



NIGHTSHIFT

Oxford's Music Magazine

**Free every
month
Issue 234
January
2015**

Duotone

"People will come to me after a gig and say, 'that's the first time I've seen someone head-bang playing the cello!'"

Virtuoso gun for hire and loopmaster
Barney Morse-Brown talks cellos,
collaborations and sad, sad songs.

Also in this issue
Introducing **WILLIE J HEALEY**
plus
all your local music news, reviews and gigs

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NIGHTSHIFT: PO Box 312, Kidlington, OX5 1ZU. Phone: 01865 372255

THE BULLINGDON

JANUARY 2015

Sunday 28th December

NTNS vs We Are Elements
Ilghazi
Man of Science
Pool Tax
Doors: 10pm

Tuesday 30th December

Jazz at the Bullingdon:
Guitar Summit
Doors: 8.30pm

Wednesday 31st December

NYE - Barbarama
The Dublings
Dave Norton
Sam Seller
Oxford Allstars
The Gees
Doors: 9pm

Saturday 17th January

HodgePodge Presents:
The Birthday
Extravaganza
Doors: 9pm

Tuesday 20th January

Jazz at the Bullingdon:
Alvin Roy's Reeds Unlimited
Doors: 8.30pm

Friday 23rd January

Balloon Ascents
Duotone
Doors: 7pm

Saturday 24th January

Karma Free Diet
Doors: 7pm

Saturday 24th January

Bedrock
Oxford's Rocking Club Night.
Release Your Inner Dinosaur!
Doors: 11pm

Monday 26th January

Stark
Invisible Vegas
Doors: 7pm

Tuesday 27th January

Jazz at the Bullingdon:
Guitar Summit
Doors: 8.30pm

Friday 30th January

Bloodstock:
Metal to the Masses
Heat 1
Doors: 6.30pm

Saturday 31st January

Bloodstock:
Metal to the Masses
Heat 2
Doors: 6.30pm

Monday 2nd February

The Haven Club:
Jon Amor (The Hoax)
Joel Fisk (UK)
Doors: 7pm

Tuesday 3rd February

Jazz at the Bullingdon:
Hugh Turner Band
Doors: 8.30pm

Thursday 5th February

Slow Club
Doors: 7pm

Saturday 7th February

Drew Holcomb (Duo)
Doors: 7pm

Saturday 7th February

Simple:
Subb-an
Doors: 11pm

Tuesday 10th February

Jazz at the Bullingdon:
Heavy Dexters
Doors: 8.30pm

Thursday 12th February

Hidden Charms
George Taylor Music
Island
Doors: 7pm

Friday 13th February

The Egyptian Death Orchestra
The Neon Violets
Kancho! + DJ Krazi
Doors: 7pm

Friday 13th February

Cut Grass
Doors: 11pm

Saturday 14th February

Sons of Bill
Doors: 7pm

Saturday 14th February

Bedrock
Oxford's Rocking Club Night.
Release Your Inner Dinosaur!
Doors: 11pm

Tuesday 17th February

Jazz at the Bullingdon:
Stuart Henderson Quartet
Doors: 8.30pm

Wednesday 18th February

Frontier Ruckus
Les Clochards
Doors: 7pm

Friday 20th February

The Dreaming Spires
The Shapes
Doors: 7pm

Saturday 21st February

Space Heroes
of the People
The Long Insiders
Hugh McManners
Doors: 7pm

Monday 23rd February

Giles Robson
and the Dirty Aces
Doors: 7pm

Tuesday 24th February

Jazz at the Bullingdon:
Alvin Roy's Reeds Unlimited
Doors: 8.30pm

Friday 27th February

Keep-Hush presents:
Walk Thru Pt 1
Last Japan
Silas & Snare Surgeon
Phase 2
Pilgrim
Doors: 11pm

Saturday 28th February

Bloodstock:
Metal to the Masses
Heat 3
Doors: 6.30pm

Tuesday 3rd March

Jazz at the Bullingdon:
Guitar Summit
Doors: 8.30pm

Wednesday 4th March

Aquilo
Doors: 7pm

Friday 6th March

Kim Churchill
Doors: 7.30pm

Friday 6th March

Dr Syntax (UK Tour)
Doors: 11pm

Saturday 7th March

Police Dog Hogan
Doors: 7pm

Tuesday 10th March

Jazz at the Bullingdon:
Blakes 7 Funk Project
Doors: 8.30pm

Wednesday 11th March

Tragedy - A Metal Tribute
to The Bee Gees & Beyond
Doors: 7pm

Friday 13th March

Sivu
Doors: 7pm

Saturday 14th March

Bloodstock:
Metal to the Masses
Heat 4
Doors: 6.30pm

Saturday 14th March

Ben UFO
Doors: 11pm

Monday 16th March

The Haven Club:
Stephen Dale Petit
Doors: 7pm

Tuesday 17th March

Jazz at the Bullingdon:
Stuart Henderson Quartet
Doors: 8.30pm

Saturday 21st March

The Knights of Mentis
Black Feathers
The Shapes
Trev Williams
Doors: 6pm

Saturday 21st March

Bedrock
Oxford's Rocking Club Night.
Release Your Inner Dinosaur!
Doors: 11pm

Tuesday 24th March

Jazz at the Bullingdon:
Hugh Turner Band
Doors: 8.30pm

Friday 27th March

The Showhawk Duo
Doors: 7pm

Monday 30th March

The Haven Club:
Ben Poole
Doors: 7.30pm

Tuesday 31st March

Jazz at the Bullingdon:
Alvin Roy's Reeds Unlimited
Doors: 8.30pm

Wednesday 8th April

Turbowolf
Doors: 7pm

Friday 10th April

Larkin Poe
Doors: 7pm

Saturday 11th April

Bloodstock:
Metal to the Masses
Heat 5
Doors: 6.30pm

Saturday 18th April

Bedrock
Oxford's Rocking Club Night.
Release Your Inner Dinosaur!
Doors: 11pm

Monday 20th April

The Haven Club:
Earl Thomas
Doors: 7pm

Monday 27th April

The Haven Club:
Girls with Guitars
Blues Caravan
Doors: 7pm

Thursday 30th April

Simple:
Pearson Sound
Doors: 11pm

Saturday 2nd May

Bloodstock:
Metal to the Masses
1st Semi-Final
Doors: 6.30pm

Monday 18th May

The Haven Club:
Virgil & the Accelerators
Doors: 7pm

Saturday 23rd May

Bloodstock:
Metal to the Masses
2nd Semi-Final
Doors: 6.30pm

Monday 1st June

Chameleons Vox
'What does Anything Mean? Basically' Tour
Doors: 7.30pm

Monday 8th June

The Haven Club:
Laurence Jones
Doors: 7pm

Saturday 13th June

Bloodstock:
Metal to the Masses
3rd Semi-Final
Doors: 6.30pm

Monday 15th June

Ryan McGarvey (US)
Doors: 7pm

Monday 22nd June

Hamilton Loomis
Doors: 7pm

Friday 3rd July

Bloodstock:
Metal to the Masses
The Final
Doors: 6.30pm

Monday 13th July

Moreland & Arbuckle
Doors: 7pm

NEWS

Nightshift: PO Box 312, Kidlington, OX5 1ZU

Phone: 01865 372255 email: nightshift@oxfordmusic.net

Online: nightshift.oxfordmusic.net

THE OXFORD PUNT is still open for applications from local bands and musicians wanting to play the event. The Punt takes place on Wednesday 13th May featuring some 20 acts across five venues in the city centre.

Running since 1997, The Punt is the annual showcase of new Oxford music talent, providing early exposure for many of Oxford's most successful bands. Venues this year are The Purple Turtle, The Cellar, The Wheatsheaf, The Turl Street Kitchen and The White Rabbit. To enter, simply send us a link to your music to nightshift@oxfordmusic.net. Clearly mark your mail Punt. Acts must be from Oxfordshire, have some gigging experience and be over 18. A

contact phone number is essential. Applications to play this year's Punt were opened last month with dozens of acts applying. Many of whom were unable to follow the very basic rule of having to include a contact number in their application. Which makes us think they'll have difficulty understanding slightly more complex requirements nearer the time. If you have already applied but think you might have neglected to include that one essential thing. The only thing we asked you to include. Because you're a bit simple. Then why not try again, this time utilising what passes for your brain.

ROGER HODGSON headlines the Sunday night of this year's Cornbury Festival. The Supertramp singer and chief songwriter is an unexpectedly early announcement for the festival, which is promising more big-name acts on the main stage this summer. Cornbury Festival is a week later than usual in the year. This year's festival takes place over the weekend of the 10th-12th July at Great Tew Country Park. Early bird tickets for the festival went on sale at the end of November, priced £155 for adults. Visit www.cornburyfestival.com for more details.

AUDIOGRAFT returns for another celebration of new experimental music, sound-art events and exhibitions in March. The annual festival, curated by the Sonic

Art Research Unit (SARU) at Oxford Brookes University and co-promoted by OCM, runs from **11th – 22nd March**. The festival will take place in some of Oxford's more unusual spaces and venues and will feature renowned international and UK artists. Names already announced for the 2015 festival include Mario De Vega; Minoru Sato; Sam Kidel; Mike Blow; Andy Guhl; Lucio Capece; Darren Copeland; Diego Garro; Jennifer Walshe; Matthew Shlomowitz; James Saunders; Paul Whitty; Joanna Baillie; Felicity Ford; Maria Chavez, and Sally Golding, with more to be announced. News and new additions to the line-up can be found at www.audiograft.co.uk.

BELLOWHEAD AND SHOW OF HANDS are the star names among the first wave of acts to be announced for this year's **Towersey Festival**. The annual folk festival, which celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2014, runs over the weekend of the 28th-31st August at Thame Showground. Other acts confirmed so far include Sally Barker, The Treacherous Orchestra, Martin Simpson, John Smith, The Travelling Band and The Spooky Men's Chorale. Tickets are on sale now, with adult weekend tickets at £90 and discounts for under-18s and children. Visit www.towerseyfestival.com

LIU BEI follow up their place in Nightshift's end of year Top 25 with a new EP and Oxford show in February. The new band formed by Oxford singer Richard Walters release their 'Goodness' EP on the 2nd February. They then play a show at The Cellar on the 3rd as part of a UK tour. Visit soundcloud.com/liubeiwins to hear the new songs.

LOCAL GUITAR TUTOR RIKKY ROOKSBY releases his new book 'Songs & Solos' this month. It is his twelfth title for Backbeat/Hal Leonard publishing and examines the subject of solos from a songwriter's perspective. It deals with many practical issues to do with where and how to use solos in songs, and features a 42-track CD of examples. Rikky's first book in the series, 'How to Write Songs on Guitar', released in 2000, has sold



STORNOWAY have been announced as ambassadors for The Cellar as part of this year's **Independent Venue Week**.

Singer Brian Briggs will play a rare solo set at the venue on **Friday 30th January**, while bandmates Jon Ouin and Oli Steadman will take to the decks for the night. BBC Introducing producer Liz Green will also be making her DJing debut, with more live acts to be announced.

Independent Venue Week returns over the week of the 26th January – 2nd February. The annual celebration of the UK's small independent venues this year features 85 venues around the country, including The Cellar and The Jericho Tavern.

Talking about the festival, Brian said, "We played every single place we could get a gig in the early days, and numerous times, including The Cellar. If it wasn't for small, independent venues it would be nigh on impossible for a new band to start building a following and to cut their teeth in the live music world."

The Cellar's Vez Hoper expressed her excitement at getting Stornoway involved with the venue that gave them some of their earliest shows: "We were so excited to be able to ask Stornoway. Our reasons behind choosing them is their fantastic success story, built on sheer hard work and a massive appreciation of how the local Oxford music scene has supported them, and largely thanks to the opportunities small venues, and independent publications like *Nightshift*, have helped them to build up their audiences. Wow, does that band have a phenomenal work ethic! Through this all, they've maintained strong links with all the local Oxford venues and are well loved by all for this. As a local I watched them go from playing the odd small room and pub to rising up through the small venue circuit to the main stage at Glastonbury."

This year's national Independent Venue Week ambassador is the very great Frank Turner, taking over the baton from Radiohead's Colin Greenwood. The week is part-funded by The Arts Council, with indie labels Rough Trade, Domino, Fierce Panda and Xtra Mile among a host of event partners. Visit www.independentvenueweek.com for more details. *Tickets for the Cellar show on the 30th are on sale now, priced £6 in advance from wegottickets.com.*

125,000 copies and been translated into German, French and Russian.

OXFORD GIGBOT provides a regular local gig listing update on Twitter (@oxgigbot), bringing you new gigs as soon as they go live. They also provide a free weekly listings email. Follow them. Do it now.

AS EVER, don't forget to tune into **BBC Oxford Introducing** every Saturday night between 8-9pm on 95.2fm. The dedicated local music

show plays the best Oxford releases and demos as well as featuring interviews and sessions with local acts. The show is available to stream or download as a podcast at bbc.co.uk/oxford. Regularly updated local music news is available online at www.musicinoxford.co.uk. The site also features interactive reviews, a photo gallery and gig guide. Nightshift's online form is open to all local music fans and musicians at nightshift.oxfordmusic.net

A quiet word with

Duotone



“MAYBE THAT’S WHAT DREW me to the cello in the first place: its depth and sincerity, its solemnness. It certainly has the ability to bring on the tears, but like any instrument it’s just down to who’s playing it.

BARNEY MORSE-BROWN is discussing the nature of the musical instrument he’s become intrinsically associated with over the last decade and beyond. One of the most recognisable characters on the local music scene, Barney’s talent with the cello has taken him to places most local musicians can only dream off, including the Sydney Opera House and *Later With Jools Holland*. His musical history includes stints with The Imagined Village folk supergroup

and as part of million-selling singer Birdy’s band, as well as in-demand session and tour musician for the likes of Eliza Carthy and Jackie Oates.

BEYOND SUCH WORK, though, he’s well known and loved for his own music, recorded and performed under the moniker Duotone, as which he’s released two full albums with a third just recorded. Although occasionally in the past a collaborative affair, Duotone is really a one-man show, a chance for Barney to show that, much as his talent can augment all manner of fellow musicians’ material, in his own right he is a songwriter and performer of extraordinary range and versatility. Witness Duotone live and you’ll be

left awestruck by the way Barney feeds instrumentation and vocals through a loop pedal, elaborating on the resulting sounds to create music that is beautiful, haunting, innovative and deeply emotive. While he is a great singer and multi-instrumentalist it’s the cello with which he is most closely associated, and we ask Barney about its air of sadness since, listening to his new album, ‘Let’s Get Low’, we’re struck – laid low at times it must be said – by the gorgeous sense of melancholy and longing in songs like ‘Little White Caravan’, already a contender for song of the year. Barney is aware of the instrument’s emotional tug, but plays it down. “I think I remember recording some

‘happy’ cello on this record. And what about the bassoon? That’s a pretty sad sounding instrument! Nothing against the bassoon by the way. Lovely instrument.”

FANS OF DUOTONE’S MUSIC – an airy, atmospheric mix of traditional folk, chamber music, pop and experimentation, can be almost evangelical about it. Two self-released albums to date, ‘Work Harder and One Day You Will Find Her’ and ‘Ropes’, have made his name in certain circles and attracted all the right sort of attention, but ‘Let’s Get Low’ looks set to take Duotone to another level altogether, a well-deserved break into wider acclaim. Believe us, it’s a stunning album, one that provides a musical wormhole to bring together the disparate universes of Nick Drake, Jacqueline du Pre and Brian Eno amongst others. Recorded with producer Richard Evans, ‘Let’s Get Low’ is set for release in March; given a chance to look and listen back to it now, how does Barney feel about it and how it compares to his last two albums? “Ultimately I feel happy to be at this stage of making the record, being able to listen to it as a whole, and even though what I think of it changes, sometimes day-to-day, I’m chuffed to have made a record that I feel sums up where I’m at right now. “Emotionally I haven’t really been comparing this record to the last two, partly because I think they’re both unique to that time in my life and they represented where I was back then. Musically and lyrically though, it’s a definite departure from the Duotone ‘sound’ of albums one and two, if only for the use of synths.”

AN EARLY TASTER FOR THE new album was a video of Barney performing ‘Little White Caravan’ live in the studio, utilising his array of instruments and loops, a great insight to the virtuosity he brings to his gigs where everything is performed live by Barney alone. That kind of arrangement can’t work in a recording studio, surely? “I never use the looper in the studio; it all has to be played in live, with real people. The downside to this is that I then have to ‘re-learn’ all the songs and work out how I incorporate the looper. It does mean at least that there’s a difference between the studio version and live. No point in playing the songs exactly the same. Might as well just press play.” Anything you’d particularly like to be able to bring to the live show that you currently can’t? “Maybe ten cellos, live drums, piano,

actually maybe an orchestra... I got into live looping purely for the reason of not having an orchestra up my sleeve, as it was the best way I could create the sounds I had in my head. There’s something about working in a band, with real people, though, that I really miss. Looping is great and efficient but having someone to connect with is the ultimate.” You write and play everything on ‘Let’s Get Low’, so what does a producer like Richard Evans bring to the album? “He’s the one person I can think of who throws himself completely into the music he makes and he’s has been absolutely instrumental in creating the perfect setting and foundation for these new songs. “Before we got together to plan this new album we had worked together on a number of projects over the years in his studio and I think because we had a good working relationship, both in the studio and through touring, that it was an obvious choice to ask him to produce. He took all of my rough demos that I had recorded on my boat and even though we re-recording some parts, live drums, electric guitar and a few cellos here and there, he created a sense of space and place for each instrument and basically created what you hear. I just wrote the songs. He made them sound good.”

A GRADUATE FROM THE Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama in Cardiff, and post-graduate of the Royal College of Music in London, where he studied Baroque cello, Barney started playing cello aged six and progressed through the ABRSM grades, gaining a distinction at grade 8 at the age of 16, subsequently being offered a scholarship to study at the Birmingham Junior School under Elaine Ackers. Rather than follow the classical route into an orchestra that his talents would certainly earn him, Barney has taken a path into music that’s far more individualistic. Does he still feel, though, that people have a preconception of what he’s going to sound like when they see him take to the stage with a cello? “I’m not sure if I think about it too much these days. I’m aware that the cello has been on a steady rise in its use outside the classical world with people like Vivienne Long, who played with Damien Rice on ‘O’. She certainly helped to show what the cello could do within a band. Seeing her play ‘Seven Nation Army’ at Glastonbury gave me the confidence to showcase the cello more. ““Ooh, a cello, I love the cello’ is the common phrase I get pre-gig, and ‘I can safely say that I’ve never seen a cello been played that way before’ or, ‘that’s the first time I’ve seen someone head-bang playing the cello!’ post gig. It’s not really my mission, but I like

the fact that people see the cello in a new light when they see it being torn to shreds or taking the role of bass or lead guitar. It certainly has a place in the black-tie classical world but there are loads of amazing musicians taking the cello to new places and I’m just doing my bit.”

THE LAST TIME WE featured Barney on the cover of *Nightshift*, back in 2009, he had just launched his own record label, Garrett-Brown Music, with his wife Kate Garrett, the highly-influential singer and musician who was part of cult local stars The Mystics as well as an acclaimed solo artist, and who founded the Oxford Young Women’s Music Project, providing space, support and education for aspiring local female musicians. Tragically Kate died of cancer shortly after that interview ran, aged just 37. Lyrically Barney’s new album continues to deal on his thoughts and feelings about Kate. How does he feel they have moved on from previous albums, and does writing about her help deal with that loss? “This record, like the last two in a way, is just a documentation of where I am at within myself, a marker really. It’s hard to quantify, the journey through loss and grief is only something you can analyse through looking back. It’s impossible to predict an emotional state so I think on the subject of writing about it there have been many times where I’ve wanted to avoid writing about the elephant in the room, but because it was such a catastrophe in my life, I often find myself regularly returning. “I would say though that it feels like there’s a new depth and a different perspective to how I’ve approached writing this time around. It seems there’s a huge amount of ‘stuff’ that was buried deeper below the loss of Kate that has started to colour the music and the way I write. By no means making things any clearer, ‘cause it will never be clear, but through diving deeper it has somehow given me a stronger sense of self.” How do you feel the Young Women’s Music Project has kept Kate’s legacy alive? “The work that Zahra (Tehrani) has been doing is really inspiring and she is the right person to take the YWMP forward having come up through the project herself and having worked alongside Kate. I wish she could have been there to see it come to fruition, seeing her name on the studio door at the Ark T Centre where she gave so much of her time to help others. Kate would be chuffed to know it is still going strong.”

BACK IN 2006 BARNEY WAS invited to join the award-winning, globetrotting Imagined Village band by Afro-Celt Soundsystem’s Simon Emmerson, a collective also featuring

Martin and Eliza Carthy, Jackie Oates, Chris Wood and Sheila Chandra. It was something of a big break for him as a cellist. “Yeah, thinking about it, it was really. Being asked to play on the first record alongside all those amazing artists was fantastic. It’s really through that band that I got to work with Eliza, Chris and Jackie; one gig eventually lead to another, so I’m immensely grateful to Simon for that phone call.” How much creative input did you get in that band and what did you take from the experience? “The opportunities opened up for each member of the band as it went on, with the last album, ‘Bending the Dark’, being a more collaborative project. Each member brought songs, lyrics and tunes that meant that the individual members had a bigger stake and in turn made it more personal. “It was a big learning curve to be part of a large band: communication, listening skills, and tour bus etiquette. I’m hoping there’ll be another opportunity to make a new record and go out on the road. I miss them.” You’re also part of Birdy’s touring band; what’s that been like and what do you think you’ve brought to each other’s music along the way? “We’ve all improved as musicians I think, I certainly have. There’s something about the regularity and focus of being on the road that has helped my playing and listening. I enjoy feeling like a better musician by the end of a tour, working on technique, trying not to make the same mistakes you made the night before. I have very happy memories of playing some amazing venues around the world, namely three nights at Sydney Opera House; in fact that Australian tour was all amazing. “Long haul flights were new to me. Drink lots of water, do those little exercises in your seat! I had the opportunity to see more of America and again, play some iconic venues. I’m really grateful to have had these experiences. They’ll stay with me for a long time.” More locally, Barney worked with Jess Hall on her debut album ‘Bookshelves’ last year. There seems to be a shared sense of longing in both artists’ songs. “Jess actually got in touch through Facebook – it has its uses! – after a gig at the A1 Pool Hall a few years back and asked if I would like to play cello with her. We clicked musically because of a mutual appreciation for that sense of longing maybe. She’s a wonderful singer and writer. You can’t help but be drawn to that voice. When we came to plan the recording of her debut the intention was to showcase her voice and for the arrangements to be there only to complement and support it. “There’s always been a huge wealth of talent on the Oxford scene. I’m lucky to be part of it

and be surrounded by wonderful musicians and dear friends. Sure there are people who I’d love to work with, both locally and on the wider scene, but you only have to go to somewhere like Catweazle to be inspired and make new connections.”

WORKING AS A SESSION musician beyond making his own music, Barney has been able to earn a living of sorts playing music, but how much of a struggle is it, particularly nowadays, for musicians to keep going financially. What are the chief obstacles in their way and in what ways has he overcome these? “Wow, well, yes I have somehow managed to put the bread on the table through music, though it certainly hasn’t always been straightforward and it’s likely to not be again. It’s clear that the times when I’ve told the universe what it is I do, been committed and turned up regardless, those have been the times when I’ve probably succeeded I think; a bit of blind hope helps but given the chance again I might not leave a steady job to ‘make it’ without any clue of how to *actually* make ends meet. “I’ve heard a lot of people say that this is the best time to be a musician, to be a creative, because it’s possible now to get your music out there to literally millions of people. In a way yes, but the reality is there are also millions of people all wanting the same thing, so to get your head above water takes not only a big leap of faith, and a healthy social media following so I’m told, but also the support of a professional who knows how to market a product and most importantly someone who will hopefully nurture and guide your creativity. “It really comes down to your own version of success and what that looks like. It might be to get signed, sell loads of records, or get your five minutes of fame etc. but without wanting to sound weird, I believe I’ve been able to put the bread on the table through music because I have been willing to diversify. Of course it’s important to be single minded, focused, confident and to strive for what you want because without it no one’s gonna take you seriously but I think there’s no harm in taking a few scenic routes here and there. I had to learn a lot as I went but working as a session musician has given me opportunities that I might well have missed had I decided to just focus on my own music. Getting there has often been more enjoyable and rewarding than actually being there.”

Duotone play The Bullingdon on Friday 23rd January with Balloon Ascents. ‘Let’s Get Low’ is released in March on Garrett-Brown Music. Pre-order the album at www.duotonemusic.com.

RELEASED

GAZ COOMBES

‘Matador’

(Hotfruit)

“So let’s walk down to Jericho / Share a little smoke / Watch the paper burn.”

Contrast these lines from ‘Seven Walls’, the romantic centrepiece of ‘Matador’, one that’s as reflective as winter sun on an icy lake, with the nervous raucousness of ‘Caught By the Fuzz’, where that little smoke takes place in a completely different environment and with massively contrasting consequences, and you can trace a line along Gaz Coombe’s life, from exuberant teen to contemplative adult. He’s still the same bloke, with the same small pleasures in life, but with maturity and experience to burn alongside those cigarette papers.

Gaz has always shown his reflective side, as far back as ‘I Should Coco’ and most prominently on ‘Road To Rouen’, but after the effusive nature of much of 2012’s solo debut, ‘Here Come The Bombs’, ‘Matador’ feels very much like a comedown album with autumnal introspection trumping the club-friendly swagger of songs like ‘Break the Silence’.

Recent single ‘20/20’ is a prime example, an almost wraith-like slice of wistfulness based on a strangely sombre piano melody that even when it skitters up a gear retains that air of gentle, almost folky psychedelia. Or ‘The Girl Who Fell To Earth’, ‘Matador’’s most introspective episode, a simple, plaintive acoustic ride through the clouds carried on the gentlest of breezes. Not that it’s solemn or lacking in spark; both tracks carry the air of a man at ease with life and himself and thus free of earthly shackles.

THE MISSING PERSIANS

‘The Missing Persians’

(Self-released)

It’s almost a truism to say people mellow with age, but it doesn’t have to be so. Not everyone can grow into middle age and beyond raging against the dying of the light so wilfully as Scott Walker or Yoko Ono or Lemmy, but you’d hope a few more people, particularly musicians, would fend off the slippers and cocoa a little more forcefully.

Ironic then that the first track on The Missing Persians’ eponymous album is titled ‘Old Man’s Shoes’, with its opening couplet ‘I’m slipping into the old man’s shoes / He left them here for me to use.” It sums up just how comfortable and mellow the band are, and how easily they’ve taken up the timeless mantel of easy blues rocking of a kind so frequently encountered in the snug bars of market town pubs across the nation. Clearly plenty of people enjoy this kind of thing else it wouldn’t be so abundant. Then again, the common cold tends to get around a bit without being a popular form of entertainment.

Instead, The Missing Persians’ take on the blues is less bone-deep sorrow and more observational whimsy of the sort that wouldn’t be out of place in a local newspaper column. ‘China Is The



And by contrast Gaz’s love for Moroder-like electro-pop and Krautrock surfaces again on ‘The English Ruse’ and ‘Detroit’, the former a Neu!-inspired flutter and thrum riding a simple, propulsive synth rhythm, the latter recalling the hypnotic synth-psych of Silver Apples, but coated with Gaz’s characteristically rich voice and big, warm harmonies.

That word ‘reflective’ keeps coming back to you as you listen through to ‘Matador’, though. Gaz made the album almost completely by himself – just a handful of drum parts and keyboards on one track played by others – and an air of isolation and self-contemplation remains throughout. But that reflection must come without regret, both for a music career littered with magic moments, and a new album that is open, honest and elegant, and still as fresh as his teenage self would have wanted.

Sue Foreman

Workshop For The Widgets Of The World’, in particular, which could be a damning indictment of poverty-wages labour in the developing world but comes across as wry bemusement at all the flash stuff you can buy in shops these days.

The relentlessly relaxed funky blues that underpins such bloodless lyricism is the well-worn armchair that allows the whole thing to sink into lethargy and torpor. The Missing Persians could cover Crass’s ‘System’ and make it sound like one of Eric Clapton’s most sedate slow jams. Even a dip into soul on ‘Every Now And Then’, with its melody borrowed from Bill Withers’ ‘Lovely Day’, can’t bring itself to exude passion or genuine sorrow, preferring a non-committal “Every now and then I miss you” about its lost love. It’s a failure to commit that runs through to the end of the album, even ‘No Purpose’, which lyrically promises to examine mass murder, or a man at the end of his tether, concludes with the desultory “Some might not agree.” No purpose being an apt summation of this pipe’n’slippers exercise in middle aged blues indulgence.

Ian Chesterton

Sponsored by



HALF DECENT

‘Love Is Dead’

(Self-released)

Bigging up your mates, along with getting them all to take a turn at the mic, is a staple of rap albums, often to the detriment of the cohesion and flow of the music. But heartfelt “I love my friends and couldn’t do it without them,” soul bearing is slightly less common. So credit to Half Decent for such honest emoting on ‘Best Friends’, a slinky, easy funk thanks to his chums. It’s a very human beat at the heart of this extensive mixtape, a mixtape that consolidates the West Oxfordshire rapper as one of the most solid and dextrous rhymers around. The breathless rant of ‘Get Up Off The Floor’ that immediately follows it shows Chris Martin, the man behind the moniker, in his more forceful natural light, cracking out words nineteen to the dozen to the point you’re often simply hanging on to his coattails to keep up.

Half Decent’s trademark delivery is an abrupt machine gun flow that can, just occasionally, feel you’re being lectured by a militant drunkard at a party but at his best he’s a verbal storm, hitting the ground running on assertive opener ‘I Know The Way’, with its message of positivity, before he makes a rare misstep with the too-much-information sex life commentary of ‘I Love You’.

The low-key free download nature of this mix means he gets away with some great cheesy samples, notably the wholesale steal of Berlin’s ‘You Take My Breath Away’ on the track of the same name, snippets of Eels on ‘Let It Go’, and Dr Bigelow’s lecture from *Louie* on ‘This Is Dead’. His production is tidy but inventive – the Marilyn Manson-like grind of ‘Love Is Dead’, with a guest vocal turn from Chris’s brother Lee Christian from Smilex keeping it fresh and dirty, while a remix of ‘Love Is Dead’ is similarly gnarly with its grimy synth splurge and aggressive rhyming.

As ever in these cases a bit of pruning in places wouldn’t be amiss – Half Decent rarely loses focus across 17 tracks but the distracting ‘Cassettes’ skit is an aberration we could do without – but he tempers his relentless flow with contributions from Inspekta, Full Spectrum and Nonsensible amongst others, creating necessary space and air. But maybe his own steely determination to pack it all in that’s his greatest strength. Certainly, for all that emotional honesty in ‘Best Friends’, there’s barely a hint of weakness on show here.

Ian Chesterton



DESERT STORM

‘Omniscient’

(Blindsight)

Increasingly beyond as well as within the Oxford scene, the stoner rock behemoth that is Desert Storm is becoming a name to remember, cemented by constant touring in the UK and Europe, supporting a growing number of big names in the metal world. Most local bands seem to lose steam after an album or two, but ‘Omniscient’, Desert Storm’s fourth full length, is already looking like being one of the best metal albums of the year.

For those already intimately familiar with the band’s sound, there’s a lot to enjoy here. Tracks like thrashy opener ‘Outlander’ showcase the band’s riff-driven, sludgy stoner rock, with strong influences from bands like Clutch, Crowbar and Down. However, ‘Omniscient’ also demonstrates a continuation of the maturing process witnessed in 2013’s ‘Horizontal Life’. This is best exposed in longer songs like ‘Queen Reefer’ and ‘Sway of the Tides’, both of which include harrowing clean sections that drive the band’s sound much more in the direction of progressive metal, showcasing an increasingly cohesive style of songwriting.

While ‘Omniscient’ is still distinctly the Desert Storm we know and love, it also sees the band



CHARLIE

CUNNINGHAM

‘Outside Things’

(Outset)

There’s a fine tradition of musicians from some of the most brutal bands going to the farthest extreme at the point they realise they’ve taken noise as far as it will go, whether it’s Michael Gira’s career beyond Swans or, on a local tip, Humphrey Astley’s soulful folk-blues journey as Huck & the Xander band after years pulverising audiences with Sextodecimo. To that elite band you can add Charlie Cunningham. Before they disbanded a few years ago he was guitarist in Xmas Lights, a band who took extreme metal into dark, industrial waters with extreme prejudice. They spared no quarter and yet with this debut solo EP Charlie reveals himself as a singer of a persuasion so gentle you can imagine butterflies resting themselves atop his guitar while he sings and plays.

Possessed of an alternately soulful and whispery voice that reminds us of Jose Gonzales as well as recent tour-mate King Creosote at times,



massively diversifying their influences. All the stoner rock greats are still evident, alongside clearly distinguishable influences by Orange Goblin and The Sword, while creative guitar solos in ‘Queen Reefer’ and ‘Collapse of the Bison Lung’ evoke the more traditional blues guitar of legends like Gary Moore. Meanwhile, ‘Home’ colours the band’s style with a gritty filter of Americana, varying the album brilliantly with its luscious, folky acoustic guitars. Following on from this, they flow smoothly and majestically back into chaotic overdrive with ‘House of

Charlie’s songs exist in that autumnal twilit hour where a slight chill penetrates the air and the mood darkens a few notches without freezing the listener out. The EP’s lead track, ‘In One Out’, with its air of hazy woodland magic is the stand-out, but on ‘Outside Things’ he brings a flamenco flair to bear on his guitar playing, breathing fresh life into proceedings. It’s sweet and simple fare but getting it just right is still a challenge, and one that Charlie is more than equal to.

Sue Foreman

D. GWALIA

‘The Iodine Trade’

(Self-released)

When D. Gwalia last washed up on our shores (perhaps in the rickety boat that graced the cover of his 2010 debut album ‘In Puget Sound’) he took us all by surprise: a Welsh singer-songwriter who relocated to Oxford by way of Berlin, he wrote curious songs about rogue movie directors, cruel sea captains and small town intrigue, combining folk with a gothic take on post-punk and new wave. For a debut release from a relatively unknown artist, the album was incredibly assured and cohesive and his voice (both literally and figuratively) was uniquely his own. Now, with typical lack of fanfare, he’s back with long-awaited follow-up ‘The Iodine Trade’. While ‘In Puget Sound’ was primarily composed of pleasantly warped folk songs, augmented with creaky harmoniums and ghostly synthesisers, ‘The Iodine Trade’ is far darker, bringing some of the noisier and more nightmarish moments of the debut to the forefront. Opening track ‘A Day Out’ starts with a series of piercing guitar stabs, like tiny pickaxes attacking the walls of a mine, before easing into Gwalia’s familiar baritone croon and guitar arpeggios. ‘Vamp’ borrows the icy, sparse arrangements of Joy Division, mechanical drums, melodic bass lines and monotone vocal and all, on one of the album’s most immediately engaging

Salvation’, which features some tasty ‘chicken pickin’ riffs and slide guitar licks, a vibe which is continued through to ‘Night Bus’. The incorporation of these influences could be a risky path to take, but one which has ultimately paid off – they absolutely make the album, giving each track a distinct flavour.

For ‘Omniscient’, Desert Storm worked with underground legend Billy Anderson, who mastered the album. The result is a much better recording than any of their previous work, most notably in the representation of Matt Ryan’s blistering live vocals, which walk a fine line between the guttural growls of crushing, riffy closer ‘Collapse of the Bison Lung’ and the powerful, melodic and characterful cleans of ‘Sway of the Tides’ and ‘Home’. Ultimately, the album lacks the catchy accessibility of ‘Horizontal Life’, but it more than makes up for it with far greater depth and a much more diverse sound.

Despite the myriad influences at play, everything fits together perfectly. Each full listening seems a little more rewarding than the last, and the raw riffing that made the band’s name in the local scene is better than ever. Without a doubt, this is Desert Storm’s best album yet, and it can only continue their rise to power as the single most prominent champion of the Oxford scene in the metal world.

Tal Fineman

songs, although there are many highlights to choose from. ‘Alan’s Machine’ is an affecting song about the tragic fate of Alan Turing, composed on a mechanical music box, while ‘Illuminations’ is a haunting and beautiful piano piece that stands apart from much of the album. However, it’s on the title track that we get the album’s first sense of theatre and musical experimentation; a disjointed collection of artificial keyboard cellos and increasingly nonsensical diary entries, the track betrays a sense of madness signified by a recurring declaration: “I do beg your pardon but I may have to scream/ What if I can’t stop?” Later on ‘400°F’ provides us with the most haunting recipe for a post-apocalyptic soufflé ever committed to tape in a style akin to Tom Waits’ spoken-word nightmares. The album ends on an unsettling note with ‘Sleeping in Abandoned Cars’, a nine-minute piece of *Musique Concrete* that is the sound of being dragged backwards through a WWII radio broadcast, with music hall performers dancing a polka with radio static and the disembodied voices of a children’s choir. However, it’s the quality of the songwriting throughout the album that really shines throughout ‘The Iodine Trade.’

Tom McKibbin



RELEASED

THE LOST ART

‘The Lost Art’

(Self-released)

It’s not often I get a debut album that I’m compelled immediately to play twice. It’s partly because The Lost Art’s eponymous debut has only eight, good length songs, leaving you hungry for more, but also the final track, ‘Distant Friends’, has a down-note ending that simply urges you to loop back to the joyful call-response and chiming round of ‘Equals’, to begin the thrilling journey all over again.

And what a journey. Gordo Francis and Greg Hooper are both classically-trained classroom music teachers, so they know their way around the world of musicality, where nothing feels out of place and the subtle changes of pace and acceleration in each song echo the ride. Their voices, though tonally similar, alternate lead and gradually differ to your ears by sheer personality. So the faint tyre tracks of Labi Siffre and Jamie Cullum are crossed in ‘Secret Life’ and ‘The Stage’ to give way to giddy theatrics, most notably on the Bossanova helter skelter of ‘The Passenger’ (“I’m a passenger in my own train / Uncomfortably out of control”), then straight on to destination West End and the achingly epic Lloyd Webber-esque ‘High & Mighty’.

But the song that springs out and bats you in the head like a serotonin beach ball is ‘Kick the Habit’, which intros like ‘Jive Talking’ and balloons into a



studio party akin to Paul Simon’s Cecilia’, bouncing around magnificently between MIKA, Jose Feliciano and the Tex-Mex vibe of Buddy Holly’s ‘Not Fade Away’. My advice is buy this superbly orchestrated and produced absolute gem of an album as a CD rather than the band’s free Bandcamp download, to experience the full volume sparkle, gusto and real promise that’s been lovingly put into it, right down to the Akira Kusaka artwork. Treasure it and file it under progressive folk or acoustic pop or world music or Broadway. No, wait, just file it under The Lost Art.

Paul Carrera

Sponsored by



BLACK SKIES BURN

‘Stuck On A Name Live’

(Self-released)

It starts with a scream and a note of feedback that hangs briefly in the air before tumbling down a mountainside at terminal pace. And that’s pretty much how this live album from local death/grindcore crew Black Skies Burn – the band behind the excellent Slave To The Grind club nights – continues until its abrupt end. Subtlety and nuance are given a proper kicking and thrown out the back door as velocity and raw, brute aggression take the controls, the album careering through a dozen tracks in barely 20 minutes, like Juggernaut ploughing through solid concrete walls in *X-Men: The Last Stand*.

Even seasoned death-heads would generally struggle to tell you the difference between most of the bands in that particularly uncompromising sub-genre, but you can probably spot the influence of Napalm Death, Carcass, Slayer and Cannibal Corpse infecting Black Skies Burn’s 200mph, all-hands-to-the-pump racket. Occasional, brief, respite along the way comes via singer Simon Manion’s between-song announcements. “We’re going to play four in a row now. The first one is about sitting on dead people. It’s called ‘Ashes to Ashes, Turd to Turd’.” As charming as they’d want to be.

Ian Chesterton

INTRODUCING....

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

WILLIE J HEALEY

Who is he?

Singer-songwriter Willie J Healey has been playing in and around Oxford for around five years now, until recently under the band moniker Sweet William but now going under his own name and recording with bandmates Easy Chalmers and Sam Wilson Fletcher. The results of these bedroom and garage recordings will be an EP, mixed by Pelham from Spring Offensive, on the 29th January. Managed by Stornoway’s Oli Steadman, Willie has bought himself an old limousine which he’s taken on tour around the UK over the winter. He launches the EP with an instore show at Truck on Cowley Road on the 29th. “So watch out,” he says.

What does he sound like?

Self-described with some accuracy as ‘rock’n’s stroll’, Healey has an easy, loping feel to his simple songs, a gentle playfulness that’s often at odds with the overly serious nature of many balladeers, though he’s not averse to acoustic contemplation at times. In his own words, he’s “surf indie straight outta suburban Oxfordshire.”

What inspires him?

“I tend to write my best stuff after watching big budget films. Patrick Swayze seems to work for me; I guess we have a lot in common.”

Career highlight so far:

“Supporting Spring Offensive at their last Oxford show was a cool one, I’m a big fan. I’ve always enjoyed the nights they host, so being able to play their last Oxford one was hot.”

And the lowlight:

“I really hit rock bottom when I heard that Ice Cube had left NWA.”

His favourite other Oxfordshire act is:

“My friend Micky is working on a Latin funk project called Sagalu, but they haven’t released anything yet so I’ll go with the mighty Stornoway.”

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

“It would have to be ‘After the Gold Rush’ by Neil Young. It’s got some



killer hits on side two.”

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

“There will be an in-store at Truck on the 29th of January. Newcomers can expect big grooves from Easy Chalmers, and fat bass licks from big Wilson. I just fill in the gaps.”

His favourite and least favourite things about Oxford music are:

“Unlike most towns Oxford has a genuine community of true players. For a town its size it has a disproportionately good music scene. I’m into Oxford, and feel the people and the music. Everyone loves a gang, right?”

You might love him if you love:

Jonathan Richman; Courtney Barnett; Mac Demarco; War On Drugs, Will Leahy; Jeff Healey.

Hear him here:

sweetwilliam.bandcamp.com.

THE WHEATSHEAF

Friday 2nd January – KLUB KAKOFANNEY

ZAIA

MOON LEOPARD + DES BARKUS & FRIENDS 8pm/£5

Thursday 15th January

REVELLER

INDICA BLUES + LEPER KING 8pm/£5

Friday 16th January – IT’S ALL ABOUT THE MUSIC

STORYTELLER

THE AUTUMN SAINTS + LITTLE RED 8pm/£6

Saturday 17th January – MD PROMOTIONS

STROKE OF LUCK

CLOCKWORK RADIO + MOMENTO + ADAM MCMILLAN 8pm/£5

Thursday 22nd January – THE SPIN JAZZ

TIM WHITEHEAD

8pm

Friday 23rd January – BLACK BULLET LIVE

BASTIONS

HIEROPHANT + FIVE MILES NORTH OF NOWHERE + HATEMAIL 7:30pm/£5

Saturday 24th January

ROCKSOC

STUDENT ROCK NIGHT 8pm

Friday 30th January – BURN THE JUKEBOX

WORKIN’ MAN NOISE UNIT

GREY HAIRS + NEW COWBOY BUILDERS + GIRL POWER 8pm/£5

Saturday 31st January – GAPPY TOOTH INDUSTRIES

MAN MAKE FIRE

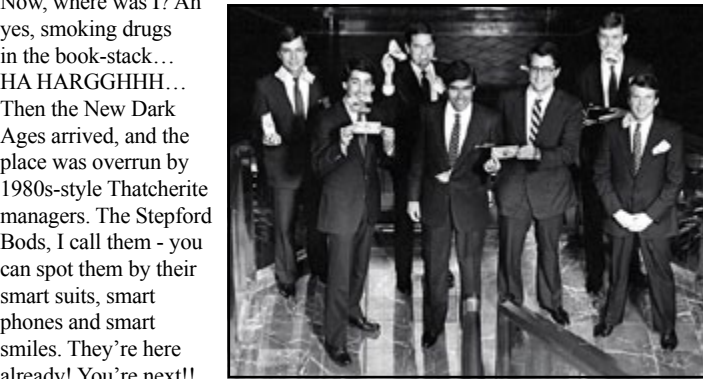
LAKE OF KINGS + ROBOT SWANS 8pm/£4.50

The Wheatsheaf 129 High Street, Oxford OX1 4DF / www.facebook.com/wheatsheaf.oxford

DR SHOTOVER:

Invasion of the Bodley Snatchers

Good evening book-lovers. Pull up a pew and buy me some of the finest wines which the East Indies Club bar has to offer. Ah, Chateau Gaviscon, my favourite... [shurp-o, shurp-o]... Now, if it is not too much of a frightful ‘bind’, let us ‘cover’ a few book-related topics. HA HA HARGHHH. Did I ever tell you about my first job, working as ink well boy in the old Bodleian Library? A thoroughly Dickensian experience. When I’d finished filling all the ink wells and sharpening all the dip pens, I’d be wrapped in gaffa tape and lowered into a flooded basement to save old manuscripts from water-damage. My supervisor, Mr Skellington, had a constant drew drop on the end of his nose and knees that went off like pistol shots as he strode along the squeaky lino of the corridors. Luckily this stopped him from catching us when we were writing revolutionary slogans on aeroplanes made of old sheets of blotting paper and launching them from the upper windows of the library. Then there were the golden years of Andy ‘Ride’ Bell’s dad being in charge... though this era did give rise to a document one had to sign promising not to play guitar solos on top of the Radcliffe Camera. Not that Brian May took any notice when he came a-looking for books on badgers... he was up on that neo-Palladian dome like a rat up a drain, strapping on the old axe, giving it widdly-this and diddly-that... Now, where was I? Ah yes, smoking drugs in the book-stack... HA HARGGHHH... Then the New Dark Ages arrived, and the place was overrun by 1980s-style Thatcherite managers. The Stepford Bods, I call them - you can spot them by their smart suits, smart phones and smart smiles. They’re here already! You’re next!! YOU’RE NEXT!!!



‘Hell-oooo, we’re the management consultants. We’ve come to save you [whirr click]... save you [whirr click]... save you...’

Next month: Bods and Rotters

ALL OUR YESTERDAYS

20 YEARS AGO

In January 1995 Oxford music was in the middle of its bleakest winter. With **The Oxford Venue** shut and plans for it to re-open as **The Zodiac** still a way off, and **The Hollybush** in Osney no longer hosting gigs, we bid an emotional farewell to **The Jericho Tavern**, which bowed out with a quartet of incredible sold-out shows in a week, featuring **Ride**, **The Candyskins**, **Supergrass** and **Radiohead** all playing one final show each at the venue that had made them. Ride, The Candyskins and Supergrass each donated their gig fee to promoter Mac who was already in negotiations to re-launch his promoting adventures at the newly-opened **Hobgoblin** on the Plain (now the Cape of Good Hope). The donations enabled him to buy a PA for the new venue. With few gigs to report on and most venue-based advertising gone, *Curfew* magazine folded. In the days before extended opening hours became the norm, the Kari King on Cowley Road became a late-night hub for local musicians, promoters and journoes, where plans were hatched to kick-start the local scene back into life. For now, though, the fragility of a grassroots scene, even one as close-knit and fertile as Oxford’s, was clear for all to see and a reminder that we should never take it for granted.

10 YEARS AGO

With a lot of hard work, the local scene did

survive and continues to thrive, thanks to the hard work of myriad dedicated souls, so that in January 2005 *Nightshift*, which formed from the ashes of *Curfew* back in July 1995, was celebrating the new wave of bright young things coming up through the ranks. Chief amongst these were **Fell City Girl**, who graced the cover of the magazine. Other names mentioned included singer-songwriters **Laima Bite** and **Chantelle Pike**, bands like **The Half Rabbits** and **Harry Angel**, as well as soul man **Asher Dust**, a creative force who remains a mainstay on the local scene. Another name in the list was **Warhen**, whose garage-pop racket was quickly winning local fans. While they didn’t stay the course, **Cameron Grote** from the band has and he’s this month’s Demo of the Month. So our prediction for greatness was sort of right.

A traditionally quiet month in the music calendar saw releases from local folk/blues singer **Maeve Bayton** and instrumental rockers **P.Y.E**, while a sparse gig calendar found **Henry Rollins** doing a spoken-word performance at the **Oxford Playhouse** and cello-based metallers **Apocalyptica** at the **Zodiac**. Hidden gem of the month, though, was a **Vacuous Pop** show at the **Wheatsheaf** in conjunction with Carpark Records that saw **Panda Bear** and **Ariel Pink** gracing the tiny pub venue. How much would you have to pay to see that double bill nowadays, eh?

THIS MONTH IN OXFORD MUSIC HISTORY

5 YEARS AGO

And talking of things coming back round as we sort of were just then, January 2005’s cover of *Nightshift* was graced by local legends **Ride**, whose reunion was still five years off but was briefly touched on in an interview to mark the 20th anniversary of their debut ‘Ride EP’ – acclaimed by *Nightshift* as “The most important record in Oxford music history,” and “the record that changed Oxford music forever.” And so it was, as it opened the door for so many other local bands who previously could never have dreamt of record deals, chart placings and international tours. Mark, Andy, Loz and Steve were gathered in The Rusty Bicycle to talk about the formation of the band, the recording of that seminal EP and to look back at what the local scene was like for young hopefuls before they changed everything, and the Oxford acts who inspired them. The full interview is still online at nightshift.oxfordmusic.net if you want to have a look. It’s great, and with Ride’s return, a nice reminder of their roots. “There are no plans to reform,” stated Mark at the end of the interview. Thankfully those plans changed.

Elsewhere this month, former-**Candyskins** frontman **Nick Cope** released his debut album of children’s songs, ‘What Colour is Your T-shirt?’ and there were releases for **The Black Hats**, Phantom **Theory** and **The Half Rabbits**, while sludge-metallers **Beard of Zeuss** were *Nightshift*’s Demo of the Month.

G I G G U I D E

THURSDAY 1st

New Year's Day! A new year! A fresh start! Optimism is in the air! Maybe a chance, this time, to make your big musical break to fame and fortune. Send us your demo, why not. We'll soon kick that airy fairy daydreamy crap out of your system for you.

FRIDAY 2nd

KLUB KAKOFANNEY with **ZAIA** + **MOON LEOPARD** + **DES BARKUS**: **The Wheatsheaf** – Klub Kak open their account as they enter their 21st year promoting an anything-goes selection of live music. Tonight's mixed bag features funk and reggae from former-Raggasaurus people Zaia; Jeremy Hughes' Moon Leopard and classic

JANUARY

rock'n'roller Des Barkus.

SKYLARKIN SOUNDSYSTEM: **The Cellar** – Count Skylarkin' hosts the first of his monthly ska, reggae and dancehall parties of 2015, featuring live sets from rising stars of the UK reggae scene, alongside guest and resident DJs. Regularly the best party in town.

SATURDAY 3rd

TRASHY: O2 Academy – Pop anthems, glam, kitsch faves and more at the O2's weekly dance party.
HONOLULU COWBOYS: **St Giles Hall (6pm)** – Hawaiian tea dance.

SUNDAY 4th

MOON LEOPARD + **BEARD OF DESTINY** + **DES BARKUS** + **TONY BATEY**: **Donnington Community Centre (6pm)** – Free evening of acoustic music hosted by Moon Leopard's Jeremy Hughes and featuring one-man blues army Beard of Destiny and veteran local rockers Des Barkus and Tony Batey.

MONDAY 5th

TUESDAY 6th

JAZZ CLUB with **THE RORY McINROY QUARTET**: **The Bullingdon** – The first of the Bully's free weekly jazz club nights of 2015 plays host to experienced pianist Rory McInroy and his band.

OPEN MIC SESSION: **James Street Tavern**

WEDNESDAY 7th

THURSDAY 8th

ROYAL BLOOD + **TURBOWOLF**: **O2 Academy** – Brighton's bluesy grunge-rockers return to town after the postponement of November's planned show, cancelled due to illness, the pair enjoying life on the rise after their debut album hit the top of the charts, capturing the enduring desire for straight-up rock in the vein of Led Zeppelin, Cream, Foo Fighters and Queens of the Stone-Age.
CATWEAZLE CLUB: **East Oxford Community Centre** – 20 years and counting, the weekly open club continues to showcase singers, musicians, poets, storytellers, performance artists and more.

OXFORD IMPROVISERS NEW YEAR SOCIAL: **The Old Fire Station** – Free open improv gathering with the local collective.
OPEN MIC SESSION: **The Half Moon**
BLUES JAM: **Ampleforth Arms, Risinghurst** – Open blues jam with in-house band.
HONOLULU COWBOYS: **Burton Taylor Theatre** – Hawaiian music night.

Fun blues-rocking from the local veteran.

SUNDAY 11th

FIREGAZERS + **SAL & TONY** + **SCOTT GORDON** + **JULES PENZO** + **PURPLE MAY**: **The Wheatsheaf (3.30-7pm)**

MONDAY 12th

TUESDAY 13th

JAZZ CLUB with **THE MARTIN PICKETT ORGANISATION**: **The Bullingdon** – The Bully's free weekly jazz club plays host to the Martin Pickett Organisation.
INTRUSION: **The Cellar** – Goth, ebm and industrial club night with Doktor Joy and Bookhouse on the decks.
OPEN MIC SESSION: **James Street Tavern**

WEDNESDAY 14th

THE JOHNNY CASH ROADSHOW: **The New Theatre** – Big stage tribute to The Man In Black.

THURSDAY 15th

REVELLER + **INDICA BLUES** + **LEPER KING**: **The Wheatsheaf** – Rock night with stoner/groove heavyweights Indica Blues and more.
ROCK'N'ROLL PARADISE: **The New Theatre** – Classic rock'n'roll hits from the 1950s, from The Big Bopper and Buddy Holly to Roy Orbison and Eddie Cochran.
CATWEAZLE CLUB: **East Oxford Community Centre**



Friday 23rd

AMON AMARTH / HUNTRESS / SAVAGE MESSIAH: O2 Academy

Together for over two decades, Sweden's Amon Amarth looked in danger of dying that slow death by diminishing returns, sticking to their guns at what they do best, but particularly with 2011's 'Sutur Rising', failing to excite any more. Last year's 'Deceiver of the Gods', though, saw them revitalised, still sticking to that tried and trusted formula – melodic death metal with excursions into thrash, everything coated in Viking mythology, Norse folklore and tales of the old Gods – but back sounding like a fresh new band again. Alongside a welcome guest vocal contribution from Candlemass' Messiah Marcolin, 'Deceiver...' was a mighty headlong rampage of blast beats, scything riffage, John Hegg's rasping vocals and simple but thrilling guitar solos. Just look at them song titles: 'Warriors of the North'; 'Blood Eagle'; 'As Loke Falls'. You won't get them on a Kasabian album. After the welcome return to action of Behemoth last year too, it's good to hear the old guard are still ready for battle when it matters. Great support tonight from California's rising metal stars Huntress and London's Earache-signed thrash merchants Savage Messiah.

FRIDAY 9th

BOSSAPHONIK: **The Cellar** – Dancefloor Latin, Balkan beats, Afrobeat, global grooves and nu-jazz at the long-running world dance club night. Tonight's club features a live set from Cambridge's Fender Rhodes-driven jazz-funk and 70s groove band Resolution 88, inspired by Herbie Hancock and The Headhunters. Oxford's own groove band The Phat Collective bring their jammed-out jazz, funk, hip hop and reggae to the party, plus DJ sets from Chalky and Bossaphonik host Dan Ofer.

SATURDAY 10th

TRASHY: O2 Academy
EXTRA CURRICULAR: **The Cellar** – Weekly techno, bass and house club night.
PETE FRYER BAND: **Dolphin, Wallingford** –

OPEN MIC SESSION: **The Half Moon**
BLUES JAM: **Ampleforth Arms, Risinghurst**

FRIDAY 16th

LAST RITES + **THE DEVIATED** + **ENDLESS MILE** + **MAN MAKE FIRE** + **THE MARK** + **SUGAR DARLING**: **O2 Academy** – Rock night at the Academy tonight with old school heaviosity from Last Rites in the vein of Sabbath, Iron Maiden and Stone Sour, plus heavy rocking from The Deviated, glam-tinged thrash from Endless Mile, classic Led Zep-style rocking from Man Make Fire and electro-noise from Sugar Darling.
STORYTELLER + **THE AUTUMN SAINTS** + **LITTLE RED**: **The Wheatsheaf** – It's All About the Music showcase gig with rustic folk-pop newcomers Little Red and more.
FRACTURE + **THE SHAPES** + **SILVERSPARK**: **The Jericho Tavern** – Strummerroom Project show with a trio of local acts. Fracture bring their bluesy indie-grunge, with echoes of Arctic Monkeys and QOTSA, while The Shapes breathe life into classic 60s rock and soul. Bluesy rock trio Silverspark open the show.

SATURDAY 17th

IGNITE THE SKY + **SANITY LOSS** + **BEING EUGENE** + **IMMINENT ANNIHILATION**: **O2 Academy** – Seriously heavyweight action tonight with death/grind nasties Ignite the Sky; metalcore from Sanity Loss; velocity thrash and metalcore from Being Eugene and virulent tech/death noise from Aylesbury's Imminent Annihilation; the clue's in the name, innit?
SINKING WITCHES + **MOGMATIC** + **OSPREY & THE OX4 ALLSTARS** + **SIR**

LOIN & THE STEAK KNIVES: **The Cellar** – Prog-rocking from Sinking Witches at tonight's It's All About the Music show, plus funky blues rock from Osprey and his band.
STROKE OF LUCK + **CLOCKWORK RADIO** + **MOMENTO** + **ADAM McMILLAN**: **The Wheatsheaf** – Bluesy rocking from Stroke of Luck.
TRASHY: O2 Academy
HODGEPODGE: **The Bullingdon** – Club night.

SUNDAY 18th

ROB LANYON + **EMMA HUNTER** + **THE CALLOW SAINTS** + **PUPPET MECHANIC** + **MATT SEWELL**: **The Wheatsheaf (2.30-7pm)** – Klub Kakofanny host an afternoon of free unplugged music in the Sheaf's downstairs bar.

MONDAY 19th

TUESDAY 20th

JAZZ CLUB with **ALVIN ROY & REEDS UNLIMITED**: **The Bullingdon** – Trad jazz, bop and swing with veteran clarinettist Alvin Roy and his Reeds Unlimited band at tonight's weekly jazz club.
OPEN MIC SESSION: **James Street Tavern**

WEDNESDAY 21st

HOZIER: **O2 Academy** – Rearranged from December, an already sold-out show from the County Wicklow singer-songwriter, whose debut EP, 'Take Me To The Church', went to Number 1 in his native Ireland's iTunes chart, with its raw, soulful take on Delta blues, not a million



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Friday 30th

ALVVAYS: O2 Academy

Surf-rocking, sugar-coated sadness is something that never fails to get *Nightshift* feeling a bit giddy, so it was inevitable we'd fall madly in love with Toronto's Alvays the moment we heard them. Any band that reminds us, even a teensy little bit, of The Shop Assistants has got to be great, right? Right! If you haven't heard the band's sublime 'Archie, Marry Me', then you're undoubtedly mistaken. If you haven't encountered it on any decent radio station, you might have heard it in your dreams. Or when you think of sunshine and ice cream and love and kittens. It's just lovely. We play it a dozen times a day to keep the clouds and the dark evenings at bay. Because, like musical close relations Camera Obscura and The Vivian Girls, Alvays manage to convey biting melancholy while sounding absolutely joyous. Their compact, self-titled debut album is a perfect blend of froth, fear and frivolity. It's a timeless indie sound – all jangle and shimmer and Molly Rankin's gorgeous, yearning voice – but it's a timeless sound for a good reason, and Alvays are a well-timed reminder that great pop music simply will never die.

miles from George Ezra, but better, while his eponymous debut album similarly went to the top back home, while going Top 5 in the UK. **SPARKY'S JAM NIGHT: James Street Tavern** – Monthly open mic and jam night.

THURSDAY 22nd

NIKKI LOY: Joe's Bar, Summertown – Soulful acoustic pop from the local singer-songwriter. **CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre**
OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon
BLUES JAM: Ampleforth Arms, Risinghurst
THE PETE FRYER BAND: The Wheatsheaf – Free gig in the downstairs bar.

FRIDAY 23rd

AMON AMARTH + HUNTRESS + SAVAGE MESSIAH: O2 Academy – Return to rocking form for the Swedish metal titans – *see main preview*
BALLOON ASCENTS + DUOTONE: The Bullingdon – Single launch show from rising local indie stars Balloon Ascents, managing to mesh intricate, almost proggy electronic rock with sweet, folk-inclined pop. They're joined by this month's *Nightshift* cover star Duotone, the stage persona of Barney Morse-Brown, using loops and

multiple instrumentation to conjure gorgeously romantic ambient pop – *see main interview feature*

BASTIONS + HIEROPHANT + FIVE MILES NORTH OF NOWHERE + HATEMAIL: The Wheatsheaf – Extreme noise terror at tonight's Buried In Smoke hardcore show – *see main preview*

TRASHY: O2 Academy

THE MIGHTY REDOX: James Street Tavern – The veteran local swamp-blues and funky psychedelic rock crew play their first show of 2015.
GUNS'N'ROSES EXPERIENCE: Fat Lil's, Witney – Tribute act.

SATURDAY 24th

BLACK LIGHT MACHINE + REMNANT + A HIGHER DEMISE: The Cellar – Oxrox host a night of heavy rock and metal, with south Wales's progressive metallers Black Light Machine, with their mix of technical and classic heaviosity.
BRICKWORK LIZARDS: Modern Art Oxford – Celebrating the start of their tenth year promoting eclectic shows in and around Oxford, Pindrop return to the source, inviting back the band that played their very first show - Arabic-hip hop Turkobilly ensemble Brickwork Lizards.
KARMA FREE DIET: The Bullingdon – Acoustic punk.
ROCKSOC: The Wheatsheaf – Rock and metal bands at the University's rock society night.
BEDROCK: The Bullingdon – The Bully's monthly rock and metal club, hosted by Skeletor promotions, playing heavy classics and the best new stuff.
EXTRA CURRICULAR: The Cellar – Techno, bass and house club. Turf Festival launch party.
THE MIGHTY REDOX: The Swan, Wantage

SUNDAY 25th

TOM IVEY BAND + DARREN & THE TRAMP + JESTER + PURPLE MAY: The Wheatsheaf (3.30-7pm)

MONDAY 26th

STARK + INVISIBLE VEGAS: The Bullingdon – Blues, prog, roots and folk from Brighton's eclectic rockers Stark at tonight's Haven Club show, plus support from local bluesy rockers Invisible Vegas.

TUESDAY 27th

JAZZ CLUB with GUITAR SUMMIT: The Bullingdon – Guitar-based jazz at this week's free jazz club show.
WE AERONAUTS + SALVATION BILL + JULIA MEIJER + WALTZ IN THE DEEP END: Modern Art Oxford – Pindrop presents a night of songs from classic teen movies from assorted local luminaries. The gig is an after-show party for the Oxford screening of teen movie celebration *Beyond Clueless*.
OPEN MIC SESSION: James Street Tavern

WEDNESDAY 28th

BURNING DOWN THE HOUSE: The Cellar – 80s, new wave, disco, synth-pop and glam club.

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THURSDAY 29th

WILLIE J HEALEY: Truck Store – EP launch gig for this month's *Nightshift* Introducing act, with his quirky, laidback rock'n'stroll.
BADLANDS + ORANGE VISION: The Cellar – EP launch gig for local rockers Badlands.
SON OF DAVE + LITTLE BROTHER ELI: Fat Lil's, Witney – Some serious blues magic going on at Fat Lil's tonight with former Crash Test Dummies man Benjamin Darvill continuing to multi-task to the max with his human beatboxing and harmonica playing while also singing the blues in a soulful, funky fashion that recalls Tom Waits, Stevie Wonder and Seasick Steve at times. Local funky blues youngsters Little Brother Eli support.
CATWEAZLE CLUB: East Oxford Community Centre
OPEN MIC SESSION: The Half Moon

FRIDAY 30th

ALVVAYS: O2 Academy – Sugar-coated sunshine pop from Toronto's rising stars – *see main preview*
BRIAN BRIGGS + STORNOWAY DJs: The Cellar – Independent Venue Week comes to The Cellar with local heroes Stornoway helping celebrate the grassroots venues that helped them get a foothold on that slippery old music ladder. Oxford's most independent of independent venues plays host to a solo headline set from Brian Briggs, playing stripped-down Stornoway favourites, while his bandmates Jon Ouin and Oli Steadman will be manning the decks alongside BBC Introducing producer Liz Green. More live acts to be announced.
WORKIN' MAN NOISE UNIT + GREY HAIRS + NEW COWBOY BUILDERS + GIRL POWER: The Wheatsheaf – Quality noise at the Sheaf tonight with Reading's malevolent rockers Workin' Man Noise Unit dragging Black Sabbath riffage through Butthole Surfers' demonic arsqake attack. Post-punk blues in the vein of White Stripes and QOTSA from Grey Hairs; spindly hardcore from New Cowboy Builders and alternately brutal and technical hardcore savagery from Girl Power.
BLOODSTOCK METAL FOR THE MASSES HEAT 1: The Bullingdon – Rock and metal band competition for a place on this year's Bloodstock bill.
HUCK: Modern Art Oxford – Folk-blues and gothic Americana storytelling from the Handsome Fee / Xander Band man.

SATURDAY 31st

GAPPY TOOTH INDUSTRIES with MAN MAKE FIRE + LAKE OF KINGS + ROBOT SWANS: The Wheatsheaf – Gappy Tooth's first monthly show of 2015 brings the usual mixed bag of new music, including Chipping Norton's old-fashioned rock and roll crew Man Make Fire, with their classic Led Zep-inspired sound. They're joined by Reading's sombre indie rockers Lake of Kings, and twinkly, ramshackle indie-popstrels Robot Swans.
EXTRA CURRICULAR: The Cellar – **BLOODSTOCK METAL FOR THE MASSES HEAT 1: The Bullingdon**
TRASHY: O2 Academy

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SEXTODECIMO / GUNNBUNNY / FLACK BLAG

The Library

If, as Christian fundamentalist nutjobs keep telling us, rock and roll is the Devil’s music, then tonight’s gig must be the seventh circle of Hell. Welcome; it’s party night. The twin one-off reformations of Sextodecimo and Gunnbunny have, in their own way, been as keenly anticipated as the Ride reunion and tonight’s Smash Disco-hosted gig in The Library’s fantastically compact and dingy basement is rammed to the (worryingly low) rafters with fans possessed of their own near-religious zeal.

On any other night a Black Flag tribute band featuring the two Bens from Winnebago Deal would be a tumultuous climax, provoking a raucous sing-a-long and moshpit in a venue barely big enough to swing a cat, but for all its frenetic, furious fun, it’s just a warm-up to what’s to come.

Before he was the imposing but svelte frontman for Fixers, Jack Goldstein was the imposingly hirsute hollerer-in-chief of local grunge titans Gunnbunny. We can barely see him or the rest of his gang through the forest of bodies tonight but you can’t fail to hear – or more accurately *feel* – the band’s downtuned, grunged-up racket that pays due respect to Mudhoney and Tad with suitably extreme prejudice. Ten years on from their first incarnation they haven’t dated one iota.

In current sci-fi blockbuster *Interstellar*, astronauts Anne Hathaway and Matthew McConaughey experience the time dilation effects of gravity through a wormhole in space. Hours become years in the shadow on a monstrous black hole. Which is pretty much the effect Sextodecimo have on the

space around them. By far and away the most extreme band to have come out of Oxford – and some distance beyond – they were a band who took the basic molecular structure of heavy metal into a whole new world of noise, threatening to condense music into a point of singularity. If five years have passed since they split, it might as well have been mere minutes for the band, who lay waste to the heaving room before them. Within moments of the first barrage of Tommy Longfellow’s drums and the iron foundry clang of Roo Bhasin and Oli Hewer’s guitars, half of *Nightshift*’s pint is down the front of our t-shirt, the other half is down the back of Elliot Cole from Desert Storm’s neck. A band who once cleared venues as a matter of course are back and preaching to a devoted congregation. As bassist

Humphrey Astley stands grinning with the satisfied malevolence of a man who enjoys dishing out pain, topless, heavily tattooed singer Steve Keyzor is throwing himself bodily into a tightly-packed throng at the front while rasping and howling like the childbirth screams of a hellbound ogre as bodies surf atop the front rows. Pressure is piled on, and then piled on some more as the meticulously orchestrated noise storm builds and implodes, like a terrifying mutation of acid house’s crowd-baiting dynamic. As epic piece follows epic piece, you start to believe that music can actually develop its own gravity field, one so immense that even light can no longer escape.

In a fittingly cataclysmic finale, Keyzor collapses into the drumkit, taking most of the front row with him. There can be no encore now; there’s no escape. We are stranded forever on the dark side.

Dale Kattack

SPACE HEROES OF THE PEOPLE

The Wheatsheaf

Tim Day, one half of Space Heroes of the People, is wearing a t-shirt bearing the slogan Cats on Synthesizers in Space. So that’s basically *Nightshift*’s three favourite things in one. We are insanely jealous. It’s also something of a reflection of the duo’s music: silicon and futuristic but with an organic underbelly; synthetic but with soul and attitude.

This divide and fusion is apparent on stage as Tim toys with his synths and gadgets, while Jo Edge alternately hammers a floor tom or adds rhythmic pulses by way of an upright bass. It’s Tim, however, who adds the most human element with is voice. Here he’s best when forcing his vocals through a Vocoder, less effective when trying to add a dose of emotion with more straight-ahead singing.

With a long overdue debut album set for release this year, tonight’s set is mostly newer material rather than the impressive demos the band have

furnished us with over the years. Stand-out track ‘Moroderhead’ basks in the warm, propulsive 70s sci-fi disco of Cerrone or Sheila B. Devotion, but the references points throughout are impressive, from the playfulness of OMD’s ‘Dazzle Ships’ to the driving electro-rock of Trans Am and the uplifting pure synth-pop of Belgium’s Vive la Fête.

That sense of some serious attitude comes to a head at the very end, an unexpected, joyously aggressive cover of McLusky’s ‘To Hell With Good Intentions’, proof you can do punk rock just fine with synthesizers.

Space Heroes are a band who have hovered around the margins of the local scene for a few years, beloved of a clued-up few but an unknown quantity to most. Hopefully the arrival of their album will finally make them heroes of the people.

Dale Kattack

CATFISH & THE BOTTLEMEN / HONEYBLOOD

O2 Academy

Honeyblood are a Scottish female duo, just guitar and drums; on paper much like The White Stripes, but really not. Where Jack and Meg played with the empty space created by their limited instrumentation, Honeyblood completely fill out their sound to such an extent that with your eyes closed you could believe it’s a full band with a bassist and even second guitar.

Their sound is an excellent blend of Jesus & Mary Chain-esque wall-of-noise indie, and the perfectly constructed pop hooks of Haim. It’s loud and lo-fi but there’s real soul and depth here that keeps us hooked throughout.

With a name like Catfish & The Bottlemen, we’ll admit we expected tonight’s headliners to be post-Mumford alt-Americanana for the masses. And we’re wrong. About the genre, anyway. CATB are a four-piece rock band from Llandudno. They play relentlessly upbeat and anthemic three-chord rock. Every song is somehow instantly familiar. The formula is simple and keeps the capacity crowd jumping, cheering and singing back every lyric like they are already classics. And realistically

they may as well be classics; all these songs could have easily been released in 2006 at the peak of Kaiser Chiefs, Razorlight and similar bands’ success.

If you think of a band like The Courteeners but take out any risk or edge you may have an idea of what CATB sound like. It’s Radio 1 A-list, festival-friendly, inoffensive and thoroughly uninspiring. Maybe we’re too cynical (we’re not denying it), but would an occasional slow song be too much to ask? Maybe a breakdown, a bit of acoustic guitar so just something to relieve the monotony. Big hit singles ‘Kathleen’ and ‘Pacifier’ are definite high points, but they barely stand out from the rest.

They give all the energy they’ve got and have the confidence you’d expect from a band with half a dozen years’ gigging experience under their belt. The riffs are by the book and infectious, and their choruses have woah-oh-ohs in all the right places. Catfish & The Bottlemen are a good band. Possibly a very good band. Just don’t ask us to remember any of their songs in a week’s time.

Matt Chapman-Jones

METHOD MAN & REDMAN

O2 Academy

A full body frisk on entry indicates this is not going to be a typical night at the O2. Walking in only confirms this; the level of anticipation is as obvious as the fug of herbal smoke surrounding the venue, adding to the feeling that we’ve all been transported somewhere else entirely, maybe even New York, in time as well as space.

A 6pm start is needed to accommodate the seven acts on the bill. Ollie Mac and Legoman bring a UK hip-hop angle to proceedings: nice to hear but clearly a poor cousin to what is to come.

Brooklyn’s M.O.P. raise the bar, mixing their own tracks like their Top 5 hit ‘Cold As Ice’ in with snatches of ‘Eye Of The Tiger’ and a straight cover of Bob Marley’s ‘One Love’. Their trademark urgent delivery and unusual bass sounds make for a perfect warm up for the main event.

Method Man and Redman are as close to hip-hop royalty as we’re likely to see on Cowley Road. The East Coast duo, together since ’94, receive a rapturous welcome and justify it from first beat. Method is, of course, famous as original member of the Wu-Tang Clan, still setting standards with their new album

‘A Better Tomorrow’, their first in seven years. Redman may have a lower profile but together they’re a perfect unit: voices working together perfectly, Redman’s higher than Method’s throaty rumble, as they bounce around the stage. Considering Method’s sullen and moody image it’s a pleasant surprise to see him showing off some slick dance moves, some almost harking back to the 90s days of New Jack Swing. There is continuous engagement with the crowd, bursting with raucous but positive energy, surreal though it is to hear Oxford getting name checked so often by figures as pure NYC as you can get. Tracks from throughout both their careers tumble after each other, including plenty of Wu-Tang. ‘All I Need’ brings a big cheer but not as much as ‘How High’, the paean to the herb that inspires so much of their lyrics. Method Man collaborator Streetlife makes a sudden appearance, making this one of the best value nights in recent times.

Fun though their albums are, a night like this adds a whole new dimension, reminding us that hip-hop is essentially a live experience – it’s just we rarely get to experience the real New York flavour as close up as this.

Art Lagun



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'68 / TROPHY SCARS

O2 Academy

Faced with a disappointing turnout some bands might put in a lacklustre performance. It's commendable then, that tonight both Trophy Scars and '68 don't wither, but dig deep and seek instead

to raise the bar for those that made the effort. Trophy Scars are no strangers to adversity. When their 2008 UK tour fell through they were faced with heavy debt. Thanks to donations from their

fans (and in a time before crowd-funding) the band continued, which is a blessing because their latest album, 'Holy Vacants', is one of the hidden gems of the year. Unsurprisingly much of tonight's set is taken from this album, and although its conceptual aspects don't get time to breathe, it hardly matters because the performance is so impassioned. Vocalist Jerry Jones leaps across the stage like a man possessed, growling and crooning like a hardcore Tom Waits whilst John Ferrara conjures impassioned blues riffs from his guitar. 'Crystallophobia' is a particular highlight, essentially a blues rock behemoth with a wonderfully serrated edge; it is indicative of how far Trophy Scars have come from their post-hardcore roots.

Two-piece bands are having a good year, what with the return of Death From Above 1979 and the unstoppable rise of Royal Blood but '68 might well be the most interesting duo around at the moment. Josh Scogin's latest project (he was previously in The Chariot and Norma Jean) is a sonic colossus, one that takes its lead from early Melvins, and Tad. Part of their appeal is the sheer weight of the band's songs; Scogin's feral guitar sound and Cobainesque roar is complemented by some thunderous drumming from Michael McClellan but it's the interplay between the two that impresses most. Using hand signals to extend songs (during the sledgehammer 'Three's A Crowd'), or to adjust tempos, there's a sense that each set has a life of its own, bending to their whims. When not dismantling and reassembling their own songs, they're quite happy to tear into a cover and bludgeon it (Nirvana's 'Tourette's' gets a thumping tonight). It would be unfair to tar them with the "next Nirvana" brush at this stage, but there's something quite electric about '68, so expect big things.

Sam Shepherd

THE JALI FILY CISSOKHO BAND

The Cellar

Locally based Senegalese kora player and Mandinkan griot Jali Fily Cissokho usually plays solo or sometimes accompanied by Nature Boy. So tonight's appearance with a full band at Bossaphonik's monthly live jazz-world-music dance night is something different and a bit of a rarity.

Certainly Jali Fily seems up for entertaining the Bossaphonik dance crowd. He strides onto the stage with his kora strapped to his waist and in contrast to solo gigs which he usually does seated, he is on his feet throughout which as a physical feat is impressive as the kora is quite heavy and Fily is not long recovered from illness.

In electro-kora mode and backed by a continual dialogue between the dynamic djembe and a rat-a-tat rhythm from the kit drums, plus keys and guitars, Fily is in good voice with his piercing vocals as he and the band show they can come up with the dancefloor delight the regular Bossaphonik crowd revels in. Yet it's the occasional slower, more lilting songs which appeal most to us because in these Fily's intricate kora playing is more to

the fore whereas when the band are going full tilt inevitably some of that intricacy is lost.

Similarly, when Nature Boy is invited onto the stage, he's rather submerged in the general band sound. It seems a pity that Fily doesn't take a risk with the dance-oriented Bossaphonik crowd and play a short interlude just with him, for as a duo they have really come on in the last couple of years.

Even if we remain uncertain as to whether we like Fily best playing solo, in a duo or with his fellow Senegalese musicians, it's great that Bossaphonik give us a chance to hear his undoubted potential playing with his band.

Though the set is somewhat stop-start in the middle, and so the atmosphere sags a little, they do manage to build it back up, and by the end there have been Afro grooves aplenty to satisfy the crowd and an impressive Bossaphonik-style closing crescendo which sends us out into the small hours feeling good and hoping we'll get opportunity to hear Fily with his full band again soon.

Colin May

COLOURED

The Cellar

Coloureds' approach to dance music has always been wayward in the extreme – hardcore disco not so much mutated as savaged by a pack of rabid Rottweilers – the soundtrack to a closing time punch-up involving a pissed-up Cyberman, as they were once described in these very pages.

But things change, and tonight's live set as part of the Cellar's Fresh Out The Box club night is as close to four-to-the-floor techno as Coloureds come. Original duo Nick Brewer and Matthew Mooney are now joined by former-Youthmovies man Graeme Murray, his live drumming adding an extra element of propulsion to their seriously dirty house. They've not lost their sense of the perverse of course, particularly visually, the trio sporting their trademark masks, tonight for this pre-Christmas party, supplemented by cheap and nasty Santa masks, which make them look equally comic and deeply disturbing, a bad acid trip vision of Yuletide jollity.

Murray thumps out his tattoo while Mooney and Brewer mix and mangle their deep, dark trance

into a hypnotic beast of a set, their build and release dynamics quickly becoming irresistible, dropping odd, crowd-pleasing snippets of festive favourites in among the scouring basslines and acid squelch, occasionally sounding like early Daft Punk possessed by serial killer malevolence, or early-90s hardcore trance crew Messiah getting down and dirty. The pair are relentlessly busy but keep their lines clean and uncluttered, the mischief and deranged quality of their early releases subsumed, to pleasing effect, by an unstoppable groove.

While we're usually happiest hearing bands mess with musical formulae here at *Nightshift*, tonight's set shows that even a band as confounding as Coloureds have been at times, can benefit from playing it straight. If this is the sound of their future, our tickets are already booked. Bad Santa is coming to town; he knows you've been naughty and he's here to deliver your punishment. Resistance is futile; you will succumb.

Dale Kattack

PETRELS / PADDOX / AFTER THE THOUGHT

Modern Art Oxford

They called it Dronefest. Hard to argue, as there isn't a moment tonight when guitars or keys aren't filling the air with drones. Before any act has officially started, Lee Riley and members of Flights Of Helios and Masiro are sonically decorating both the venue space and the upstairs bar with thick tones, the sort that soon start to seep into every thought - one of *Nightshift*'s more wild-eyed associates greets us with "I've been here 45 minutes. It's brilliant!" Apparently lonely souls continue playing to an empty foyer whilst the acts perform in the basement, although we can't believe anyone's listening (Schroedinger's remix, anyone?).

On the stage, After The Thought shift slow, elegant notes round in the manner of Eno's 'Shutov Assembly' with early 90s twinkles *a la* vintage Global Communication, not to mention a penchant for heartbeat rate decay that's positively Pete Namlook. Although the set gets pretty claustrophobic and the high tones nag, it also sounds like warm, friendly pop music underneath. Is Bubblegum Tinnitis a genre? Or have the drones started to twist our thoughts, like a dystopian 70s alien infiltration.

THE SHAPES / NON STOP TANGO / GEMMA MOSS / VOLKENFUNK

The Wheatsheaf

Gappy Tooth nights are by nature mixed bags. Sometimes the eclectic bills can appear a little too diverse for all but the most open minded, but every so often there's a perfect storm of unbridled genius and insanity. Volkenfunk get things underway with a set that travels through the history of synth-pop. Their roots lie with Moroder and Kraftwerk, but there are hints of Daft Punk and Pet Shop Boys in there too. They're fronted by what appears to be Germany's answer to Mark E Smith, and have songs about David Hasselhoff and average sex. That their one piece of merchandise is a decorative china plate isn't in the least bit surprising. Gemma Moss concludes her deliberately provoking take on the Nativity by giving birth to a doll's head. Seeing as most of her set up to that point involves a raft of deviant



photo: Sam Shepherd

Our first impression of Paddox is that it's brave to puncture such prettiness with loosely sprayed static coughs and rusty corvid caws. Our second thought is that it isn't brave, but idiotic, and our third that it is clearly unintentional. The set is awash with technical snafus, bad connections and unwanted hisses, and whilst there are delightful moments, not least a mournful Gavin Bryars violin motif that floats above the pulsing noise (intentional and otherwise), we're left feeling we've not seen a performance that it would be fair to judge. Petrels set is inventive and varied, in a fashion that the event's name might not have implied. The excellent tonal tapestry brings to mind images of blasted souls trapped in an old Amstrad floppy drive, skirling seabirds enveloped in thick syrup (perhaps in tribute to the stage name) and even some 'Artificial Intelligence' offcuts. The set ends with a looping emotional chorus, like the refrain from a lost Spring Offensive song slowly disappearing into a searing sunset. As we leave James Maund is still making guitar noise in the foyer. Perhaps he's still there.

David Murphy

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DEMO OF THE MONTH

CAMERON A G

Cameron Grote is a veteran of assorted local bands, including underrated garage rockers Warhen from a fair few years ago, but in his new solo guise he’s taken a dive into more intimate, downbeat waters. The opening track from this debut demo is titled ‘Save It For The Winter’, which is well timed and seasonally appropriate musically with its sense of melancholy, bordering on gentle desolation, guitars, glockenspiel and timid electronic percussion all that’s required to back up Cameron’s wide-eyed, oddly asexual vocals, which remind you occasionally of Jónsi from Sigur Ros. Nothing, it seems, is wasted as he carves out a pretty but sad tune. Better still is ‘Double Knot’, based on a distorted electric piano melody, fleetingly reminiscent of Radiohead’s more intimate moments; it’s deceptively big music made from small pieces, cold hands hiding a warm heart. Cameron introduces drums and a full band feel for closer ‘Highs & Lows’, initially hinting at early-70s Lou Reed before cutting its cloth closer to Pavement or even Beck’s most lo-fi meanderings; it’s only slightly less striking because he does solitary introversion so well here. A decade ago Cameron’s band were sharing a stage with the earliest incarnation of Foals. Maybe now is his time to shine.

THE AUREATE ACT

We first heard The Aureate Act exactly a year ago when their first demo popped up to the top of the pile, revealing a group of sixteen-year-olds whose lack of cohesion did nothing to lessen the appeal of their ambitious, sprawling take on psychedelic prog. Twelve months on they seem to have found a more certain sense of musical focus, but have they, in the process, lost that sense of, often preposterous (in a good way) adventure? Four tracks clocking in at a whopping half an hour would suggest not. First track ‘Woods’ certainly continues that original journey, a pastoral flutter and shimmer topped by doleful, almost hymnal vocals, gently propulsive before it takes off into a widdly guitar space exploration, replete with epic heavenly host harmonies. It’s OTT but unashamed to be so, which is good. From here, though, the band seem to prefer safe ground to wild exploration,

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

the none-more-proggily-titled ‘Endymion’ a bit of a jumble of soft-centred stadium rocking with only occasional moments of brooding progadelia, while ‘Home Again’ could be a post-grunge Wishbone Ash or Jethro Tull. They rediscover their bombast on ten-minute finale ‘On The Shoreward Edge’, a gruff, bluesy jam that’s happy to drift across imagined mountains and valleys but could maybe take a chance and dive down to explore the caverns and dark lakes of that landscape once in a while. Sounding a whole lot older than their still tender years, The Aureate Act remain a band well worth keeping an eye on for their willingness and ability to take the long route, but hopefully they’ll remember the slightly madder, more oblique stuff that made their earlier demo such an unexpected treat.

WHISPERING KNIGHTS

While music obviously needs to change and adapt to progress (else we’d all still be sitting outside our caves banging mammoths’ jawbones against large rocks by way of entertainment), sometimes you wish it’d stop fidgeting and hankering for the latest new gadget and be happy with what it is. Which is a bit of an over-analytical way of saying we wish Whispering Knights would leave their electric guitar in its case and stick to being a rather decent 60s-styled folk-pop band. There’s a gently pastoral feel about songs like ‘Rolled On By’ and ‘Sparrow Song’, the latter in particular all soft shapes and textures as it recalls the hazy ruminations of Nick Drake and Simon & Garfunkel, while the former could be one of Mark Knopfler’s (rather good) post-Dire Straits folk journeys. But in both cases the band feel the need to introduce that electric into proceedings, building it up in the mix until it takes everything off on a fizzing, fuzzing crescendo where the original spirit of the song can only cling on by the coattails and hope its sense of melody doesn’t get too bruised or bashed out of shape. It’s a move they pull off on every track here to the point it becomes a cliché. And the thing is, they just don’t need it. They have nice tunes and good voices and even a decent way with a picked guitar that reminds us of Bert Jansch. And lyrics like “Summer girl with the snowfall eyes and the colour of autumn in your eyes,” which is pure hippy poetry but forgivable when you’re sitting in a woody glade off your fucking nut on Psilocybin. So anyway, nice stuff overall but maybe even nicer without all that

modern fangled elastictrickery nonsense. That way lies Nickleback.

HENRY SOOTHILL

Talking of all things rustic and folky, Henry Soothill (better known round these parts as guitarist in rising local indie starlets Balloon Ascents) would be a great name for a travelling troubadour, maybe one armed with nothing but a lute and a satchel of old fairytales. But he isn’t. On the contrary he is a man very much plugged into the national grid, with his dark, droning electric guitar and low-frequency electronics. Which isn’t to say he’s averse to something a bit more old fashioned and organic, as piano and violin invade his sombre instrumental pieces which drift like grey, glitchy fog through darkened tunnels, only occasionally squalling into something more abrasive. ‘Room 81’ in particular billows and blooms into a right old storm of restrained symphonic post-rock that, like the rest of his work, sounds like it’s waiting for some serious visuals to really make its presence felt. Henry’s adept at creating atmospheric sounds and leading them along with a sense of purpose, but maybe we’re lacking the requisite nightmarish animation to fully appreciate it.

PILGRIM SQUALL

Oxford hip hop’s move out of the shadows continues apace. Alongside the new Zuby album and Half Decent mixtape this month comes this EP/demo from rapper/producer Jacky Baker, going under the guise Pilgrim Squall. Like fellow rhymers Rawz, he’s as much a poet as a rapper, with a soft but steely, sleepy-eyed yet alert delivery that doesn’t feel the need to break out of an almost somnambulant shuffle to make its point. Lyrically he’s adept at conjuring poetic imagery in an almost conversational fashion that inevitably recalls The Streets and avoids pretty much anything that might pass for rap cliché. Musically it’s atmospheric and engaging stuff too: a hazy electro mist with tidy, understated beats that create a woozily crepuscular ambience that breaks only on the jazzy ‘First Light’. Throughout these four tracks he maintains an almost stately pace while retaining an air of genial authority about his words and music.

PIRATE RADIO

Back up the page there we were talking about how music has to progress, but sometimes maybe shouldn’t. In the world of heavy rock there is obviously a school of thought that everything must remain as it was in the 1970s and change is both unnecessary and unwelcome. We say ‘school of thought’, but that suggests those

involved put down their pints of ale long enough to give enough thought to anything other than riffs, beer and ladies in denim shorts. Which we very much doubt they could. So here are Pirate Radio, rockers of the old school and proud of it, rolling out them riffs like the last 40 years or so were just a strange dream Gary Moore once had and that he, along with Phil Lynott, is still very much alive and kicking it out through a bank of Marshall stacks. Okay, so there are concessions to the (vaguely modern) world in the form of nods to The Red Hot Chili Peppers and Pearl Jam, but these are fleeting and the spirit of Free, alongside Thin Lizzy, is a more prominent presence throughout. And nothing particularly wrong with that when it’s chopped out with suitable thunder in its heart, as on the meaty ‘Shoulder To Cry On’, or the Hawkwind-go-blues-funk ‘Snake Charmer Discotheque’, though the Chili Peppers-ish ‘Battle Scars’ is maybe a chest-beating barrel of bombast too far.

THE DEMO DUMPER

THE FIXATION

At what point did bands – proper bands with guitars and drums and people in them who actually write the songs rather than leaving it to a computer in Louis Walsh’s kitchen – decide that sounding like something conjured up in a Syco marketing meeting was something to emulate? Because this is why we’ve ended up with the likes of The Feeling and 5 Seconds of Summer, and now, on a local level, The Fixation. They’re from Oxford and are all sixteen and describe themselves as “an alternative rock band,” which puts the final nail in the coffin of the idea that the word alternative actually means anything at all in musical terms now. Because in the alternative stakes they make Busted sound like Anaal Nathrakh. ‘Change’ here might as well be Boyzone for all its rock and roll credentials. Rock and roll for people who think Lawson or Room 94 are rock and roll rather than something that gathers at the bottom of bins during hot weather. It’s all so lacking in the blood and guts and fire and soul of rock music, a weary shrug of a song. Thing is, we feel bad because this is the second month running we’ve had to stick a teenage band in the dumper, when we’d genuinely much rather be encouraging them, but when the like likes of Balloon Ascents and Twisted State of Mind are out there in local venues showing age is no barrier to invention and raw energy, safe sterility like this is all the more depressing.

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