adapting to the darker confines of local venues like The Cellar or the Bullingdon. Theirs is a real sun-kissed groove, awash with sparkling brass flourishes and cavernous basslines, but a deep melodic soulfulness at its heart.

What inspires them?

“We love to make people dance! It is such a blessing to play music to an audience.”

Career highlight so far:

“Gotta say Cowley Road Carnival! In the sun, in the place where we all grew up, playing to such a lovely audience.”

And lowlight:

“Back in Raggasaurus days there were some absolute peaches, but the best



was a little festival – don’t remember the name – playing on a collapsing stage, in a thunderstorm, to an empty field. Wait, there was a small tent full of junkies k holing to us. So not all bad.”

Their favourite other Oxfordshire act is:

“Big up to Desta*nation sound, and the Mackating guys!”

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

“Capleton - ‘Reign of Fire’. That album keeps us alive.”

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

“Supporting Gentleman’s Dub Club at The Bullingdon in October. If you love to dance and feel happy, come down!”

Their favourite and least favourite things about Oxford music are:

“The people that make up the music scene in Oxford are the best thing about it! Shout out to Phil Fryer, Hugo Makepeace, Aidan Larkin, and every other local legend that makes Oxford what it is. Least favourite thing has got to be the lack of good venues that aren’t sponsored by some shit phone company.”

You might love them if you love:

Delegators, Beats International, Mackating, Dublings.

Hear them here:

www.zaiband.com

ALL OUR YESTERDAYS

20 YEARS AGO

August 1995 was all about **Supergrass**. The local trio has just enjoyed a Number 1 hit with their debut album, ‘**I Should Coco**’, and this month played a sold-out show at **Abingdon Old Gaol** (don’t go looking for it, it’s a block of flats now), a fundraiser for The Notting Hill Housing Trust, which worked with homeless teenagers in London. The intense heat of the venue meant drummer **Danny Goffey** was forced to leave the stage twice and ended the evening suffering heat exhaustion, while **Gaz Coombes** and **Mick Quinn** had to be administered oxygen onstage. Despite this, the gig was a triumph, with the band playing their album in its entirety, including feelgood hit of the summer, ‘Alright’.

Meanwhile, ‘I Should Coco’ producer **Sam Williams** was enjoying another slice of success as his band **The Mystics** released their new single ‘See You’ on **Fontana**, a deal that was to prove ill fated but right now felt like something very special about to break. **Arthur Turner’s Lovechild?**, meanwhile, enjoyed their own bit of fanfare, signing a deal with local label Rotator on the pitch at The Manor just before Oxford Utd played a pre-season friendly with West Ham. The band kicked footballs into the crowd and missed, and subsequently missed most of the match – including a Paul Moody hattrick – because they were doing something naughty and rock and roll downstairs rather than sitting in their seats.

In another show of world-conquering action for the Oxford music scene at this period in time, music biz flag bearer *Billboard* magazine ran a front-page feature on the city and its music, comparing it to Liverpool and Motown. And thus descended several hundred A&R men upon Cowley Road, all of whom are now unemployed.

10 YEARS AGO

Fast forward ten years and August 2005 was also all about **Supergrass**. The band released their fifth studio album, the introspective ‘**Road To Rouen**’, which, while hitting the Top 10, sold less well than its predecessors. Reflecting the album’s nature, the band headed out on a semi-acoustic tour, including, this month, an “intimate show” at the **Oxford Playhouse**, which contrasted to the extravagant Greatest Hits show at the New Theatre a year earlier. Talking to *Nightshift*, Mick Quinn explained the mood of the album, recorded in southern France: “French life is particularly slow paced, where people take their time to savour the flavours of life. If we’d recorded it in London it would have been a very different, perhaps more confused, record.”

Hoping to be the next Supergrass back then were local rockers **Nation**, who had audaciously hired **The New Theatre** for their album launch show. The dandyish, phenomenally self-confident stadium-rock quintet had spent the previous couple of years playing tours of local schools as well as playing for British troops in Bosnia and felt ready for the big time with ‘Walk On’, their second album. If anyone knows their whereabouts now, do get in touch. Another bunch of young hopefuls in town were Yorkshire newcomers **Arctic Monkeys**, who played a sold-out show at **The Zodiac**. Despite the hype surrounding the band, we really rather liked them, and things didn’t turn out too bad for them, did it. Bigger names – at the time – were gathering in **South Park** for local blandfest radio station **Fox FM**’s annual Party In The Park. Current hero of the downtrodden, **Charlotte Church**, was on the bill, alongside **McFly**, **Girls Aloud**, **Texas**, **KT**

THIS MONTH IN OXFORD MUSIC HISTORY

Tunstall, **Chesney Hawkes**, **Lucie Silvas**, **The Noise Next Door** and **Mark Owen**, as well as “the ferrety one from **Busted**.” The review of the day reports that *Nightshift* was back in the pub some time before it finished, a commitment to professionalism countered by a desire not to be committed.

5 YEARS AGO

It’s not all about chart hits of course. Back in August 2010 indefatigable local rockers **Smilex** had just been awarded Best Live Band at the annual **Unsigned Awards**, run by *Playmusic* magazine. “It’s a nice surprise,” singer **Lee Christian** told *Nightshift*, “when you’ve been going as long as we have, you forget anyone is paying attention, so it’s cool after all these years of blood, sweat and other bodily fluids, to get a bit of national recognition. Gracing the cover of this month’s *Nightshift* were a very young bunch of noisemakers hoping to hit the heights – **Dial F For Frankenstein**. Still rated as one of the best live bands to come out of Oxford by certain *Nightshift* contributors, the band’s lifespan was short but explosive, with a memorable set Truck Festival a particular highlight. Highlights of a relatively quiet month in town, were **Jah Wobble** at the **O2 Academy** – a venue he returns to next month – **Fairport Convention**’s annual **Cropredy Festival** – which happens again this month – with guests **Status Quo**, **Little Feat** and **Bellowhead**, and rap crew **Ugly Duckling** at the Bullingdon – where they returned to a couple months back. Everything comes back around again, don’t it. But hopefully not Fox FM’s Party In The Park.

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DEMOS

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DEMO OF THE MONTH

THE BIG SUN

Strange and sometimes rather lovely the sort of talent that lies hidden in Oxfordshire's quieter corners. Who'd have thought we'd have our own answer to St Etienne right on our doorstep (okay, so Sarah Cracknell does live in the shire, but you know what we mean). The Big Sun come from Eynsham and have a tendency to sound like a stoner pixie disco in a meadow full of bunnies. From the giddy piano gallop that opens 'Dumb LKU', through the lush synth strings, squelchy electronics and glitchy beats to the singer's sleepy-eyed croon, they never sound in any great hurry to get anywhere, or that they're even aware of where they are at any point, but throughout this defiantly homemade-sounding demo, they prove that they've got a very firm grasp of what makes pop music fun and loveable. Incidentally the other hand is firmly grasping the sweetie jar. The best song on this demo is called 'Jelly Bang'. Of course it is. Muso worthies will doubtless scoff at its very existence and dismiss it as mere fluff. Yeah well, kittens are little bundles of fluff too, and only the terminally diseased of soul and spirit don't love kittens.

AMORAL COMPASS

Talking of sounding homemade, we'd hazard a guess that Amoral Compass's music was roughly nailed together from whatever scraps of chipboard, tin cans and cobwebs they found lying around in their garden. They probably think finesse is a lake in Scotland. But does that make them bad? To some ears (most if we're honest) probably, but we'll indulge a fair degree of shambolic noise here at *Nightshift*. Which is handy since they don't come much more shambolic than this. The first track barely passes as music at all, a rudimentary bass-heavy dirge with possibly the world's most disinterested singer ever intoning tunelessly over the top. Even when he chants "Bring me my toys / Fuck yeah, toys!" he musters all the rage and conviction of Marvin the Paranoid Android reciting his shopping list. So far so terrible, but a switch of lead vocal and things improve significantly, even if they're no closer to penning anything resembling an actual tune, Celina MacDonald, doing bored and sullen with far greater aplomb, the grungy guitar noise at last reaching a plateau where passing ornaments might be at risk. And then we're back to shrugging and mumbling and generally meandering around the outskirts of what is popularly recognised as music,

Demo of the Month wins a free half day at Soundworks studio in Oxford, courtesy of Umair Chaudhry. Visit www.umairchaudhry.co.uk/nightshift

although the finale, a droning dirge topped with barely decipherable poetry, does have an almost hypnotic psychedelic edge to it. Lo-fi in extremis, Amoral Compass might be better simply ditching any attempt at musicality, handing all vocal duties over to Celina to simply shout what comes into her head and cranking the guitar and bass up to a level where the very fabric of space and time starts to collapse in on itself. That'd be great. It'd also have the bonus effect of blowing all those stray cobwebs in the garden away.

DECOVO

Given we're reviewing this month's demo pile the day after getting back from Cornbury Festival, during which we managed to sit through an entire hour of Jack Savoretti (admittedly because by that point we'd drunk enough to render us immobile), it really shouldn't be too hard to make us think you're inspired and original. Beyond the abilities of Decovo though, sadly. They've previously had a bit of a shoeing in these pages and compared to Bastille – for which we offer a semi apology since however bad things get, being compared to Bastille isn't something any band should have to endure without recourse to lawyers – and we'd hoped they might have learned a valuable life lesson, or at least learned how to write a half decent tune, but while there's a rudimentary degree of musical competence here that might not have been entirely apparent last time, it's still generic indie rock that squishes together bits and pieces of pretty much every major player from the last 20 or so years, from Oasis, through Arctic Monkeys to Foals. We'd describe 'You Can't Stop Us' as plodding, but that would be an insult to Mr Plod, lord mayor of Ploddington in Plodland, and the overall feeling is that someone needs to spike Decovo's coffee with an industrial dose of meth just to get a bit of energy out of them. Hopefully time and exposure to something off the musical beaten track will make a decent band of them.

THE PAISLEY DAZE

This lot are currently split between Oxford and Hong Kong according to their email, which might explain why much of it sounds like it was recorded on an old answer phone via a dodgy dial-up internet connection. Certainly there's little to suggest the band are, or ever have been, in the same room as each other, and while in this day and age such things are irrelevant, maybe at least a brief discussion between the guitarist and the rhythm section as to whether they're going to be a funk band or a bunch of crazy psychedelic groovers would have eased the process for all concerned. 'We Gotta Go' in particular is a mess, which is a shame because

deep down at its core it sounds a bit like some long lost Can jam with Malcolm Mooney replaced by some wild-haired r'n'b belter. 'I Wish We Could Be Lovers', meanwhile is considerably more coherent with its unrelenting, arpeggiating rhythm nodding to Bo Diddley and Dick Dale, while the guitarist simply freewheels where he feels like and the singer goes all Jonathan Richman on us. As we mentioned before we're not really ones for hi-fidelity here at *Nightshift*, but occasionally we're presented with evidence that a bit of production polish is a necessity. This could be great. Hopefully once they're all in the same country it will be.

MATT CARTER

Matt Carter likes Nick Drake. We know this because he says so in his email, and also because every song on his Soundcloud sounds like Nick Drake. And that's not a bad thing when you consider the alternatives. Matt tells us he's back in Oxford and looking to make an album after time spent working in East Africa, though we suspect where he's really been is sat in some rural idyll gazing out at a moonlit lake for possibly weeks on end, which would account for the serene, hushed mood of these songs. His feather bed voice glides over simple acoustic guitar or piano and the world becomes still. Song titles like 'Weary Traveller' and 'Bliss Mill' only serve to accentuate the mood of wistful reflection. The only real criticism we'd make is that once he's sat down to pen such reveries on the shores of that placid stretch of water, he's unwilling to get up and look at some other scenery, so the songs do become a bit samey after a while. But, y'know, amid the hurly burly of modern life, it's sometimes nice to simply sit in peaceful contemplating of nature's stillness. Or at least it would be if BT Open Reach hadn't just parked up outside and started drilling into the pavement across the road. Cheers, you fuckers.

DIRTY VALUABLES

Not much chance of BT, or even the RAF, drowning out Dirty Valuables, such is their dedication to riffage and rock music. Not to the point of total sonic carnage of the kind we rather enjoy, sadly, more a meaty form of pop-tinged punk-metal that is simultaneously massively out of date and capable of middle-order main stage rock festival success. Opener 'Placebo Trials', for example, is gruff and shouty 90s-styled grunge in the vein of The Gin Blossoms, or the more melodic side of Red Hot Chili Peppers and it's got swearing and shouting on it and everything, but just as we're gearing ourselves up for a bit of braking stuff fun, they come on all contemplative, spiritual even, with 'Just In Time For Autumn'. "Never forget who you are / Never forget how you got this far," opines the singer, when really great rock music really is about forgetting all that stuff because you've drunk six double JD and cokes for breakfast. Shame about the poncey lyrical content as

there's some decent riff action going on. Likewise 'Better Days', which sounds like Headcount's considerably more reasonable but less effective older brother making conversation at an accounts department Christmas do. 'Enobarbas', meanwhile, beefs up the guitars but throws in a heap of "Ooh-ooh-ooh" harmonies to the point we're asking, are you The Wildhearts or One Direction? If the answer is both at the same time, you might just become millionaires. Just don't tell Louis Walsh.

THE DEMO DUMPER

TWOSIXONES

"We are TwoSixOnes, the most exciting band you've never heard of," begin TwoSixOnes by way of introduction. And the thing is, we'll have to believe them, because if we've not heard of a band, how can we know that they're more exciting than TwoSixOnes? But then, how do TwoSixOnes know which bands we have or haven't heard of? We've heard of some pretty bloody fantastic bands, but even if we pick a couple of the more obscure ones we've heard lately, like Battery Operated Orchestra or Slum of Legs, TwoSixOnes are going to have their work cut out to be more exciting than them. "We would love to feature in your magazine," they continue, "Think Extreme covering Sheppard and you're probably not even vaguely close to what we sound like." And to be honest, dear reader, we really hope that thought isn't close to what they sound like, because sounding like Extreme (tortuous American soft rockers what we thought had died sometime in the 1990s) covering Sheppard (putrefying Aussie band who describe themselves as "indie" but sound like Steps having any remaining semblance of fun filleted by a born-again Christian committee for teenage moral wellbeing) would make them utterly fucking terrible. Shit, we haven't even played TwoSixOne's demo yet and we're utterly fucking terrified. Our one tiny glimmer of hope is that they're taking the piss and actually sound like a drug-fuelled whirlwind romance between Fucked Up and The Body & Thou. (*Nightshift* presses 'play'). Funk bass. Lily-livered excuse for stadium rock. Bit of Afropop trilling. Boy band harmonising. Heavy whiff of regional band competition semi-final runners-up. Distinct feeling that the vague concepts of rock and funk music have been hijacked by a born-again Christian committee for teenage moral wellbeing. Heap of shit then, basically. The very thought that TwoSixOnes are, or ever were, the most exciting band we'd never heard still fills us with a sense of dread (just how bad would all the others have to be?), but luckily we've actually heard them now, so such pondering need no longer concern us. The important thing is that we never have to hear them again.

Send demos for review to: Nightshift, PO Box 312, Kidlington, OX5 1ZU, or email links to editor@nightshiftmag.co.uk, 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. And don't fucking whine about your review on Twitter either, else we'll print a screenshot and make you look like a prize tit.

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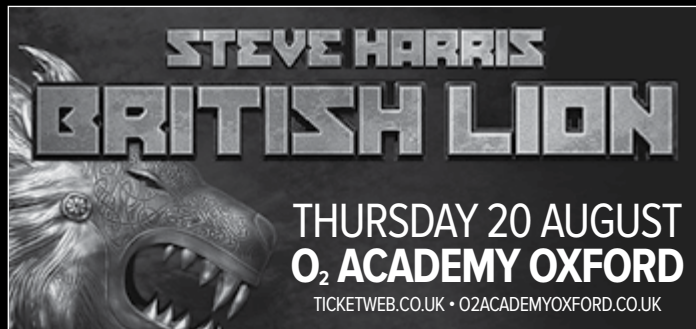
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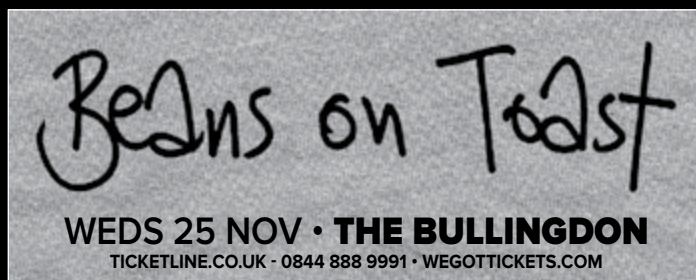
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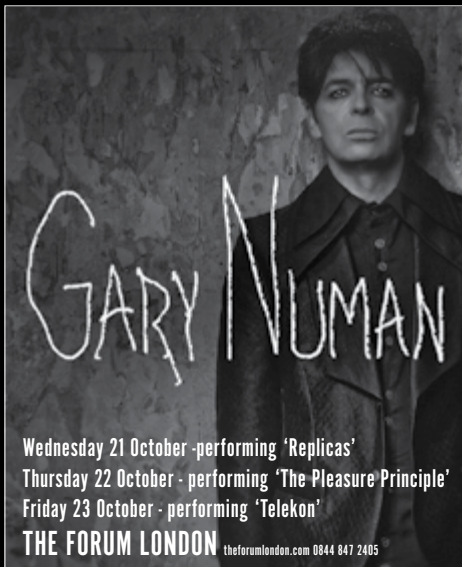
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