

# NIGHTSHIFT

## Oxford's Music Magazine

Free once  
in a while  
Issue 298  
December  
2020

# CLOSED

## UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE

**Oxford music in the year of Covid**  
Musicians, promoters, venues, festivals, shops  
and studios talk lockdown blues, virtual gigs  
and light on the horizon.

*“The first day back will be something to cherish”*

Also in this issue:

### YOUNG KNIVES

*Their Barbaric return*

### Oxford's Tracks of the Year

plus  
No gigs, still.

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## TRUCK STORE/RAPTURE ALBUMS OF THE YEAR 2020

**#1 Willie J Healey  
Twin Heavy**  
"A masterclass in effortlessly perfect songwriting with a nod to the masters but a bold voice unique to Our Will! Summery, playful, wistful and wise, this is the album we needed in 2020 and we couldn't be prouder!"

**#2 Fontaines DC  
A Hero's Death**

**#3 Laura Marling  
Song For Our Daughter**

**#4 Andy Bell  
The View From Half Way Down**

**#5 Working Men's Club  
Working Men's Club**

**#6 Bonny Light Horseman  
Bonny Light Horseman**

**#7 Fenne Lily  
Breach**

**#8 Katy J Pearson  
Return**

**#9 Perfume Genius  
Set My Heart On Fire Immediately**

**#10 Kiwi Jr  
Football Money**

FULL TOP 50 LISTED ON OUR WEBSITES  
TRUCKMUSICSTORE.CO.UK RAPTUREWITNEY.CO.UK

## TRUCK STORE/RAPTURE ALBUMS OF THE YEAR 2020

**#11 Sault  
Unholy (Black Is)**

**#12 Phoebe Bridgers  
Punisher**

**#13 JARV IS  
Beyond The Pale**

**#14 BC Camplight  
Shortly After Takeoff**

**#15 Tom Misch & Yussef  
Dages  
What Kinda Music**

**#16 Gill Landry  
Skeleton At The Banquet**

**#17 Bruce Springsteen  
Letter To You**

**#18 Bill Callahan  
Gold Record**

**#19 Jeff Parker  
Suite For Max Brown**

**#20 Sorry  
925**

**#21 Young Knives  
Barbarians**

**#22 The Flaming Lips  
American Head**

**#23 The Killers  
Imploding The Mirage**

**#24 Sufjan Stevens  
The Ascension**

**#25 BDRMM  
Bedroom**

**#26 Jeff Rosenstock  
No Dream**

**#27 Fiona Apple  
Fetch The Bolt Cutters**

**#28 Mobb Beringer  
Serpentine Prison**

**#29 Ela Minus  
Acts of Rebellion**

**#30 Brian Fallon  
Local Honey**

**#31 Moses Boyd - Dark Matter**

**#32 Four Tet - Sixteen Oceans**

**#33 I Break Horses - Warnings**

**#34 Freddie Gibbs & The Alchemist - Alfredo**

**#35 Julian Cope - Self Civil War**

**#36 Kevin Morby - Sundowner**

**#37 Blake Mills - Mutable Set**

**#38 IDLES - Ultra Mono**

**#39 Gil Scott-Heron & Makaya McCraven - We're New Again**

**#40 Drive-By Truckers - The Unraveling**

**#41 Sports Team - Deep Down Happy**

**#42 Grimes - Miss Anthropocene**

**#43 Asher Gamezde - Dialectic Soul**

**#44 OSEES - Protean Threat**

**#45 EOB (Ed O'Brien) - Earth**

**#46 La Roux - Supervision**

**#47 Porridge Radio - Every Bad**

**#48 Lady Gaga - Chromatica**

**#49 This Is The Kit - Off Off On**

**#50 Mulatu Astatke & Black Jesus Experience - To Know Without Knowing**

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## TRUCK STORE PRESENTS... MAXIMO PARK



**O2 ACADEMY OXFORD  
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THE NEW ALBUM  
'NATURE ALWAYS WINS'  
RELEASED 26TH FEBRUARY



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## TRUCK STORE PRESENTS... YOU ME AT SIX



**O2 ACADEMY, OXFORD  
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THE NEW ALBUM 'SUCKAPUNCH'  
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**HELLO AND WELCOME TO THE LAST NIGHTSHIFT** of 2020, and also the first since April. It's pointless to talk too much about Covid/coronavirus in its wider context – you've either been paying attention in 2020 or fast asleep in a remote cave – but it felt important to explore the impact the pandemic has had on people across Oxford's music scene, from artists to promoters, studio engineers to shop owners, which is what this issue is mainly here for. That and to bring the traditional *Nightshift* Tracks of the Year list – your

guide to the best music made in Oxfordshire in 2020. And that's been one crumb of positivity these last few months – the fact that music is still being made and still being played, albeit remotely. It's something well worth celebrating, as well as a reminder of what we're missing. Here's hoping the vaccines work and we can safely get back into venues and festivals in 2021. In the meantime – keep supporting grassroots music wherever and however you can, keep well and stay safe, and have a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year everyone.

### YOUNG KNIVES

have been talking about their year after their track 'Sheep Tick' was voted *Nightshift's* Oxford song of the year. It is the fourth time the band have topped our end of year chart, having previously done so with 'Walking on the Autobahn' (in 2002), 'The Decision' (2004), and 'Maureen' (2013). 'Sheep Tick' was taken from Young Knives' new album 'Barbarians', their first in seven years and a record inspired by philosopher John Gray's book *Straw Dogs: Thoughts on Humans and Other Animals*, which posits a pessimistic view of humanity's evolution from barbarism. 'Barbarians' received widespread acclaim for its challenging musical style, while Young Knives' inventive Caravan Sessions online gigs were a highlight of a 2020 mostly bereft of live gigs.

Sessions, which involved the pair playing remotely, joined by Henry's son Arthur, strange graphics, quizzes, imaginative cover versions and guests, including drummer Zahra Tehrani, were the best virtual shows of 2020, with the band obviously keen to make them something different from normal virtual gigs taking place over the year. "We just kind of did it. I did see a few online things and thought they were a bit lame and we did kind of arrogantly think that we could do them loads better. We knew it would be junky and stupid and potentially kind of embarrassing, but we have never really shied away from making fools of ourselves; I think it's an important part of the creative process. Day one of testing we decided to just go online and see what happened. That's the whole point of the format: it's not polished at all, it's warts and all and I think that's something that some performers maybe don't embrace; that is what makes the live streaming format so good and if you ignore that then you are working against it. The way I see it, the streams can be rambling and long and full of gaps and you can fuck up a song and start again without worrying about it too much. They aren't a show, they are more a kind of gathering. It's almost like a 60s style 'happening'. I think of it in the same way that long-form podcasts feel in contrast to radio shows; it's exciting and has a much deeper engagement. But it also breaks down the performer/audience relationship and makes it more fluid. Everyone is rooting for you and the audience are really part of it. Brecht would approve. "The reactions have all just been kind of positive. I wish I had a better story but either people love it and get chatting on the streams or they don't, and we don't hear from them. I think we've had one guy spamming the text chat and he was soon told to piss off. It's a nice safe and kind environment. Boring I know, you can't cut yourself on a broken glass or test your gag reflex in the venue bogs. Well, unless you've got a really unsanitary home."

As part of the build-up to the release of 'Barbarians', Young Knives gave away the album free, track by track,

Henry and Tom's *Caravan*



to fans on their mailing list. "What we wanted to do was make the album into an experience, a bit like a day driving super-cars, or a hot air balloon trip... I always like the idea of making really wicked liner notes, giving people who are interested a shit load of stuff to read or watch about the record. It's what I would want. I think it meant more people bought it: not the giving away bit on its own, but that as part of the whole thing we did to launch it. We gave people a reason to give a shit about what we had made and as far as I can tell it worked okay. We've accidentally ended up selling everything out so our problem is that there is nothing for stocking fillers. You get it for free now anyway, so it just bypassed all the streaming crap." Despite 'Barbarians' subject matter, Henry says it's unintentional how much it reflects the way 2020 has gone across the globe.

"Most of the songs were written before 2016. 'Society for Cutting Up Men' was written after

Trump's election and although it is based on Valerie Solonias' *SCUM Manifesto*, I was definitely thinking of Trump in his tower. It's funny how the record does seem to fit really well. I didn't even think of the relevance of the track 'Swarm' to the spread of the disease until a couple of months ago. I mean, the whole mood was about how crowds are both amazing and terrifying, the mob and the congregation, but also the 'plague of locust' appearance that humanity sometimes has and how one plague devours another to restore the balance of nature. It's like an unintentional prophecy." Finally, with 'Sheep Tick' voted *Nightshift's* track of the year, that makes four Number 1s have had now. Are Young Knives the best Oxford band ever? "Yes, we are."

Get 'Barbarians' at [young-knives.com](http://young-knives.com). Catch up on the *Caravan Sessions* on Youtube.

# THE YEAR OF THE VIRUS

## Covid and the Oxford music scene

**WHEN THE UK FIRST LOCKED** down in March, it's fair to say few if any of us knew we'd get to the end of 2020 with venues still shut and, realistically, many more months to come before we can return to gigs. Live music has been as badly hit as any sector during the Covid-19 pandemic. Venues were among the first places to close and will likely be among the last to reopen. The fallout from all this won't be fully calculated for a long time. Financially the sector's situation remains precarious, despite the grants that have been made available, while for those working, playing or just watching gigs, the mental health scars shouldn't be underestimated. Live music, particularly grassroots live music, isn't just another part of the economy, it's a society all by itself.

**TO GET A FEEL FOR THE** impact Covid has had on Oxford's live music scene, *Nightshift* talked to the people whose lives are tied up in gigs and the jobs that feed into live music. We also talked to various local musicians whose lives and plans have been affected by the pandemic. We asked them how 2020 has been for them and their hopes and fears for the future.

**"IT'S BEEN A VERY** difficult year for all of us, and especially for the owner who has sunk so much into the business," says Joal Shearing, who runs the live music at **THE WHEATSHEAF**, a small, wholly independent pub and venue that has weathered a fair few storms in recent years and has been closed to all live music since March. In between lockdowns the downstairs bar has been able to open with limited capacity in the hope of staying financially afloat. "Luckily The Sheaf, when it has been open, has an incredible group of support from regulars who have kept the pub alive and kicking," continues Joal. "For me it's been a

harder transition; going from having a very hectic schedule and busy venue to being in isolation has taken its toll. Only focusing on new skills and returning to writing music has kept me from going insane. "With everything so up in the air it's difficult to make any plans. Once we have a timeline on when it's possible to reopen I plan on upgrading all the gear. We have a handful of bookings for very late 2021 but everything else is on hold and I honestly cannot see live music returning before May at the earliest, unless a miracle happens. "I do think the Sheaf will survive and I'm trying to stay positive but it all depends on future lockdowns."

**THE BULLINGDON, LIKE THE** Wheatsheaf, is an independent venue, one that has been steadily building its reputation on the national scene. Now an integral part of the UK tour circuit thanks to promoters like Crosstown, Empty Room Promotions and the Haven Club, much of 2020 has seen bookings at the Bully rearranged and then rearranged again as the uncertainty around the pandemic and government rules continued. "The Bully had been getting busier and busier over the last few years and this year was set to be our best yet," explains manager Paul Williams. "The stop for us was immediate and a huge shock but also physically and mentally took its toll on everyone that works with us. We have the core team of bar staff, tech and management but there is so much more to The Bullingdon: cleaners; promoters; engineers; designers; media; bands; independent drinks suppliers, and much more. It's been great that we all still message each other to check in; it was nice to be getting weekly friendly texts from the head of Thames Valley Police licensing!" Unlike The Wheatsheaf, The Bully was able to take advantage of the government's culture recovery fund, which distributed over a billion pounds

to venues and music projects across the UK to tide them over until such time as doors can reopen. Without it, The Bully, along with myriad other venues, would not have survived this year. "The money has been our lifeline and will see us through until June if nothing changes by then. The amount was significant and I think shocked people as to why we needed so much. But if you take the first six months of lockdown, then we had lost nearly 50% of the grant in that time and that's with the government paying for the staff to be furloughed. It's also important to point out we don't just get that amount; it's split payments that are under review if we still need it. The campaign #makeitred is still ongoing and we will still be making people aware that the freelancers that are vital to making shows happen are still not getting the help that they deserve." The Bullingdon was able to host a behind-closed-doors gig by **SUPERGRASS** over the summer, which was streamed online to raise money for the Nordoff Robbins Music Therapy Charity and suicide prevention charity CALM. Paul had also drawn up elaborate plans to stage socially distanced shows before the second lockdown was imposed. "At the moment we are aiming for December to reopen and are planning for events to start happening again then; if that date moves we just move with it. That means that as soon as we can reopen we are ready for seated and distanced or full on shoulder to shoulder standing shows. Just before Lockdown 2 we had a week of seated events and they worked well so everything is in place for whatever rules they throw at us. "One thing that socially distanced and streaming shows have shown us is that there are groups of people that have not been able to access live shows. This isn't always because of a disability or affordability, so when we are back with full crowds I am keen

to ensure that these people are not left without the new experiences that they have gained across the last eight months." **ACROSS TOWN DAVE MAUL** from **BLACK & WHITE MUSIC**, who promote gigs and festivals in Reading, runs the live music upstairs at **THE JERICHO TAVERN** and has been frustrated by the constantly shifting sands that make any forward planning impossible. "There are so many obstacles for us as promoters as far as planning ahead goes, from venues being closed and social distancing rules to the ever-changing guidelines and the general uncertainty with everything. It's hard to plan with any real conviction at the moment and it's more with optimistic hope right now. "It's hard to be positive at times but overall I am optimistic and I do believe we can all weather this storm: you need the whole music ecosystem to be supported and for it to survive. I hope that there will be a cultural renaissance and people will embrace live music and culture more than ever!" **OF COURSE, WHILE VENUES** were the first things to feel the impact of Covid, this summer's outdoor festivals quickly followed, with every event across Oxfordshire cancelled. Truck, Combury, Charlbury Riverside, The Big Festival, Wilderness, Supernormal and Cropredy all held out and hoped for the best before bowing to the inevitable. "For me personally it really sank in when Glastonbury announced their cancellation and when the first lockdown happened shortly after, I think it really put the nail in the coffin for us," remembers **TRUCK FESTIVAL**'s Conor Burns. "I think, like most people, around February and March we were naive about the serious effect Covid would have on the industry and even the



world. We saw gigs, some I had tickets for, rescheduling for September or October and thought this would all blow over in a matter of weeks; how wrong we all were." Many festivals announced their 2020 events cancelled as soon as the first lockdown was announced, but as Hugh Phillimore, founder and organiser of **CORNURY FESTIVAL** explains, making such a call for a major event wasn't simple. "It was pretty obvious in early March that the festival had to be postponed. My partners wanted to wait another two months for the ticket company not to be swamped by the volume of refunds from their regular indoor shows. We had to call the agents, artists, suppliers etc etc to let them know – even if they all expected it. It was lucky that we were in the relatively early stages of planning." Truck had planned to host Catfish & the Bottlemen, Bombay Bicycle Club and The Kooks as main headliners, while Combury had announced Dido, Van Morrison and Jack Savoretti among their star names. With months of preparations involved in organising festivals, both events are cautious about how 2021 might pan out. "We're still looking at the practicalities of trying to stage a socially distanced festival, which are pretty huge," says Hugh. "Think it's very unlikely that the vaccine will be with us in time. We're thinking that pre-testing is probably the best option. A lot of festivals are saying that they'll only go ahead at full capacity or not at all." "We're pretty optimistic," says Conor. "Although I'm answering this question in the midst of a second lockdown, Truck is nine months away and with exciting vaccine news coming through every other day now, there's a chance this could happen." Despite the setbacks of this year and the challenges ahead in 2021, both Truck and Combury hope they will be back as normal next year, and look to the solidarity among the UK's festival organisers as something to cheer. Conor: "Behind the scenes methods and processes being explored. I'm

actually astounded by the cross collaboration across the festival teams – even if we are competitors. There's definitely a common goal between us all; I love that. The collaboration and the willingness of the whole industry has been astounding when, usually, it's pretty cutthroat out there." "I'm an optimist but being seriously challenged," adds Hugh. "If 2021 doesn't happen quite a few festivals won't be around in 2022. Our survival as a business is not 100% linked to the festival so we should be fine – assuming we've got the energy to get back on the pitch, whenever that is." **"The collaboration and the willingness of the whole festival industry has been astounding when, usually, it's pretty cutthroat out there."** **IT HASN'T JUST BEEN** venues and festivals that have been hard hit in 2020. Oxford is awash with great independent promoters who put their own individual stamps on the local scene. Among those are **DIVINE SCHISM** and **FREAK SCENE**, both of who personify the DIY ethic of the grassroots scene. While they both saw all their plans laid to waste, together they led the way in bringing virtual gigs into people's homes with their **REMOHTE COMMUNITY!** mini-festivals, featuring a selection of underground acts beaming in from around the country on a monthly basis via Instagram. "It was only supposed to be one show to begin with," explains Freak Scene's Richard Bell, "then after we both enjoyed doing the first one we figured we'd have another go. I assumed we would do three or four, but the next one will be the eighth show, and we'll probably be doing them for a while yet. But as much as they're fun to do, I'm absolutely gasping to get back down to The Library's basement for a sweaty little punk show." "I'd had the idea of calling an all dayer Oh, Community! for ages," adds Divine Schism's Aiden Canaday, "and

of course, I love working with others on things in this scene so it kind of fell into place as Rich was planning to put on some bands on a weekend in April and I just thought, why not do something bigger and better together! Luckily Rich was happy with the idea but then yeah, we had to cancel and rearrange and decided to rebrand slightly and go online!" Rich: "It's a shame as it would actually have been our first co-promo. That's also why the posters always look so bad – Aiden designed a beautiful poster for the original gig which I butchered for the first RemOHte Community! show, and have been making it worse and worse ever since." Switching shows online at least meant the gigs got to happen but virtual shows brought their own unique issues. Rich: "It was a bit of a learning curve. The only real technical issue we've had is that, as with any live show, we always end up running behind, and sometimes if a band hasn't quite clocked that they might try to log in and start their set before the last band is finished. Bit of a unique thing to streams that – you don't often see a band storming on stage while the others are still playing at live shows!" Aiden: "Jack Goldstein suddenly appearing on a beach whilst Common Or Garden still had two songs to go was shocking and wonderful and after initially being worried, it was a great moment."

just come from Italy; indeed their last few in Italy were cancelled due to the Coronavirus situation over there. I remember making sure there was hand sanitiser in the dressing room, and my sister went mad when she saw a photo of me getting a hug from the bass player, knowing they had flown in from Covid-ridden Italy! "Soon after that the cancellations started, though in those early days we were all optimistic about rescheduling to the end of this year; little did we know. My next gig was meant to be in April: Wille & The Bandits with Troy Redfern as support. I was really looking forward to this as I'd got Troy the support slot for the whole tour, which was going really well; the Oxford show had sold well and I love both the bands. "I haven't rebooked many shows, the Wille/Troy one was moved to March 2021 when we realised that this September was a no no and I've just been contacted by the Billy Walton Band who, encouraged by the vaccine news, are wondering about late 2021. Although a lot of my acts are from abroad there are plenty in the UK, all champing at the bit to play, and there are always too many bands wanting to play than there are dates, so that doesn't worry me. There is also the – dare I mention it – Brexit situation, which will affect bands tremendously! "I fluctuate in my degrees of hope for the future, depending on what shit has fallen from Boris' and his cronies' gobs, but mostly I'm optimistic that live music will eventually return. You can't keep a good musician down. I'm determined that the Haven Club will return!" **AS WELL AS KEEPING** people fed with live music, the RemOHte Community! shows have helped raise much-needed funds for Oxford's **YOUNG WOMEN'S MUSIC PROJECT**, which celebrates its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year and was set to host a series of celebratory fundraising events throughout 2020 before Covid put a stop to them. The Young Women's Music Project,





Foals at Truck Festival in 2019

which empowers young women through its music sessions, workshops, talks and gigs, has always walked a narrow tightrope financially, dependent on grants, donations and its fundraisers. Zahra Tehrani, who runs the project, has seen it overcome a host of obstacles over the years but recognises that 2020 has been particularly hard.

“It’s been one of the most frustrating things we’ve had to go through, but as a project we’re very used to curveballs. We seem to overcome a yearly hurdle so we’re pretty prepared for dealing with change, though obviously this is the biggest challenge so far, but we never give up without a fight. Over the years YWMP has lost its home, moved around the city and has always gotten by on a shoestring. “We had an amazing start to the year, which we kicked off with six of the 20 events we had lined up. It’s weird remembering our incredible birthday party in February, where we had a line-up of some of our favourite acts, including Jenny Moore’s Mystic Business, Julia-Sophie, Slagheap and more. We’re obviously gutted that we couldn’t see through the rest of the events, but you just have to adapt and keep going.”

As with so many, the internet has helped YWMP continue its important work.

“As soon as March hit, we took everything online and adapted our sessions. Throughout the pandemic we ran weekly discussion sessions; we partnered with Ableton and Focusrite and launched a music production course, delivering home music studios to our participants and learning how to use production software. We have also produced and launched our ‘Isolation Compilation’ album and accompanying zine.

“Alongside all this we’ve been providing essential support for our network of young women. We deliver vital provisions, including food, and provide pastoral support for women facing domestic abuse, young mothers, and isolated women in vulnerable positions.

“The RemOHte Community! shows

have been a great opportunity to highlight artists who are part of our project, raise funds and discover new music. The regular donations have been a real boost at this time, so we’re grateful for the support and to the organisers and all the acts involved.”

As well as benefitting from the RemOHte Community! shows and a grant from Youth Music earlier in

**“Everything has been done online. The customer path to the studio is now completely overgrown with weeds and moss”**

the year, YWMP hosted their own virtual gigs, showcasing grassroots female musicians with their monthly Bedroom Sessions shows.

“We made the bedroom concerts happen really quickly, starting in April, and lots of people have been happy to support us. We’re pretty rare in our approach to events because we pay all the artists properly regardless of how established they are, which is so important, especially at a time when the music industry and freelancers are suffering so much at the hands of the pandemic. We aim to platform the amazing talent of our participants as well as supporting women doing their own thing from the local and national music scene.”

**LIVE MUSIC HASN’T BEEN** the only thing to suffer throughout 2020. The gig scene serves and is served by myriad other businesses, most of which are small and independent, like the network of local rehearsal and recording studios.

Mike Bannard, who runs **SAFEHOUSE STUDIOS** in East Oxford, explained how the various shutdowns and distancing rules have affected his work.

“Pre-Covid we were busier than ever. Covid meant we had to cancel our sessions and things pretty much dried up. It was quite stressful initially and I was worried about our future. Fortunately I had enough mix and mastering work to keep busy for some time, which I can do solo or online. A

few bands that had regular bookings and could afford it also continued to fund us, despite the fact they couldn’t use the studio; I’m extremely grateful to them. A few weeks later we were then eligible for a small business grant, which has kept us afloat. It doesn’t look like this government has done a great job containing the virus but I couldn’t be more grateful for the grants and self-employment schemes, via Oxford City Council and their teams, which have kept small creative business and individuals going.”

“Once lockdown measures had eased we could take on small recording sessions, voice-over work, audio-visual projects, drum lessons etc. again with the new format: a max of one or two people in the studio to keep distance, face masks, hand gel etc. All the things that now feel normal. Then eventually we were booking limited capacity rehearsals again, and October was actually our busiest month for the last three years! We also jumped on the streaming bandwagon and started a lockdown sessions format, which will see some video content released over

the next few months.”

Mike has seen firsthand how this year has affected musicians but remains optimistic for the future.

“Everyone’s mental health has been affected generally, which will translate in different ways. Some musicians have lost motivation for now and it makes you realise how much of a social scene it is, and others have utilised the time to great effect. I’m humbled by the creative efforts and optimism of people continuing to move forward in some way.

“It feels like there’s an end in sight and the initial lockdown easing proved that the people of the Oxford music scene are willing to get busy again. We were actually thinking of expanding to a bigger space if the business kept up!”

Jamie Hyatt, who runs **GLASSHOUSE STUDIOS** in

Cumnor also remains upbeat. “The lockdowns haven’t been easy on anyone and especially small business. Loads of bands have been rehearsing with us in between lockdowns, and it sounds like they’ve been putting the downtime to some good. I think lots of bands will be ready to start gigging and releasing music as soon as things ease a bit. I predict a real creative outpouring in 2021 and beyond and I think bands and audiences are going to make up for lost time.”

One small business that has continued to be busy throughout the pandemic is **TURAN AUDIO** in Cowley. Mastering engineer and local scene legend Tim Turan said, “Covid hasn’t affected business here at all; if anything we’ve been busier than normal. Musicians are pretty irreplaceable when it comes to their art, they always seem to find a way round the restrictions in order to keep productive. Many are local artists but we’ve also had a huge amount of work from around the world. The massive downside for me is not being able to have bands and artists in the studio. Everything has been done online. The customer path and entrance to the studio is now completely overgrown with weeds and moss.”

Meanwhile, **OXFORD DUPLICATION CENTRE**’s Cheryl Lee Foulsham has seen business dip substantially but remains optimistic.

“From our perspective, CD duplication is slightly picking up. There was little more than a dribble, turned now in to a trickle, so this is positive. We have emails requesting quotes but due to this second lockdown clients are holding off for a little while longer. But I can see there might be a little light on the distant horizon.”

**OF COURSE RETAIL HAS** suffered spectacularly throughout the pandemic. The sector was under pressure from online trade before coronavirus, not least independent shops. **TRUCK STORE** on Cowley Road and its sister store **RAPTURE**, in Witney, are used to being innovative to stay ahead in the game but even



they have found themselves having to come up with new ideas to stay alive in the most challenging of times, as Truck manager Carl Smithson explains.

“Like everyone we’ve had a strange and challenging 2020, but we’ve always been adaptable and that became vital this year. Having to mothball the shops for such a long spell over the spring and summer went against everything we’ve been about; the in-store customer experience has always been our priority, but it did offer the opportunity to step-up our mail order game. As such we now have a fully functional online webstore and are offering mail-order and click-and-collect services which have proved to be very popular.”

One particularly significant blow to Truck and Rapture was the loss of Record Store Day in 2020 – traditionally indie record shops’ busiest day of the year. Again though, shops adapted to the situation.

“Being closed during April, when **RECORD STORE DAY** is usually our busiest day of the year, was a tough one. However the organisers also adapted and we held three RSD drop dates over three months which were a healthy, and most importantly safe, alternative which gave the local vinyl junkies their fix!”

Truck and Rapture also missed out on sales from their pop-up stores at local festivals over the summer.

“Missing out on a summer of festivals has been tough and we missed our friends and annual jaunts to WOOD, Truck, Combury and Riverside, but we’re confident the love for these events will mean they come back stronger than ever next year and we’ll be there with bells on!”

“As we look to re-opening and going into the Christmas build-up we hope our customers will feel safe returning to the store. Equally we fully understand if some folks are remaining cautious and as such offer up our mail-order and click-and-collect services as ways to keep supporting us and shop independent this Christmas.”

**ONE THING THAT STANDS** out from talking to almost everyone involved in the local scene is a hope that maybe the trials of 2020 have given more people an appreciation of live music and everything that surrounds it. With vaccines set to be rolled out in the near future, there are still months of hardship to come, and it might be a few years before live music fully recovers, but maybe 2021 will see the scene rise again.

“I’m very much taking a wait and see approach to putting on live shows in 2021,” says Richard from Freak Scene. “Earlier this year I rearranged a show that was supposed to happen in April for November, but had no idea at the time that I was trading one lockdown for another. I think it’s

probably best to look at the whole year with cautious optimism; I really hope we can do actual shows, but if we can’t then we can’t, and we’ll make the best of it by carrying on with RemOHte Community!”

“My chief hope is that a vaccine will put an end to this pernicious virus and we can all return to some sort of new normal,” agrees Tim Turan. “My fears are for the many friends I have in the live music industry: promoters, venue owners, sound engineers, tech staff etc; even the Portaloos folks business has gone down the pan now that there’s no festivals. The ticketing industry too: how do you sell tickets to non-existent events. It’s a nightmare really and the end is still definitely not in sight.”

Zahra from YWMP worries about young musicians while hoping for better things to come: “Our fears are around the decline in mental health for everybody: not having human contact in the same way we did before really hits hard. Lacking access to live music also has a big impact for musicians and music lovers, and it is actually a massive loss for the people who make music and the community that is built around it. My fears are that this scene won’t be able to come back as soon as we’d like it to or in the way that we want it to. I don’t have any illusions about live music bouncing back quickly, but I do have optimism that communities like YWMP will stick together and be stronger from coming through this. I think light will be shed on the issues that marginalised communities face.”

**SOMETHING EVERYONE** agrees on is how much they’ve missed going to gigs. Live music is a lot of people’s lives, both work and socially and its return can’t come soon enough.

“I’ve really missed the shared experience of a coming together of strangers and those little moments when you are watching a performance and feel connected to one another,” says Dave Maul. “You can’t replace that feeling with Zoom.”

“I’ve mainly missed the people at shows: the staff, the artists and the punters; we have a great community of people in Oxford on the music scene and the vibe at shows is so great,” adds Aiden.

Joal agrees: “I used to get asked all the time if I missed my evenings and weekends being stuck in a little dark venue working with noisy bands who don’t listen and wind me up. I used to wonder what it would be like on the other side and now I know it’s hell. I started working in this industry due to my love for live music and that’s what I miss the most. I’m simply looking forward to catching the bus into town and watching the bands roll in for soundcheck. The first day back will be something to cherish.”



*While 2020 saw so many independent businesses shutting down, either temporarily or permanently, Oxford record label **BIG SCARY MONSTERS** bucked the trend and opened their new bar-cum-record store **BSM SOCIAL** on Cowley Road. As the label looks forward to celebrating its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in January, head honcho **KEVIN DOUCH** talks about riding the storm and hope on the horizon.*

“Honestly, 2020 hasn’t affected the label too badly all in all. It’s been weird having no gigs or festivals but the bands have stayed as busy as they can and it’s given us space to introduce some creative ideas we’ve been working on for a while now. We’ve got everything crossed for a more ‘normal’ – whatever that means anymore – year in 2021, though.

“In my mind it’s been in the pipeline since BSM began, staring at empty buildings on Cowley Road and daydreaming. We started working on it around 18 months ago, brainstorming how to bring the worlds of vinyl and craft beer together under one roof, how we’d want the shop to look, products we should stock and what it could bring to the community. We first viewed our shop – 98 Cowley Road, opposite Big Society, formerly the Elm Tree of course, where I first started going to gigs as a teenager – on my birthday in July so took it as a sign and we got the keys in October. We knew going in the winter would be tough and our plans were based around a Covid phase – click and collect, social distancing, etc. – and a post-Covid phase – more inside seating, live in-stores, beers on tap and other fun things – and that’s what we’re really excited about. Hopefully some of that can start happening in the spring.

“On the music front it’ll offer a different set of records to what you’ll find at the wonderful Truck Store just down the road. We’ll be focusing more on punk, hardcore, emo, math rock, post rock and alternative artists, roughly in line with the label’s catalogue but a bit broader in each direction. On the beer front we’re the first bottle shop in Oxford, and it’s something the city is long overdue. So whether people view it as a bar you can buy records in or a record shop you can drink in, we think it’s quite different to anything you’ll find pretty much anywhere in the country.

“Between 2007 and 2011 we ran a subscription service and I’ve been trying to figure out a good way to bring that back ever since. I finally cracked it during lockdown and feels quite appropriate to bring that back for our 20<sup>th</sup> birthday. We launched the first part earlier this year with our Family Friend website ([bsmrocks.com/familyfriend](http://bsmrocks.com/familyfriend)), where people can sign up for free to access exclusive discounts, downloads, competitions and more. We’re now launching a paid tier for this, which gives subscribers a free LP every month plus an exclusive 7” each quarter and a bunch more. I think it’s gonna be a great way to introduce even more amazing new music to a wider audience. So I guess you could say our Number 1 target across both sides of the business is to introduce lots of people to their new favourite band in 2021. We’d love to have some kind of party to celebrate the birthday too but we’ll hold that thought for now and see where things are in the summer. If anyone fancies buying us a celebratory drink in the meantime though, I know just the place...”

# HOW WAS IT FOR YOU?

## Oxford musicians talk about their Covid year



**WHILE THE CORONAVIRUS** pandemic and its accompanying lockdowns and restrictions has had a catastrophic effect on gig venues and music-related businesses in 2020, its fallout has been no less severe on musicians.

**VERY FEW GRASSROOTS** musicians make a living from their art but many aspire to, while for others it provides an escape, an adventure. It's what they work long hard hours to be able to do. This year, with no venues or festivals, and studios either closed or working on reduced numbers, they had to find new ways to make music and get it out to fans.

*Nightshift* chatted to a selection of our favourite local stars and hopefuls to find out how Covid had affected their plans, their writing and their mental health, how they had adapted to ever-changing new normals and their hopes and fears for music in the future.

**FOUR-TIME NIGHTSHIFT** cover stars **DESERT STORM** released their latest album 'Omens' on APF Records in May. This summer should have seen them touring around Europe where years of slog had seen their reputation on the rock and metal scene grow and grow. On the road is where the quintet's man hours pay the greatest dividends.

"We had an 18 date European tour booked but when everything in the world started going crazy, we decided to reschedule the tour to October," explains drummer Elliot Cole. "At the time we thought that things would be okay by then but clearly we were wrong. We were

of full band rehearsals and we've even managed to make a start on a couple of new songs, which is great. It was really good to get together and jam but also just really nice to catch up with the guys again since none of us had seen each other in months. We are going to do a live stream soon too. It will be nice when it finally happens though because we are planning to play loads of old songs that haven't been in our live set for years."

**ANOTHER ARTIST HOPING** to tour around Europe over the summer was hip hop poet/producer **EB HILL**, who planned to release a follow-up to her acclaimed debut EP from last year. While those plans were put on hold, she made use of online resources to record and release a new single, 'Never Be Alone', last month with Canadian rapper J.O.B.

"I had planned to release my second EP this summer, and I had

***"The main effect of the pandemic has been to slow down my writing; it's hard to be prolific when you're preoccupied with survival."***

distanced seated shows at a limited capacity, but despite this, they were still great fun and we were just happy to play live again after six months.

"Despite not being able to tour album sales have been going well. Regarding the reviews for 'Omens', we had lots of positive feedback and it seemed to be well received right across the board, which we were very happy with. But we did miss out on a few print mags, which was a shame. *Kerrang!* and *Metal Hammer* didn't cover the album because the first UK lockdown started at the same time as our PR campaign, which meant the magazines weren't printing for a few months. The whole Bandcamp Friday thing has been very useful, not just us, but for a lot of other bands too. It's really helped push sales and support smaller bands in these difficult times.

"We're trying to remain optimistic that we can finally tour 'Omens' in Europe next year. We are thinking about doing it around October time, so hopefully the Covid situation will be under control by then.

"We've managed to have a couple

quite a few opportunities lined up to play some festivals around the UK and Europe. It would have been my first summer of playing festivals rather than attending so I was really excited. Alas, as the rest of us experienced, there was a three week period where each opportunity fell through. It was incredibly disappointing, but such is the way of 2020. Instead, I got to spend time with my parents I otherwise wouldn't have, and all the extra time has allowed the EP to become something really quite special. I'm really excited to get it out there, it's much more comprehensive than I ever could have imagined. If anything, I'm grateful it's given me something to focus on through this.

"J.O.B is a very talented artist based in Toronto. I came across his music when he posted in a hip hop music producers forum we were both a part of on Reddit. The video was a freestyle about *Fullmetal Alchemist*, an anime we both really like, and I couldn't not reach out to see if he wanted to work on something. 'Never Be Alone' was basically finished by this stage, so it was just a case of sending the track

over by email, getting the recording from J.O.B, and doing my part to the production before sending to mix. I've been collaborating with artists and producers remotely for a long time, so it doesn't feel too out of place to 'have' to work this way now.

"I think many of us have had some sort of opportunity to reflect on what is most important to us as individuals, and our communities, moving through the challenges that this year has presented. My hope would be that we're all able to hold on to what that means as we move towards a sense of normalcy. Regarding music, I sincerely hope that not too many people gave up on learning an instrument or writing a song because the world got scary and they listened to that one click-bait article that said 'this is the worst time to start in music'. I think that's my biggest fear too, to think about the music and art that won't be made or heard simply because this year is a horrible beast that won't leave us alone. That's probably out of my hands for the most part, though. I just look forward to being able to hug people after a show again."

**ANOTHER ARTIST USED TO** working alone, either at home or in the studio, is **LINA SIMON**. 2020 was the year she was set to get a new full band together and gig more regularly. 2020 of course, had other plans

"The plan was to write another EP which would have been either heavy like 'My Embrace' or dancey like the 'Turn Off Live a Little' EP. That was put on hold because the thrill of playing it live didn't seem a reality at the time.



"I wrote a mini album, called 'Suburbia', of collated ideas over lockdown; the aim was to capture the aimless meandering of time. I played one of the RemOHe Community! live stream gigs. I nearly dropped out but went for it with my housemate Anne jumping on my bed in her dressing gown; that's probably why I kept getting distracted.

"I'm just hoping to get to play some live gigs in Oxford next year. I just co-formed a band with some friends during lockdown. We're called Hertz. It sounds good. Very good indeed. Fears? I have none."

**ONE OF THE NEWEST** names on the local scene at the start of 2020 was **APHRA TAYLOR**, an 18-year-old singer-songwriter who was releasing her debut EP, 'The Night Dances', alongside revising for her A-levels.

"It was really sad because I couldn't play any release shows to promote the EP. I had even rehearsed with Gaz Farmer, who drummed on three of the tracks, and was really happy with all of our hard work. My school was still open on the day of release though so I was able to ask people to listen to it but I also had to take down all of the gig posters down that I had put up, so it was a little bit bittersweet.

"I had been due to play an instore at Truck and a Divine Schism show with Max Blansjaar and Ally Craig for the EP launch. I was finishing my A-levels at the time so all of my exams were cancelled, and then the government fucked up everyone's grades. This then included all of the end of exam celebrations and meeting up with friends in the summer. It was, and still is, a difficult time for everyone though and I'm very privileged to be in the position that I am.

"I wrote a song at the start of the first lockdown which I'm pleased with but I have been finding it really hard to write stuff since. Instead of writing I've been recording a lot of my next project as I got some new recording equipment. I just don't think I want to write a song about Covid or lockdown; I want to escape it as much as possible, especially creatively.

"I just hope that lots of great music is released in 2021. I'm scared for musicians and venues and it makes me incredibly sad to know that I probably won't play or attend a gig in a good while. Everyone seems to be thinking and feeling the same way about the situation and it's really hard for people who find an escape within making/listening to music."

**FOR MOST MUSICIANS**, the pandemic has meant not being able to play gigs, go on tour or meet up with bandmates. For **ALLY CRAIG** it has meant ten months of shielding at home, with the extra sense of isolation that brings. Despite that, and suffering bereavement during that period, Ally released a brace of solo singles as well as a collaboration with Tiger Mendoza.

"I've been shielding since March and it has been tough. Luckily I'm a fairly quiet and solitary person; I'm usually happy enough reading books and working on music at home. But I still miss getting a change of scenery, spending time with friends, and, of course, playing gigs. But there's nothing I can do to make a pandemic end any sooner, so I'm resolved to wait it out. I think I'm doing about as well as I can expect. It's certainly easier now the initial wave of terror has worn off.

"I collaborated with Tiger Mendoza early on during lockdown and my single 'Quarantine Angst' directly referenced the lockdown and tried to encourage people to follow safety precautions, but the main effect of the pandemic has been to slow down my writing; it's hard to be prolific when you're preoccupied with survival. I've mostly been mixing and re-recording unreleased songs from the past few years. My single 'Chrysalids' was written last year; I was holding it back for a potential album but I decided to put it out as a single instead. Perhaps a few more songs will leak out in that fashion too.

"I've been home-recording since I first started writing songs in my teens. And no, you can't hear them! I used to dash off a quick demo with the intention of recording it 'properly' in the studio later. But it's unlikely that I'll get to record in a studio again for a while, so now I'm working on improving my recording and mixing skills, and investing in a few pieces of equipment, so that I can record things at home that I'd be proud to release."

"I have several different projects in the pipeline. I lost my mum to cancer in May, so I plan to release a couple of songs in her memory, songs of mine that were meaningful to her. I've also been writing new tunes to lyrics and poems by Shakespeare, working on more electro-pop stuff in the vein of 'Chrysalids', and planning to rework some older demos for a home-recorded album, or at least an EP. I have no idea what to expect for 2021. Who does. I'm of an anxious disposition, so I won't trouble you with my fears: they're



**Amid all the venue closures, lockdowns and virtual online gigs, one Oxford band managed to get out and keep playing live shows. Klub Kakofanney hosts and indefatigable party starters THE MIGHTY REDOX tell us how they've kept rocking in 2020.**

"We played every Thursday outside our house for the neighbours during the clap for the NHS – an interesting gig which got us some new fans in our locality; the first one was on our kitchen roof and they slowly turned into a mini street festival and were a great coming together. We combined this with ten online gigs of the two of us. Aided and abetted by Alan D, our Klub Kakofanney crew member, we rapidly acquired filming and audio skills equal to the task in hand. We are hoping to use some of this material in a small retrospective theatre show of our lives in music; the plan is to reveal a little bit of the story behind the songs. "In July, we began to play as a band in socially distanced events – in private gardens, parks and meadows. A highlight was the four Mighty Redox gigs we played for the Donnington Community Music event, in the local park, organised by Jeremy Hughes. Unfortunately, that was brought to an end in September, as it was judged to be outside of the rules by the City Council. They had a real 60s spirit about them and were well attended by a chilled but enthusiastic audience of between 50 -100 people, with far less boozing than in any pub!

"After that, we moved to The Tree Garden in Iffley for a weekly Sunday afternoon gig, which continued until this last lockdown. We played all of the outside gigs with small amps, a cut down drum kit and no PA system. We knew the gig could only continue if we avoided noise complaints, which is no small achievement in Iffley village. Although dancing was banned, the concerts were very special to our fans, who have been fantastically supportive throughout, sending daily emails and messages, and this kept the spirit of live music going strong. It was quite a discipline to keep the volume low and yet still rock out. Six people per table, and the place was full.

"Band practices took place in our small back garden, rain protected by an event shelter, which was essential to the task. We endured at least three severe downpours. These get together and outdoor gigs gave us valuable time to perform new material which we are now recording for our new album at Evolution Studios.

"It's been very hard on the band to miss our venue gigs, Summer festivals, and mini-tours; you just cannot replicate the amazing atmosphere of a live gig. Losing the festivals was a dreadful miss for us and our creative instincts. Many of our songs start right there.

"We also miss Klub Kakofanney greatly: the bands; the fans; the vibe, and all the staff at The Wheatshaf.

"We have been very lucky to have Alan provide a weekly e-mail of new and archived music from the Klub Kakofanney archive, which has kept all the supporters well informed, and still together. We are hopeful now with the advent of a possibly effective vaccine, and as soon as we know it's safe, we will be back. Next year, will be the klub's 30th Anniversary."

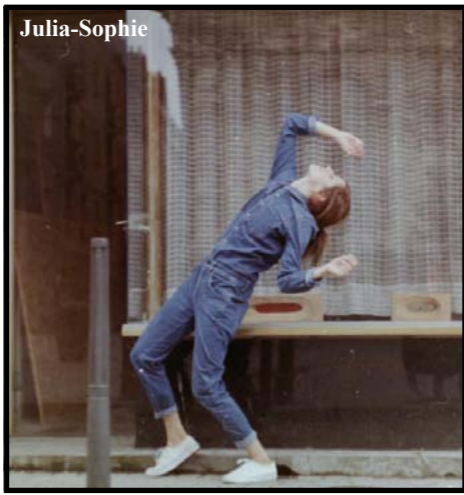
far too numerous and mostly unrealistic."

**TIGER MENDOZA IS** renowned as Oxford's collaboration king. As well as his single with Ally, Ian de Quadros, the man behind the tiger mask, has worked

with the likes of Mike Ginger from Deadbeat Apostles; Ocean Ruins' Katy Herridge; Stuart Macbeth from The Original Rabbit Foot Spasm Band, rapper Half Decent and Ciphers' Mila Todd this year alone. 2020 didn't slow his release schedule down too



much, culminating in his excellent 'TMSk8' mixtape in November. He's also been busy on the virtual gig front, but like so many others, misses the real thing. "I've done a few live gig type streams this year on various platforms. Yaya Jojo and I took part in the virtual Cowley Road Carnival back in July where I played from my house and he scratched live over the top from his house; that was cool. Then I did one of the Divine Schism RemOHe Community! sessions on Instagram as a solo thing. That was kind of weird but fun. Instagram is weird anyway though, right? And then most recently a session from TAD Studios which was also a solo set but in studio so there were a few other people around for that one. "Live stream sets are weird. They're fun and they fill a kind of performer shaped hole in all us musical types but it's not the same for playing for live audience. You miss that connection, although for me at least the challenge of bringing the whole thing together, especially when it's just me in my spare room, has been really interesting and helped pass the time. "The music I put together is actually done over email and file sharing services like Dropbox and Wettransfer anyway. Not very rock and roll but it's proved quite useful in the middle of a pandemic. I obviously haven't been to any gigs or much in general in a while which means less 'we should do something!' chats but I did reach out to people like Emma from Death Of The Maiden and Ally on socials and I'm really happy with the tracks we made together. It's about adapting I guess. "I try not to over think things when I'm coming up with music but I guess the pandemic and a realisation that this is a global crisis did seep in and gave it probably gave it a darker edge than it may have had otherwise. Not that my music is happy clappy fun time



music anyway. But this year has been about more than just the pandemic. I don't know, maybe the Covid crisis has accelerated the thinking on things but the Black Lives Matter protests, the US presidential elections, statues being toppled... something has been in the air. I don't really do words, I'm not a lyricist, but I think Mila summed it up really well on 'Oppressor' on 'TMSk8'. She wrote all of the lyrics and there's a directness I could never capture myself. There's quote from Anthony Bourdain at the end of mixtape and as soon as I heard it, I knew I had to finish the tape with it: 'It is a fascinating planet filled with, more often than not, beautiful people'. I just needed that sense of hope at the end otherwise what else is there?"

**2020 MAYBE ALLOWED** solo artists a bit more room to manoeuvre than bands. While she helms Candy Says, Julia Walker had already started writing and performing under her own **JULIA SOPHIE** moniker before Covid hit. While she was able to release her debut EP earlier in the year, it didn't make up for the inability to play live. "Not being able to perform live was a real blow as playing and performing live shows is, for me, a really integral part to how the music should be experienced, as well as to my life, and to my identity as an artist. On the upside, the lockdown forced people to slow down and with bigger artists pulling their releases, I wonder if it perhaps carved a little passage for newer



artists to be heard. Maybe radio producers and the like had more time to listen and the slowdown made people feel more empathic towards one another. Not playing live also meant that I had to really focus on music review sites to help spread the music, which I did, and was really grateful for all the reviews the EP got. "I've only performed one virtual show and I really loved it. It obviously wasn't anything like playing live, but for that brief half-an-hour or so, I gave it my everything and it felt like a real escape; I remembered who part for my second EP as well as prepare an entire album's worth of songs so I just thought 'why the fuck should I keep writing?'. So I stopped and I haven't written a word since August. Instead, I've focused on being the best parent I can be right now for my children, as they have really needed me. I think I'm ready to write again and get to know myself again."

**LIKE JULIA, TAMARA PARSONS BAKER** is used to playing with a band – in her case 2019's *Nightshift* end of year chart toppers Death of the Maiden, but similarly she already had solo music plans before Covid and the last few months have seen her begin the build-up to a full solo album with a brace of singles, 'Colours' and 'Slow', which came with a video filmed around a near deserted Oxford. "I was about to start my one-woman yacht tour show extravaganza just before Covid came along and scuppered it all. Lucky for me I'd recorded my solo album in January and so I had a project to distract me from feeling so bummed out about the world burning. I decided to release a single in May and do an online gig to test the waters. I got just as nervous as if it was a live show, but that was quickly replaced by horror; I platformed the event live on Instagram, Facebook and Zoom so had three versions of myself on three different screens where an audience used to be. Facebook was the most special as it has a delay so you can catch whatever ugly singing face you just pulled a couple of seconds ago, a couple of seconds later. Fun! It was so great for my self-esteem I decided to do another one in November. I may even do a third because I'm a total masochist and have now found my 'thing'. "I wrote fuck all music for ages. I had zero interest in it, just didn't feel the need to. The online gig

in May was half to get some new music out there and half to motivate my musical arse into doing something. Often when I start a new project it takes a lot of my focus and I find it difficult to start new things; this is a great excuse for not doing things. Also, I just felt a bit meh. I spent much more time on fitness to be honest. Perhaps because being in a health crisis made me feel like that would be more important. These things come in cycles for me though and at the moment me and the guitar are more united, although I still curse it and wish it didn't have to be the worst, the most annoying instrument in the world that I hate. I wrote something new last week so that's one new song for the 2020 calendar which is a relief as all the other pages are just covered in shit." "The thing I've missed most this year has been my self-esteem. HA HA! No, probably just being able to hang out with friends at the pub and go to gigs. Even the shit gigs. Any live music really. You can't beat a pint in a pint glass too. I miss hugs and only having to feel embarrassed when you accidentally spat in someone's face rather fearing you might have actually now caused their death. Simple things like that really. I think it will be a while until we are all getting sticky with each other in the basement of The Library, which I never thought I'd miss. Our last gig was there and I sweated right through my dungarees – I felt so gross and looked like I'd pissed myself but would now give anything to feel that gross again. I'm realistically pessimistic and believe the government will continue to find ways in which to cock everything up for us."

**ONE BAND WHO LOVE TO** get down and dirty are **THE DEADBEAT APOSTLES**. They were the last band to appear on the front cover of *Nightshift*, back in April before the magazine went into hibernation. They had plans aplenty – a double single release to celebrate, gigs aplenty and their own Day of the Deadbeats mini festival to host. Again, all rent asunder by Covid. Singer Michelle Mayes hankers for packed pubs and full band rehearsals again in 2021. "My dream since starting a band in Oxford was to be sat in the Wheatsheaf drinking a Red Stripe and seeing my boat race staring out at me from the front cover of *Nightshift*. Pubs are my favourite place in the world, and I would have been proud as punch after all our hard work over the last few years. I also wanted to do it for the boys. I said over four years ago when we

started the Deadbeats that one day, I'd get our mugs on the front cover and when we did, I was honestly so fucking happy. One because I think we deserved it; our songs are top notch; we put on a great show and always give our all and two cause we're a massive bunch of divas. Plus, the photo is fucking awesome – taken by *Nightshift* regular Jason at Fyrefly studios. When the rumours started about the C word spreading, we joked that that it would be classic Deadbeats timing that we are on the front the month all the pubs get shut. We couldn't believe it became so. However, the sadness was quickly taken over by how gutted we were for the pubs, all the gigs that had to cancel and the disappearance of *Nightshift* itself. We'll be on it again and you won't be able to neck a sambuca without seeing it in the corner of ya eyes. "All our plans got cancelled – Day of the Deadbeats at the Bully; we'd got Wonderland to play with us – holy moly, that would have been a night and a half. Thame Festival. Our first ever Towersey... "In terms of promoting the singles the lockdown allowed us to create our first documentary called *On Record*, a tongue-in-cheek story of the Deadbeats so far with contributions from a host of Oxford's musical royalty. We worked our arses off on that and were blown away by the support we received from everyone who sent in their videos. Plus, we filmed our video for 'Viva la Evolution' just a few weeks into being isolated: not sure it would have been half as genius if we hadn't been prisoners in our own homes. "I've kept busy since April writing, singing, rehearsing and drinking mostly. We have written some absolute gems, but I miss the regular Wednesday rehearsals, seeing the boys every week and playing live. We were literally ripe and ready for plucking this year. "Deadbeat Apostles probably aren't a band suited to socially distanced, seated show. As something of a diva I do like a seat and table service – but I would give everything to return to the freedom of our distant past. In terms of socially distancing a lot of people at gigs get on my tits so in a way that could be a good thing. But in all honesty, I want them packed, sweaty and loud – especially if it's one of ours. Even the thought of people stepping on my feet and getting on my nerves when they push past me to the loo or the tallest guy in the world standing slap bang in front of me so I see nothing for the whole thing seems inviting and delicious. I'll never complain again after this year."

***"Our last gig was at The Library and I sweated right through my dungarees – I felt so gross and looked like I'd pissed myself but would now give anything to feel that gross again."***



photo: Jason Warner @ Fyrefly Studios  
photo: Sam Shepherd  
photo: Helen Messenger  
photo: Helen Messenger

# TRACKS OF OUR YEAR

*Yes, we know – 2020 and all that. The gigs stopped but the music didn't, and one thing that kept us going through the lockdown and the tiers was the amount of new sounds being made by local musicians. Some of those should have been out on tour, others seemed more content playing at home but all of them brought extra cheer to a strange old year. And even if *Nightshift* has been in a semi-dormant wine fug for most of the year, we couldn't not compile our favourite tunes of the past 12 months. And because you might have missed a lot of these amid the mess, we've even expanded our end of year chart to 30, so dig in, open your ears and enjoy. Music – it's bloody brilliant, yeah.*



## 1 YOUNG KNIVES ‘Sheep Tick’

Fair to say 2020 was a bit of a shit year: a terrified world in turmoil and the ugly side of humanity too often exposed. Perfect then for Young Knives to draw back the veil on their own musical barbarity with an album inspired by philosopher John Gray's *Straw Dogs*. Henry and Tom Dartnall are musical adventurers like few others, exploring their esoteric influences – from PiL and Throbbing Gristle to Death Grips and Stevie Wonder – chipping away at their old pop sheen and yet still coming up with more brilliant tunes on their album ‘Barbarians’ than 99% of bands will manage in a lifetime. You could pick any track at random off the album and it would be worthy of top spot but ‘Sheep Tick’ typified everything great about Young Knives: grotesque, ugly, disorientating, disturbing and downright fantastic. And the accompanying video? That's even weirder. Song of the year; album of the year; band of the year. No contest.

## 2 JULIA SOPHIE ‘xOx’

It doesn't matter what situation you put Julia Walker in – rock band, electro-pop duo, film soundtrack composer, Kate Bush coverer – she will invariably conjure something both brilliant and beautiful. The Candy Says singer and multi-instrumentalist had just started performing solo shows under her Julia Sophie moniker when lockdown hit but she never broke her creative stride, releasing a debut EP, ‘y?’, from which this busy,

bubbling, atmospheric exercise in self examination was the stand-out. Airy yet suffocating, nervous yet understatedly confident, just another mesmeric chapter in Julia's ongoing musical story.

## 3 MANDRAKE HANDSHAKE ‘Hypersonic Super-Asterid’

Expansive, psychedelic, Stereolab-informed hypno-pop heads out on a trip – and it is a trip. Even at nine

minutes it feels like it's over far too soon. For such an expansive, sometimes nebulous ensemble, and a style of music prone to flights of fancy, Mandrake Handshake are perfectly in sync and ‘HSSA’ is simultaneously propulsive, turbulent and butterfly-light. What a revelation this band have been since they emerged a couple of years back.

## 4 THE BOBO x KID KIN ‘Sprinter (at last)’

A luxuriant mood piece from new electronic artist The Bobo, announcing her arrival in real style alongside post-rock star Kid Kin, gently swarming synths, ghostly vocals and a dreamy midnight vibe adding up to sound like a cross between Mazzy Star and Chvrches. Ominous yet soothing and a hell of an opening statement.

## 5 GLASS ANIMALS ‘Hot Sugar’

If 2020 put a stop of Glass Animals' plans for world domination, they're likely just glad still to be here given recent past events and thank god they are still with us, spreading languorously good vibes and lysergic lyricism – all lemongrass eyelids – on this slow-mo funk jam that could make you briefly imagine the world is all really rather lovely, actually.

## 6 ANDY BELL ‘Love Comes in Waves’

If Andy Bell's debut solo album was planned before coronavirus it mattered little as this lead track from ‘The View From Halfway Down’ was a reminder how great it is to have Ride back, a softly swirling snowstorm of 60s psychedelia, Beatles-y pop and shoegaze fuzz. Andy sounds less like a guy who's spent 30 years playing in bands and more like a fresh-faced innocent who's only just discovered guitars and love.

## 7 TAMARA PARSONS BAKER ‘Colours’

If Covid has deprived us of last year's chart toppers Death of the Maiden this year, it's given us bandleader Tamara's solo songs. Her style suits isolation and lockdown: sparse and deeply emotive, on this first taster of a full album to come, channelling her inner Tracy Chapman on a song that's fragile and emotionally fraught and yet possesses the warmth and peace of a large mug of tea on a cold winter's day.

## 8 PANDAPOPALYPSE ‘Do You Wanna’

More joy unbounded in a terrifying world. Pandapocalypse were the last band *Nightshift* saw live before lockdown and their positivity and unfettered joy de vivre still clings to us via ‘Do You Wanna’ – chant-along big beat folk-pop with a heart of pure sunshine.

## 9 JOELY ‘Get Up & Go’

Joely sounds twice her tender years on this wonderfully world-weary torch song, with its heartbroken late night jazz dive feel as she examines life's uncertainties and feelings of not fitting in and wanting to escape. Could be an anthem for this year really if it weren't so soothingly sweet and sultry.

## 10 MEANS OF PRODUCTION ‘Welfare Power Apparatus’

Trust MoP to break the spell of comforting loveliness with some menacing cyborg synthetics: harsh, austere, minimalist, ‘WPA’ bleeps, bleeps, bubbles and grinds with steely inhuman intent. This is the sound of 2020 in Terminator form coming to get you.

## 11 RICHARD WALTERS ‘SC97’

Richard Walters could sing the phone book and make it sound the greatest love song ever, so turning his voice to youthful nostalgia was only ever going to sound gorgeous. ‘SC97’ sees him wistfully recalling Oxford Sound City and his first great immersion in live music as a

teenager. Beautiful melancholy to the max.

## 12 LOW ISLAND ‘Don't Let the Light In’

Another band whose almost club-like live vibes we've seriously missed seeing in 2020. Their star continues to rise though with ‘Don't Let the Light In’ on the new FIFA soundtrack, it's fidgety electro-funk-pop a little something to get you dancing round the kitchen, imagining packed venues and warm summer festivals.

## 13 DEADBEAT APOSTLES ‘I'm a Man’

The last band to grace *Nightshift*'s cover, back in April, co-singer Michelle Mayes was looking forward to drunken, naked crowds going mad and licking the stage pre-Covid. They didn't get to play their famously raucous shows but we still got this rootsy tribute to what it means to be a man with Mike Ginger letting loose his inner Levi Stubbs over a twinkling soul-rock meander. No gigs but you can still drink yourself silly to it at home.

## 14 DESERT STORM ‘Vengeful Gods’

Maybe this isn't a fanciful stoner-rock anthem; maybe it's a documentary about the residents of Valhalla popping down to earth to teach humanity a lesson in the form of plague, populism and pompous, puffed-up presidents and PMs. If so this is a suitable soundtrack, Ver Storm on belligerent best form, demolishing housing blocks with their riffs while still finding time for an oceanic passage of calm before the second wave hits.

## 15 TILLY VALENTINE ‘Fit for a King’

Breathless, birdlike r'n'b-inflected pop from singer Tilly on this real grower of a single that reveals its charms incrementally, her voice dancing with almost fairy-like lightness over skittering beats and judiciously restrained horns.

## 16 TIGER MENDOZA feat. KATY HERRIDGE ‘Words’

‘Golden Nugget Morning’ (with Deadbeat Apostles' Mike Ginger) might have been the big bluesy banger in his bag, but ‘Words’, alongside Ocean Ruins' Katy Herridge was the slow-burn beast in

Tiger Mendoza's arsenal, a gloomy clamour of electronics, beats and gnarly guitars over and above which Katy made like a witch and brought the darkness.

## 17 ALLY CRAIG ‘Chrysalids’

‘Quarantine Angst’ is probably the song we should have picked but ‘Chrysalids’ is Ally at his best, referencing antique sci-fi as he sings about love and a darkness to come over squelchy, fractured lo-fi electro-pop, speaking quietly while carrying a big stick and somehow managing to sound optimistic, even cheery, amid the musical shadows.

## 18 LIMPET SPACE RACE WITH THE ORCHESTRA OF ST JOHN'S ‘Reaching Water’

Tucked up in their overstuffed studio solitude, Limpet Space Race still dream of escaping into space or, as on this team-up with TOOSJ, the wide-open ocean and its hidden depths, an atmospheric, elegant electro-orchestral piece that mixes unnerving soothing and immersive tones into its unfolding waves.

## 19 ASHER DUST ‘Ring Out’

Oxford's most dapper gent about town, Asher Dust might have had to consign his finest threads to the wardrobe for most of the year but ‘Ring Out’, a tirade against knife crime and its human cost, sounded like a man fighting an army of androids to escape his Covid prison, a brilliantly claustrophobic musical panic attack on a misshapen future factory floor to a soundtrack of The Chemical Brothers and The Prodigy.

## 20 PREMIUM LEISURE ‘Remedies’

Chris Barker plays in Willie J Healey's band and Willie returns to favour in Premium Leisure and both acts share much musical DNA, with a hazy stoner smile playing over their songs. ‘Remedies’, though released at the end of September, sounds like it's ready for the summer holidays and all the fun ahead, in this case Marc Bolan off on a camping expedition with Aerial Pink. “You do whatever makes you feel good” sings Chris, and so should we all.

## 21 SELF HELP ‘Milkshake’

Feisty pop-punk fighters Self Help

go disco? Well, sort of. A belligerent, militantly marching disco perhaps, as they railed against the rise of the far right with a steely glare in their eye, a baseball bat in one hand, an unfinished McFlurry in the other and laser-fire synths pinging off the grimy punk dirge. Properly nice in a nasty sort of way, and all ready for battle.

## 22 LUCY LEAVE ‘Thumbs’

Lucy Leave's music features more changes of direction than a Tory party coronavirus plan but tends not to leave us in such a ball of rage. There's confusion for sure, voices coming at you from all over the place on this lead track from their ‘Everyone is Doing So Well’ album, but, unlike a Boris proclamation, they've paid attention to the details and it all makes strange, disorientating sense.

## 23 THE HOPE BURDEN

Oxford's been missing a great post-metal act to call its own since the demise of Xmas Lights, but here are The Hope Burden, surfing a vast, cresting wave of guitar noise, across flat, moonlit oceans and onward into the firestorm beyond the horizon. Cultured but prone to violence, it's a journey best enjoyed at top volume.

## 24 APHRA TAYLOR ‘Red’

“I want to go back to those days” laments Aphra Taylor on this highlight from her debut EP, ‘Night Dances’ and who couldn't agree with that? One of the newest teenage talents in town, Aphra's deeply personal, conflicted acoustic confessionals mark her out as one to watch in 2021 – if we're allowed to.

## 25 FLIGHTS OF HELIOS ‘Tree & Fly’

Back in February FoH were on the cover of *Nightshift* and this single brought a heady waft of optimism – a hint of The Lotus Eaters' ‘First Picture of You’ about it – as spring approached. A good time then to listen back and imagine everything turned out differently and far, far better.

## 26 GREAT WESTERN TEARS

‘Van Diemen's Land’ If 2020 has had you dreaming of faraway lands, GWT's Dava

Waterhouse is well ahead of you. He's been documenting his travels for years now, with a resolutely gravelly, hang-dog outlook, which befits the tragedy he often finds there. This closer from the band's ‘Trials of the Apple Isle’ is a classic tale of a man lost in the wilderness and a woman left behind, mixed with colonial barbarism and finds Waterhouse and co-singer Fern Thornton in perfectly imperfect harmony, while Ben Heaney's circling violin adds a haunting atmosphere to the tale.

## 27 MEGZZ

### ‘Love Tonight’

Another young local voice for the future from Megzz, an r'n'b crooner in the vein of Jorja Smith and Pip Millett and at her best on this languidly jazzy highlight from her ‘Feel My Love’ EP, her vocals soft and clean cut and held on a tight rein to best draw out the soul in her songs.

## 28 OCTAVIA FREUD

### ‘Photographs’

Phenomenally prolific synth-botherer Octavia Freud released two full albums in 2020, so picking a fave track wasn't easy but this silky cut displayed both his instrumental subtlety and way with a slinky tune, somewhere twixt classic electro-pop and 90s techno, hypnotic and more than a tad trippy.

## 29 BASIC DICKS ‘Frown’

Lest we imagine all the usual shit in the world has been subsumed by Covid and Trump, here are Basic Dicks to remind us that plenty of people are still, well, dicks. Once again they skewer everyday sexism with a sharpened punk snarl and a barbed sense of humour. “Cheer it up, it might never happen” indeed. Bit harder to do when you've just had a well-aimed vegan DM aimed at your bollocks.

## 30 BRUNO MUERTE

### ‘Monte Cristo’

Another band who were really beginning to establish themselves on the local live scene as Covid hit, Bruno Muerte's ‘Decay/Control’ EP might not have possessed the free-flowing electro-rock exhibitionism of their live shows but ‘Monte Cristo’ showed what they could do when they mined those early 80s synth influences and went to town. Going to town being something we've sorely missed this year.

# TRACKS

Anyone still out there? We're not sure see, given we haven't been to a gig venue since (checks diary) March 13<sup>th</sup>, we're starting to believe that maybe the world really is an AI simulation, or we dreamt the whole of the past 30 years – though some of the shows we've been to over the years might count as nightmares.

Emerging from a Netflix and Pinot Noir coma, *Nightshift* kicks aside the forlorn rabble of empty bottles and discovers there's a pile of demos lurking forgotten in the corner. Is this something to do with the job we believe we might have done in *The Time Before*? If so, have our critical faculties survived where an ability to remember what month it is or what human company is like have not? And more importantly, is snarky, not always constructive critical analysis compatible with this New Kinder World social media keeps telling us about in between pile-ons? Best unplug the Christmas tree, turn the volume dial down to a socially decent level and crack on...

## TOP TRACK

### TOM DALBY

We reviewed Tom Dalby's previous offering in the last issue before everything ground to a halt and suggested he stopped sounding like he was dragging his heels musically given we teetered on a pandemic precipice and there might not be much time to dilly dally. Perhaps pressed by the urgency of the situation Tom's upped his game several tiers and this new track, 'Blacktop Killer', is a chunky rock'n'roll lurch that's grimy under its fingernails in stark contrast to the hand sanitised reality of 2020. It's a raw, if not quite feral, chunk of trashcan boogie with a pocketful of Cramps, Stray Cats and Eddie Cochran riffs in its back pocket and a mean look in its eye. "He's a blacktop killer and he'll run you down" hollers Tom with plenty of conviction and we make a note to give him a call once the vaccines are rolled out and the beer taps are flowing once again. It'll be time to get down and dirty again.

### BOMBAST

If Tom Dalby's response to pandemic is all spit and grit, Bombast here is taking a far more sanguine approach to the situation. Well, sanguine with a distinctly funky undercurrent, which somehow makes him sound even more at ease with a world still in crisis. Bombast isn't, as the name might suggest, an overwrought hair metal band or Muse tribute act but an electronic music / hip hop producer from south Oxfordshire, though he sounds like he'd

be more at home making smooth grooves and easy beats in a Balearic chillout bar. 'Where We're From' comes in vocal and instrumental forms and both work well in different ways, the former, featuring DRS, ADMT and Blakey, equal parts soulful and handdog, the latter, with its jazzy shuffle, wiry, slow-mo bass and electronic whooshes and whorls more a summery comedown in the vein of Toro y Moi or Caribou. Both work equally well and Bombast reveals himself an accomplished producer, managing to sound both busy and spacious at the same time. Maybe Tom Dalby is the guy we need stood on top of the bar exhorting us to go crazy once Covid is finally knocked for six, but meanwhile Bombast is on the lockdown stereo, reminding us that there is another summer on the way and bars and beaches to visit. In their very different ways both make us rather happy and that's a nice, novel feeling given *Nightshift*'s default setting tends to be Grumpy Git.

### SLEEPERS

Perhaps unsurprisingly, a lot of the stuff in the pile comes from solo artists rather than expansive funk ensembles or orchestras. And while a combination of coronavirus and solitary music making might make for some marathon miseryfests, so far we've struck as lucky as a former schoolmate of Matt Hancock when PPE contracts are being handed out. And here's another goody, this time from a guy called Jack Hanwell whose chiming new wave pop might have shimmied in from a 'Brotherhood'-era New Order session, or even an early Flying Saucer Attack jam. It's definitely got more than a bit of a mid-to-late 80s feel to it, and if that brings back memories of Cold War paranoia, it still preferable to the fear that every supermarket trolley handle might be the death of you. Also, the name Sleepers makes us think of slippers and thus warm, comfortable things to bring a snugly sense of security to a world still gone mad.

### MR BEVAN

*Nightshift*'s new, benevolent attitude towards humanity can only cling on so long, before we're reminded why this music reviewing malarkey would be so much easier without musicians. Mr Bevan here, who seems to have named himself in such a way as to bestow all the glamour of a middle manager in a kitchen and bathroom fitting company, has decided the best way to get his EP to us is track by individual track, rather than something convenient like a streaming link or all-in-one download. Because what every busy (\* - consuming your own bodyweight in Gregg's vegan steak bakes is time-consuming, okay?) reviewer needs is to have to keep opening

new attachments while having their inbox repeatedly freeze due to the 150Meg of files lodged in there. Actually getting through the whole EP is just as much of an effort, the whole thing stodgier than said vegan steak bakes, though considerably less satisfying. For the most part it's inoffensive mid-paced bedroom rock that perhaps has pretensions to late-60s psychedelia but forgot the acid tabs and had to make do with Gregg's steak bakes instead. Being generous 'I'd Give You My Heart' has a bit of Aerial Pink-like spangle about it but sounds too timid to really take flight. In fact Mr Bevan has a reasonable ear for a melody but he also needs more spark, something to make those tunes fly. If you're going to make people work hard to be able to listen to your music make sure you give them a decent Christmas bonus for their effort – not just a company-branded desk calendar.

### PATRICK GRIFFIN

Demo number 5 of the pile and we're still on the solo stuff – proof at least that people have been obeying the ever-changing rules and not seeing anyone else through all this merry hell. If solitude has made Tom Dalby get rough and raucous and Sleepers get nostalgic and spangled, it's made Patrick Griffin here consider his navel perhaps even more than he normally would as he delicately plucks his acoustic guitar and gets his lovelorn on. His one song here, 'A Different Drum', isn't sadly, a cover of the Mike Nesmith classic but a hushed confessional that tip-toes through the party at the end of the world hoping no-one notices it's leaving early so it can get a good night's sleep before everything collapses into the void forever. Given the message of the song is to let your heart beat to a different drum, with all the freedom that entails, it don't half sound like it'd be happiest sat under the stairs listening to Radio 2 while politely sipping a mug of slightly milky tea.

### HOTEL CONTINENTAL

Fucking hell! It's an actual band! Four of them, which is less than a bubble we guess. Let's get this rock and roll show on the road! Turns out this song was recorded before Covid hit and the first lockdown basically scuppered the poor sods' chances of playing any gigs to promote their debut, which pretty much sums up what a total shitshow 2020 has been for most musicians. Perhaps because of that the tune in question, 'Well Fed', carries a sense of optimism about, almost as if it's blissfully unaware of the unending uncertainty, solitude and governmental incompetence that lies ahead. Okay, so it's a pretty standard slice of clean-cut indie speed-pop but right now we don't care. In our minds

we're drunk on life and overpriced beer, merrily catching stage divers as they land hilariously on our heads, spilling our drink everywhere and being jostled by strangers with a fast and loose attitude to personal hygiene. And then the song ends and these four walls close in just a tad more. But oh, dear reader, for four short minutes we were transported back to happier times, and if we're being uncharacteristically optimistic, forward to a glorious, post-Covid, vaccine-drenched golden dawn.

## TOILET TRACKS

### EEL

"Wake up *Nightshift*! Wake up! You've drooled on the sofa again and were shouting 'more pints, barman!' in your sleep."

Oh, let us dream dear reader, because the grim reality is stuff like this. "I would like to submit my music for review. The attached article will guide you guys on how to write my review," writes Enrique Cumberbatch (we're back to the solo artists, it seems), possibly in well-meaning fashion as he imagines we've forgotten how to do our jobs amid all the staring at the walls trying to work out whether the cats popping into the neighbours' house to blag treats constitutes breach of Tier 2 restrictions and wondering how a scotch egg constitutes a 'substantial meal' when a light mid-morning snack for us now tends to involve an entire family pack of spaghetti, a kilo block of cheese, a tin of Celebrations and a six-pack of San Miguel. Anyway, over the course of eight emails, EEL repeatedly asks us if we're going to review his music (according to his own standards and stipulations of course), while singularly failing to actually provide a link to said music. Then again, turns out he hasn't let anyone know where they can hear his music. "EEL released this album without even informing his fans on social media, this was all unexpected to them," he sneakily admits in a masterstroke of reverse marketing that will surely guide Radiohead's future campaigns. "Many people said that his album is really relaxing and chill to listen to," continues EEL, guiding our journalistic hand; "some viewers even said that it helped them sleep. EEL's aim is to continue inspiring his audience with his great work and to continue making music. He also plans to make more relaxing music, since his fans really liked his album 'Night Time' and calls it the relaxing album." And to be fair, for all we protest, there is nothing *Nightshift* can add to this critical master class, particularly given we didn't even get to hear the music. Bravo EEL, you are everything we have come to expect, if not exactly hope for from 2020.

Send tracks, downloads or streaming links for review to [editor@nightshiftmag.co.uk](mailto:editor@nightshiftmag.co.uk). If you can't handle criticism, please don't send us your music. Same goes for your stupid, over-sensitive mates. New Kinder World rules do not apply here, you bunch of hippies.

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The Hunting Act needs to be strengthened and enforced. However it is now under threat from the hunting fraternity who want to revoke it. Knowing that they don't have the support of parliament, they are seeking to weaken it by creating even more loopholes. Hunts must be held accountable for their cruel and reckless actions.

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