

NIGHTSHIFT

Oxford's Music Magazine

Free every
month
Issue 302
December
2021

TOP OF

THE CLASS

The Best Oxford Songs of 2021



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THE BULLINGDON

DECEMBER 2021

GIG & CLUB LISTINGS

Saturday 27th November
Terriforms
Doc Scott (90 Mins)
Trex
Doors: 11PM

Sunday 28th November
Peat and Diesel
Doors: 7PM

Monday 29th November
November Nights
Little Brother Eli
Jen Berkova
GSquared
Doors: 7PM

Tuesday 30th November
Porridge Radio
Doors: 7PM

Thursday 2nd December
Carl Hutchinson
Doors: 7PM

Thursday 2nd December
So Fetch
Xmas Special
Doors: 11PM

Friday 3rd December
The Shapes - Xmas Party
Jodie & The Germs
Vernons Future
The Shapes
Doors: 7PM

Friday 3rd December
The Raving Trippy
Doors: 11PM

Saturday 4th December
Simple
Shanti Celeste & Peach
Doors: 11PM

Sunday 5th December
Kawala
Masterpiece
Doors: 7PM

Monday 6th December
The K's
Doors: 7PM

Thursday 9th December
The Young Knives
Doors: 7PM

Friday 10th December
Mandrake Handshake
Flight of Helios
After the Thought
Doors: 7PM

Friday 10th December
ABBA 'knowing me knowing Yule'
Christmas Special
FT. Live Tribute
Doors: 11PM

Saturday 11th December
Saved by the 90s
Doors: 11PM

Sunday 12th December
John Otway & The Big Band
Doors: 7PM

Monday 13th December
Clearwater Creedence Revival
Doors: 7PM

Thursday 16th December
Nineteenth Hour
Doors: 7PM

Saturday 18th December
Old Skool Oxford
DJ Faydz
Doors: 11PM

Sunday 19th December
Rock School
Doors: 7PM

Tuesday 21st December
Mad Dogs & Maddox
Feat. Leburn
Doors: 7PM

Wednesday 22nd December
IAATM Xmas Party
Your Song
Doors: 7PM

Thursday 23rd December
The Annual Night Before
Xmas Eve Show
Raleigh Green
Doors: 7PM

Thursday 23rd December
Nang Tunas Presents Nangmas
Emmy Bacharach
Goe Shadles
Joe Boss
JNK
Shed
Doors: 11PM

Friday 24th December
Skylarkin Soundsystem
Reggae Xmas 2021
Doors: 11PM

Sunday 26th December
Deep Cover
Boxing Day Bash
Doors: 11PM

Friday 31st December
Skylarkin and Friends
Doors: 9PM

Friday 31st December
P.Y.T x NYE
Doors: 9PM

Saturday 1st January
New Years Day Celebration
Seani B
Doors: 11PM

Friday 7th January
David Bowie's Birthday Party
Doors: 11PM

Saturday 8th January
The Operation
DJ Luck & MC Neat
Doors: 11PM

Sunday 9th January
All Ears Avow
Gen and the Degenerates
Doors: 7PM

Thursday 13th January
Noahfinnce
Sophie Powers
The Oozes
Doors: 7PM

Friday 14th January
Sander Nights Presents
Sounds of the Underground
Finest Wear
Ranj Kaler
J5
Doors: 11PM

Saturday 15th January
Musical Medicine
Esa & Poly-Ritmo
Doors: 11PM

Wednesday 10th January
Rob Tognoni
Doors: 7PM

Friday 21st January
Jah Wobble
Doors: 7PM

Thursday 27th January
Call Me Maybe
2010s Party
Doors: 11PM

Friday 28th January
Sukh Ojla: Life Sukhs
Doors: 7PM

Friday 28th January
Drink and Jive
Doors: 11PM

Thursday 3rd February
Josh Berry
Rafe Hubris
Doors: 7PM

Friday 4th February
James Taylor Quartet
Doors: 7PM

Friday 4th February
Drum and Bass
Doors: 11PM

Saturday 5th February
Simple
Job Jobse
Doors: 11PM

Tuesday 8th February
Saturn Returns
With Caggie
Doors: 7PM

Thursday 10th February
Jack Hutchinson
Doors: 7PM

Friday 11th February
Olysses Wells
Doors: 7PM

Friday 11th February
Soul Sista
The Bullingdon Boogie
Doors: 11PM

Sunday 13th February
A Few Too Many
Youth Illusion
Das Choul
Doors: 7PM

Wednesday 16th February
Benjamin Francis Leftwich
Elanor Moss
Wounded Bear
Doors: 7PM

Thursday 17th February
So Fetch
2000s Party
Doors: 11PM

Friday 18th February
HAUS Party
Volume 1
Doors: 11PM

Friday 25th February
The Now
Concord Drive
Haig
The Follants
Doors: 7PM

Friday 25th February
Tracksuit & Trance
Ibiza 90s Rave
Doors: 11PM

Saturday 26th February
Symmetry Oxford
Break
Enel
Gray
Jakes
SP:MC
Doors: 11PM

Tuesday 1st March
Airways
Doors: 7PM

Wednesday 2nd March
Melt Yourself Down
Doors: 7PM

Friday 4th March
Larry Dean: FUDNUT
Doors: 7PM

Friday 4th March
Cut the Trap
Bad & Bully
Doors: 11PM

Saturday 5th March
Simple
Daniel Avery
Doors: 11PM

Tuesday 8th March
Beans on Toast
Doors: 7PM

Thursday 10th March
Call Me Maybe
2010s Party
Doors: 11PM

Friday 11th March
Raving Trippy
Cosmic Version
Doors: 11PM

Tuesday 15th March
Aurie Styra: Green
Doors: 7PM

Thursday 17th March
Dream Wife
Doors: 7PM

Friday 18th March
Bangerz and Lash
00s Edition
Doors: 11PM

Saturday 19th March
Skylarkin Soundsystem
Mungo's HiFi Soundsystem
Doors: 11PM

Monday 21st March
Lady Bird
Doors: 7PM

Wednesday 23rd March
Warmduscher
Doors: 7PM

Friday 25th March
The Total Stone Roses
Doors: 7PM

Friday 25th March
Soul Sista
Grand Theft Disco
Doors: 11PM

Tuesday 29th March
Skinner Brother
Doors: 7PM

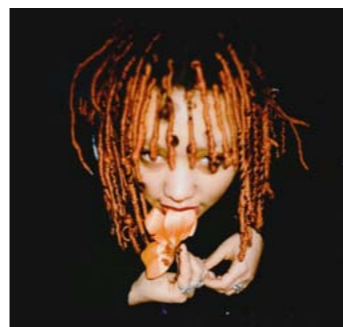
Friday 1st April
Sean Walsh:
Back from the Bed
Doors: 7PM

Friday 1st April
HAUS Party
Volume 2
Doors: 11PM

Thursday 7th April
Police Dog Hogan
Doors: 7PM

NEWS

Phone: 01865 372255
email: editor@nightshiftmag.co.uk
Online: nightshiftmag.co.uk



FEEO IS BBC INTRODUCING IN OXFORD's Artist Of The Year for 2022. She was chosen by show producer Liz Green and presenter Dave Gilyeat who said of the singer "Ever since her debut on our show in 2018 we've eagerly anticipated each new amazing release from Feeo. She's an incredible and versatile songwriter, an impeccable and captivating performer, and her debut EP released this year is a distillation of her abundant talent."

Accepting her award, Feeo added "Thanks to the BBC Introducing Oxford team who have been supporting my music since I was 18; It means a lot!"

Feeo joins an illustrious list of former winners of the title that includes Glass Animals, Stornoway, The Young Women's Music Project and last year's winner, SImba. BBC Introducing In Oxford is broadcast every Saturday evening from 8-9pm on DAB and 95.2fm, playing new Oxford music as well as featuring interviews with local artists. The show is available to stream at bbc.co.uk.



DESERT STORM will celebrate their 15th anniversary with a special hometown show next year. The local rock heroes will headline **The O2 Academy** on **Saturday 26th February**. The gig will feature a final appearance with the band of bassist Chris Benoist, who officially left the band earlier this year; he will play half the set while replacement Matt Dennett will play the other half. Support comes from Battalions.

The Oxford show is part of an extensive UK and European tour as Desert Storm, who have been *Nightshift* cover stars four times, continue to promote 2020's 'Omens' album. The tour kicks off on the 16th February in Cardiff. The band are currently working on their seventh album at Woodworm Studios. Visit facebook.com/desertstormuk for full tour dates.

NORTH OXFORD GOLF CLUB is an unexpected addition to Oxford's venue circuit. The club, on Banbury Road at Jordan Hill, will host live music once a month from January under the name **The Caddyshack**, after Shapes frontman **Anthony Kelly** was approached by the golf club to host shows.

A pilot show on the 27th November featured sets from Pandapocalypse, Band of Hope, The Factory Lights and Alcon Blue; future dates are: January 29th; February 26th; March 25th, and April 29th, and Ant is keen to hear from acts – originals only – wanting to play.

EMMA HUNTER HAS REACTED TO HER SONG 'WINDOW' being voted Oxford's Song of the Year by *Nightshift*.

Emma and drummer Tom Bruce followed up gracing the cover of *Nightshift*'s 300th issue in October by topping our traditional end of year Top 30, pipping **The August List** to the top spot.

On hearing the news Emma said: "Well, actual wow, we can't believe it! A huge, enormous thank you! We are totally delighted to get the number 1 slot, especially when we are in the company of such talented, hard working fellow musicians. We have been so happy to get back to gigging this year. We love performing and getting our music out there into the world and a huge thank you to anyone who has come along to a gig, listened to our music or watched one of our cinematic videos!"

"Our next single, 'Love Is Not a Choice', will be out at the start of next year, with a shiny new video to boot; expect flowers, sequins and some Lynchian angst for good measure. Ideally we would love 2022 to be filled with gigs, festivals, a vinyl record and maybe David Lynch will finally write back to us, who knows; either way, an extra big thank you to *Nightshift*, it means more than we can say."

Emma Hunter supports John Otway & His Big Band at The Bullingdon on Sunday 12th December. Read the full *Nightshift* Top 30 in this issue.



RONAN KEATING AND JAMES BLUNT HAVE BEEN confirmed as the remaining headline acts for next year's **Cornbury Festival**. They join **Bryan Adams** at **Great Tew Country Park** over the weekend of the **8th-10th July 2022** as Cornbury returns after two years off due to the pandemic.

Blunt tops the bill on the Friday and is joined by **The Darkness**. Saturday sees Adams headlining alongside **The Waterboys**, while the final day is headed by Keating with Cornbury regulars **Jools Holland & His Rhythm & Blues Orchestra**.

Tickets for Cornbury's big return are on sale now at 2019 prices at cornburyfestival.com.

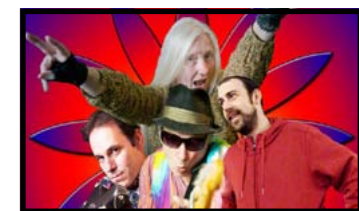
Talking to *Nightshift* he said: "I was aware of the room for a few years now and even though it's at a golf club, which ain't that cool, it's a really great room, 100 capacity, with low ceiling and brilliant acoustics. I've played in there a few times over the years."

"The club approach me and as the room is hardly used over the winter months they suggested I put some music nights on and open it up to the public. There is a large free car park and a bus stop right outside from Oxford or Kidlington, and the

Parkway rail station is just up the road, so it's very punter-friendly, unlike many other venues. It also has a lift up to the gig room, which makes it wheelchair accessible.

"I want to make it a total original music night with many different musical genres; I will supply the PA and hope to have three or four bands or acts a night. I aim to run it through the winter months on the last Saturday of each month until April and then review it then to see if it's worth continuing."

Acts wanting to play can get in touch with Ant at tonystabskelly@aol.com.



KLUB KAKOFANNEY returns this month, but regulars hoping to help the club celebrate its 30th anniversary will have to wait a while longer.

The monthly music club, which began in October 1991 and ran at The Wheatsheaf for the past 21 years before Covid stopped live

Continued over...



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NEWS



ANDY BELL plays a solo show at **The Jericho Tavern** next year. His show on **Friday the 4th February** under the name **Andy Bell's Space Station**, is part of a tour to help celebrate *Independent Venue Week* and brings Andy back to the venue where Ride played their earliest gigs. Andy released a new electronic album in his **Glok** guise back in October. Tickets for the show, priced, £8 (+bf) are on sale now at **Gigantic.com**.

music and then the owners closed the venue down, will take place at **The Gladiator Club** on Percy Street – off Iffley Road – on **Friday 3rd December** with sets from **Ran Kan Kan**, **Papa Nui** and **The Mighty Redox**, and then every first Friday of the month. The official 30th

birthday party will take place at **Cowley Workers Social Club** on **Between Town Roads** on **Saturday the 9th April**.

Phil Freizinger, who hosts **Klub Kakofanney** with **Sue Smith** and **Ainan Addison**, told *Nightshift*: “After 21 happy years at **The Wheatsheaf**, we were gutted that we were unable to celebrate **Klub Kakofanney**’s 30th Anniversary at our favourite venue. After a long search, we’re now re-locating to two community venues – **The Gladiator Club** for our regular first Friday of the month gigs, and **The Cowley Workers’ Social Club** for larger and louder events. “Music in Oxford is our mycelium: you may remove a head but the magic will forever rise again!”

CASELS release their third album next year. ‘**A Gut Feeling**’ is out on the 4th February on **God Unknown Records** and is the follow-up to their acclaimed 2019 album, ‘**A Happy Ending**’. The duo, brothers **Jim** and **Loz Beck**, grew up and formed the band in **Chipping Norton** but are now based full-time in **London**. Singer and guitarist **Jim** said of the new album: “the songs are an intentionally muddy mix of experience, opinion, red herrings and fiction,” adding, “I found that setting myself the brief of writing character pieces offered a nice way of sneaking quite personal things into the songs without being explicitly autobiographical. Writing can be a great way of unearthing hang-ups and becoming acquainted with your own anxieties.”



YOUNG KNIVES play their first Oxford show for over two years this month and launch a new collaborative podcast. The band, who released their ‘**Barbarians**’ album in 2019, headline **The Bullingdon** on **Thursday 9th December**, following a UK tour throughout November. Brothers **Henry** and **Thomas Dartnall** have recently been joined by former **Self Help** drummer **Silke Blansjaar**. Tickets for the show, priced, £12.50 (+bf) are on sale now via **seetickets.com**. The new podcast, **Very Very Songs Go**, features **Henry** and **Thomas** interviewing some of their favourite new artists and writing and recording a song together. The first podcast – available now on **Spotify** – features **Young Knives**’ recent tour support **Wesley Gonzalez**. Their joint single, ‘**Man of the People**’ is also available now on **Spotify**.

SHONK STUDIOS looks set to move in with **Warehouse Studios** from next month after their landlord issued a notice to quit. **Shonk**, based at the bottom end of **Magdalen Road** and run by engineer **Jimmy Hetherington**, was given an end of lease notification at the beginning of November to quit by the 31st December, with the landlord wanting to turn the building over to **Oli’s Thai** restaurant. **Jimmy** has been trying to locate a new premises and **Warehouse**, based in **Kennington**, looks like the most likely new location. More definite details as we get them but existing and new **Shonk** customers should check the studio’s website and social media for updates: **facebook.com/shonkstudios**.

OXFORDSHIRE MUSIC SCENE magazine returns this month with a launch gig at **The Port Mahon**. **Max Blansjaar**, **The Bobo**, **Self Help** and **ShockHorror** will help the mag relaunch on **Saturday 11th December** after an enforced Covid lay-off, with copies of the 45th issue available on the night. Tickets, priced £7, are on sale now from **wegotickets.com**.

OXFORD GIGBOT provides a regular Oxford gig listing update on **Twitter (@oxgigbot)**, bringing you new gigs as soon as they’re announced. They also provide a free weekly listings email; just contact **oxgigbot@datasalon.com** to join.

MELTING POT on **Get Radio** continue to showcase and celebrate Oxford music on their fortnightly Thursday night shows hosted by **Rich Craven** and **Dave Crabtree**, as well as hosting regular **In The Mix** shows with playlists from Oxford music luminaries (there’s a *Nightshift* curated one up at **mixcloud.com/MeltingPotEynsham**, which is bloody fantastic if we say so ourselves). Local acts can submit music to be played by emailing **info@getmeltingpot.co.uk**.

CANCELLATIONS. Please continue to check with individual promoters and venues with regard to any gig postponements or cancellations with a number of shows recently being called off due to Covid and other issues. Please also adhere to venues’ and promoters’ Covid rules. Enjoy your gigs and help keep your fellow gig goers safe.

JULY 2022 THE GREAT TEW PARK OXFORDSHIRE

CERTUS FINIS

CORN BURY

MUSIC FESTIVAL

FRIDAY JULY 8th

JAMES BLUNT

THE DARKNESS

SATURDAY JULY 9th

BRYAN ADAMS

THE WATERBOYS

SUNDAY JULY 10th

RONAN KEATING

JOOLS HOLLAND

& HIS RHYTHM & BLUES ORCHESTRA



TRACKS OF OUR YEAR

The end of another year, but unlike last year we now have real grounds for optimism with live music back and more and more artists re-emerging after Covid lockdowns kept them from their bandmates. Given the hurdles in the way of artists over the last year and a half it's great to see just how much fantastic new music has still been made by Oxford's musical stars and this year's Nightshift end of year Top 30 is as strong as it's ever been. The emergence of EMMA HUNTER as a genuine star contender is reflected in her table-topping showing, narrowly edging out long-time Nightshift faves THE AUGUST LIST who managed to produce another masterpiece of an album in lockdown. Anyway, here it is: your essential guide to the best Oxford music of 2021. Feel free to make your own list, compare it to ours and accept we're right. Just like always.



1. EMMA HUNTER ‘Window’

Emma Hunter has, we might have noted on more than one occasion, a voice to die for, and across four songs on her second EP, she didn’t put a foot wrong, musical partner Tom Bruce’s judiciously inventive percussion complementing the loops and midnight surf guitars that go to brewing the duo’s bewitching atmospherics. ‘Window’, left to last on the EP and dealing with people only seeing the superficial exterior of people, statues or situations rather than the sometimes unpleasant truth below or behind, uncoils imperiously like a cobra, a black, beautiful dream of a song that’s captured your heart in a bottle before you even know it, Emma’s voice a thing of absolute wonder, seductive and only when you’re in its talons, soaring into the midnight sky. This is a song that demands and deserves to be heard on the biggest stages planet earth has to offer.

2. THE AUGUST LIST ‘God Is In A Wire’

Somehow while waiting out Covid lockdown in the middle of nowhere and having a baby, Martin and Kerraleigh Child managed to complete their third full August List album, taking their darkly atmospheric folk-drone into ever more exotic places, with this fantastically intense devotional epic the centrepiece of the album. Kerraleigh’s voice is simply stunning as she weaves and soars above and within the artfully dooladen music, gothic Appalachian folk run through by The Velvet Underground and Bad Seeds’ understated gutter-level brutality. Just glorious.

3. SLOW DRIFT ‘Oblivion’

As far as debuts go you don’t get

much better than Slow Drift’s dark, spectral electro-pop journey into deep space, synths swarming like star liners as Jenn Steeves coos and sighs like a gothic folk siren. Here is where Portishead’s tripped-out shadow-pop meets Ladytron’s comfortingly claustrophobic futurism in the deep forest at midnight, or possibly on Saturn sometime in the 25th Century. Utterly bloody fantastic whichever.

4. JULIA SOPHIE ‘And You Know It’

Julia Sophie has made the upper echelons of the *Nightshift* Top 30 her home over the past decade and a bit, firstly with Little Fish, then Candy Says and now with her solo songs, which find her finally reaping the critical acclaim she’s long overdue beyond Oxford. Busy but without a single wasted bleep or bloop, her fizzing, glitching electronic pop takes on a *deus ex machina*-like character on this lead

track from her most recent ‘</3’ EP, half sung in French and half in an angelically ghostly (wo)man-machine voice, like a lullaby for heartbroken cyborgs.

5. LOW ISLAND ‘What Do You Stand For’

Low Island have a knack for club-friendly electro-pop that’s light and nimble on its feet but the choice cut from their ‘If You Could Have It All Again’ – something of a concept album – was this heavier number, all driving beats and electronics, a militant vocal performance and hectoring hip hop vibe, closer to The Chemical Brothers and Underworld, which serves as a caustic put-down of fashionistas, scenesters and perhaps the entire music industry. And yet, as ever with Low Island, you can’t help but dance to it.

6. MEANS OF PRODUCTION ‘We Will Bury You’

It starts with what sounds like technology collapsing in on itself and from there glides easily yet relentlessly along autobahns and concrete underpasses, the sound of a living city, awake 24/7, all human life consumed, subsumed to the all-powerful AI at its heart. Few acts capture the sound of near-future dystopia and alienation as well as Means of Production. And yet, if this doesn’t get your dancing feet going, maybe *you’re* not human at all.

7. TAMARA ‘I Don’t Care’

Few singers have a feel for the conflicted emotions of loss and despair and defiance and resilience as Tamara, who, with her band Death of the Maiden still on enforced hiatus due to Covid, continued work on her debut solo album – due out next year – and this latest song taken from it finds her lamenting a departure, yearning

for that loss and yet simultaneously sticking two fingers up to the perpetrator, and sung with a voice as hard and pure as cut diamond. A gem and no mistake.

8. ALLY CRAIG ‘Carole Lombard’

Ally’s fascination with the silver screen’s lost cult stars reached its zenith with his synth-led ‘Digitally’ EP, featuring this true story of the classic Hollywood actress who died in an air crash, alongside her mother and 15 US troops, on the way home from a war bond concert. Musically it’s a wonderfully hushed electro-pop lullaby, all clockwork mechanics, sombre Kraftwerkian minimalism and a real feel for the loss in the story, and Ally remains one of Oxford’s most enduringly idiosyncratic and thoughtful songwriters.

9. CHIIKA

One of the newest and certainly one of the brightest young stars to emerge during lockdown, Chiika mined hip hop, r’n’b, pop and traditional Indian music on a succession of short, sharp and sweet singles, the highest point of which was this smoky, beat-driven ode to self worth that revealed an artist with an innate talent for instant pop appeal.

10. THE DEADBEAT APOSTLES

When they’re not fighting for the right to party, The Deadbeat Apostles are fighting the power, this driving – nay, rampaging – rock’n’roll clarion call for all those silenced for telling the truth, particularly women, sounding like a righteous soul revue overtaken by the spirit of riot grrl, Michelle Mayes taking the lead as she and her boys go over the top. Statues start to topple, everyone enjoys a tippie and the world is left a messier but far better place.

11. KID KIN feat. THE BOBO

The Bobo and Kid Kin proved to be perfect musical allies on last year’s ‘Sprinter (At Last)’ single and the return fixture proved no less intoxicating, luxuriant electronics swelling around The Bobo’s limpid, almost otherworldly voice

to create a lysergic fug of synth-pop, psychedelia and shoegaze that shares some spectral space with Chvrches and Jane Weaver.

12. MANDRAKE HANDSHAKE

‘Monolith’ Like diving into a placid pool of warm spring water laced with LSD, ‘Monolith’ was a serenely tripped-out experience, ripples and washes of spaced-out synths and guitars and Trinity Oksana’s cloud-gazing vocals combining to bring some krautrock motorik to flower power good vibes. A new Age of Aquarius is upon us and this time it’s brought Stereolab and Neu! to the party.

13. JODY & THE JERMS ‘Spinning’

Infused with the carefree spirit of classic 80s indie pop, Jody & the Jerms jangle and bounce like carefree pop kittens across this sub-three-minute gem of a song, Jody Jeger’s sugar-sweet voice swooning over the fizz and spangle of guitars, like the best party Kirsty MacColl and The Primitives never got to have together.

14. KANADIA ‘Desert Song’

If Covid meant a lot of bands taking time out, no-one told Kanadia, who continued to play like those arenas and stadiums were still open for business. Stadiums being what songs like ‘Desert Song’, the highlight of their ‘Big Nothing’ EP, was made for – a towering slab of Muse-via-U2-via-Radiohead anthemic rock built on thunderous, galloping drums, sky-searching guitars and James Bettis’ questing howl of a voice.

15. BEDD ‘I Whoo Yeah’

From its hangdog opening verse and downbeat lyrics about crying at funerals and checking your phone to make sure it’s off, to its gorgeously uplifting hymnal chorus, ‘I Whoo Yeah’, from Bedd’s debut cassette EP on Beanie Tapes, belies its slightly silly title to reveal a band capable of making wonderfully dream-like pop music while sounding like they’re barely trying and actually doing it all from bed while half asleep. Nice dream, as Radiohead might have said.

16. PREMIUM LEISURE ‘Easy FM’

After the last year and a half we’ve all needed a bit of carefree summer

in our lives and here came Chris Barker and chums, making like it was still July 1970, Bolan still had flowers in his hair, a woozy sense of psychedelia was in the air and everyone got to dance cosmically into an imagined dappled woodland glade to live with the sunbeams.

17. SEBASTIAN REYNOLDS ‘Crows Prelude / Crows’

Even in a career that’s included Sexy Breakfast and Keyboard Choir, this is some of Seb Reynolds’ finest work, a two-part piece that unwinds from its snaking clarinet-led march, led by Grieg Stewart’s steady, insistent beat, into something far more expansive and propulsive, an acid-house take on free modern classical music that touches base with Underworld and Future Sound of London. Inventive and mesmeric.

18. SQUARK

‘Going Granular’ When they weren’t busy having a baby and finishing their latest August List masterpiece, Martin and Kerraleigh Child dressed up as cats and made sinister-sweet electronic garage pop as Squark. “The axe is in the attic / The keys are in the car” sang Kerraleigh with the kind of love me / don’t look at me menace of a kitten with its paw on the nuclear button.

19. JULIA MEIJER ‘Borta Från Allt’

An ode to escape from Oxford’s favourite Swedish ex-pat, sung in her native tongue as she mourns her separation from her family during Covid, the song a balancing between folky serenity and something angsty and intense ready to boil over, as it does at its tumultuous climax – a storm-tossed gothic prayer to lose yourself in.

20. GHOSTS IN THE PHOTOGRAPHS

‘Buildings That Won’t Fall Down When You Want Them To’

The word ‘stately’ could have been invented for GITP, whose slow-burn single earlier this year had a title almost as long as its eleven-minute-plus timescale. A timescale that allowed it to brood and bloom, tease and blossom, and ultimately combust – in stately fashion of course – in a shower of sparks and

molten ash.

21. FOLKATRON SESSIONS ‘Flower of Magherally’

A multinational electro-folk collective featuring three Oxford musicians, including Pecq’s Hannah Jacobs, whose voice leads this gorgeous folk lament that comes infected with elements of experimental electronica and minimalist classic music yet remains pure at heart as plucked strings and synthetics bubble up around it, like Vashti Bunyan getting gothic round a winter campfire.

22. ‘WONDERLAND ‘Vampyre’

Back from the grave like actual vampires, 90s goth-pop stars Wonderland have lost none of their lustre and might actually be even better than before on the strength of post-reunion releases, this latest a comfort blanket of Chameleons-meets-All About Eve where light meets dark and everyone’s a winner.

23. TIECE & RAWZ ‘Together As One’

The coming together of Oxford’s finest rap poet and the sublime talents of Oxford/London singer Tiece was always going to produce something special and the Inner Peace Record labelmates delivered across a full album, of which this paean to positivity and collaboration – with its wider message of people getting on with each other in an age of division – was a stand out.

24. ASHER DUST ‘Send My Regards To The Old Town’

Asher Dust made quite a departure from his trademark mix of electronic experimentation, dub, hip hop and beyond into this folky gospel lament for lost friends and the places they once met. While it touches on suicide and times lost, it’s both graceful and uplifting, a celebration of life as much as meditation on loss.

25. BARRICANE ‘Canopy’

Formed in lockdown by friends Emily and Rosy and led by the pair’s close harmony singing, Barricane’s almost trippy form of indie-folk found a strange sweet spot between Simon & Garfunkel’s more autumnal moments and ABBA at the most contemplative,

with buzzing synths and lashing of plangent piano. Great music for long walks across snowy fields.

26. SELF HELP ‘All Alone Again’

They might have lost half their line-up but Self Help lost none of their energy as they recruited a new half and then another one for luck and this single – recorded before Lizzie left – has all the pop sheen and shimmer and punky vim and vigour we’ve come to love the band for. They’ll never be alone while they can kick out songs like this.

27. OCTAVIA FREUD ‘I Find This Hard’

The song a Terminator suffering an existential crisis might pen to explain their feelings about exterminating humans on an industrial scale. Suitably enough it sounds like a disco in the bleakest factory in the far future. It references Joy Division tribute acts and playing football in the mud on a Sunday morning, which is possibly even more grim than human extinction. We love it.

28. BRUNO

MUERTE ‘Fibonacci’

Sadly, despite being the first band we saw live once lockdown ended in August, Bruno Muerte as a band won’t see 2021 out as guitarist Roberto Bini relocates to his native Italy, but they signed off in style with a five-song EP ‘Projections’, described as “Oscar-worthy” by *Nightshift*’s reviewer. This variously nagging and soothing slice of retro-futurist industrial synth-pop a gallop into the neon-lit streets of an imagined John Carpenter flick. A fond and rather fantastic farewell gift.

29. PIRIPA ‘Twisted’

Sweetness and light in abundance from singer and multi-instrumentalist Piripa, whose airy, wistful blend of pop, jazz and r’n’b with just a sprinkling of gospel showed she might well be the Oxford heir to Minnie Riperton’s high-register soul throne.

30. THE SUBTHEORY ‘Fader’

Seemingly inspired by the soundtracks to a score of neon-lit 80s action movies, Andy Hill, set about recreating the chase scenes from them in music, electronic beats and synth squiggles underpinning some shamelessly OTT guitar work that makes ‘Fader’ sound like *Bladerunner* soundtracked by Toto.

RELEASED

SHAVEN PRIMATES ‘Child Of Dirt’

(Self released)
It takes a good deal of bravery to put your creativity out there for the public to experience. It must then take a great deal more for that creativity to be an autobiographical concept album dealing with trauma, addiction, memory loss and healing. Shaven Primates’s debut album is just that, the story of singer Mark Elphinstone: a story of a troubled childhood leading to mental health issues and the later-life healing and self-exploration that allows the telling of the tale. Musically, ‘Child Of Dirt’ pulls on the rich history of and conceptual musical storytelling and undoubtedly a good slice of prog. It’s easy to throw the label of prog around when the variations can be huge inside any genre, let alone one so declaratively experimental. In the case of Shaven Primates, it might be the best way to set up the complex tapestry of influences woven together to support the narrative of the lyrics. There’s headbanging riffs; gothic organ-laden grandeur; funk and, searing guitar solos. There is a near boundary-less musical scope dotted throughout the album. One moment Bowie, the next The Stone Roses, moving on through Nick Cave and Pink Floyd and many more besides, it’s a challenging



JODY & THE JERMS ‘High Times’ / ‘Shiver’

(Self released)
A brace of singles from a band who have only been together since 2019 but are already set to release their second album in the New Year. They certainly don’t struggle on the pop tune front, keeping things short, simple and very sweet, their sound instantly reminiscent of the fuzz and jangle of 80s indie (when that term meant something). ‘Shiver’, released at the start of December, carries that Smiths-y vibe about it as singer Jody Jeger dons her best Kirsty MacColl duffle coat and heads down the indie disco, flowery hair clips firmly in place. November’s ‘High Times’ doesn’t quite hit



musical journey, just as much as it is a difficult narrative to be party to. The two suite-length pieces are where the full band and our narrator are truly given the space to breathe into the story and the instrumentation. It’s not easy going, but it’s not meant to be; not all art is meant to be light and fluffy, not meant to be easy and comfortable. Art can be a way to exorcise demons for the creator and an emotional journey for the audience, and this is exactly what ‘Child of Dirt’ does; it takes the listener through the pain of Mark’s life but pairs it with gripping and expansive composition. *Matt Chapman Jones*

that sweet spot, the band slowing things down, bringing some piano in for something more akin to a post-disco kitchen sink lament. Again Jody leads the line well but it sounds more like a song from the end of a West End musical than the pop underground. Carefree suits Jody & The Jerms better than careworn, it seems. *Dale Kattack*

PECO ‘Brittle’

(Upcycled Sounds)
Pecq seem to exist in a little world, or at least bubble, of their own, the duo making music from their own studio, releasing inventive, zero-budget self-made videos and creating music that often feels disconnected to the corporeal world, like this new single, the latest in a succession of new songs released ahead of a full EP early in 2022. ‘Brittle’ finds Hannah Jacobs vocally cloud drifting over airy, bubbling electronics and barely-there beats, synth-based dream-pop that’s soft like cat fur, smooth like smoked glass and serene like a woodland glade. The song finds Hannah reflecting on a broken relationship, with lines like “I’m not ready to be in your past / Another broken object and heart” while sounding like she’s actually completely at peace with the world and anything it throws at her, like Sade reborn into a world of machine music. In a world going increasingly mad by the day, such splendid isolation seems ever more inviting. *Sue Foreman*

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CHIIKA ‘Poseidon’

(Self released)
Surveying the musical landscape after an apocalypse can be profoundly disorienting. Some stalwarts that were in their pomp in 2018 and 2019 have kept going while others are yet to re-emerge – while brand new voices have also come to the fore. Leafing through the pages of *Nightshift*’s comeback issue, it’s striking how the tectonic shifts that have accompanied the pandemic have been reflected in some of the new music on offer. Black Lives Matter, the need to confront the often overwhelming maleness of music, trans rights and a newly engaged flock of artists determined to wrestle with serious political issues have arrived determined to leave behind the often introspective times of before. One of the cover stars of that *Nightshift* issue is Chiika and, on the evidence of new single ‘Poseidon’, the burst of creativity that led to previous offering ‘Natural Nicotine’ gaining a Track of the Month award has been richly confirmed. Encouragingly, for all the effervescent, clubland-honouring stomp of the previous track, ‘Poseidon’ shows ample evidence of a willingness to change direction. Chiika deploys her Anglo-Indian heritage expertly – tablas thump warmly in the background while the distinct vocal percussion that originated in the south Indian state of Karnataka, *konnakol* is also expertly deployed. Indeed, Chiika breaks into Hindi in the final verse and the use of multicultural influences adds an extra dimension to an already effortless exercise in pop sensibility. Equally impressive is Chiika’s voice: mellifluous and assertive by turns. Artists as varied as Nilüfer Yanya, Solange and Nicolette are recalled while there has been a determination to break away from an isolated lockdown that saw the first fruits of Chiika’s musical output emerge, no time has been wasted and the latest of these will see a sharing of a bill with fellow *Nightshift* cover stars Barricane at around the point this issue is published. A bright new presence on the Oxford scene, Chiika has every chance of breaking further beyond that too. *Rob Langham*



THE DEADBEAT APOSTLES ‘Leave It To Men’

(Self released)
For a band best known for being the sound of good-time rock’n’roll nights, The Deadbeat Apostles are one of the most politically-charged acts in town (‘The Cuffs Are Off’, released earlier in the year during lockdown found the band at their furious best) and this latest single continues that theme of fighting the power while fighting for the right to party. In particular the Deadbeats have shown their colours when it comes to gender politics and ‘Leave It To Men’ tackles a situation where people, and in particular women, are silenced. As depressingly apt now as ever in a world where male politicians continue to balls up Covid and climate responses while the entertainment industry is only just beginning to come to terms with its exploitative culture. Not that The Deadbeat Apostles are going to sit about complaining about stuff – no, they’re gonna kick those fuckers in the bollocks then have a good old drink and a dance on their corpulent bodies. Here Michelle Mayes takes the lead while co-vocalist Mike Ginger heads up the chorus line in a full-throttle call-and-response blues-punk charge that’s closer to the spirit of riot grl than soul revue. This is driving punk-informed blues that’s as raw and ready for a fight as we’ve heard since Jim Jones last went on a rock’n’roll riot. Absolutely mighty stuff. Get down the barricades, boys and girls. And bring wine. Lots

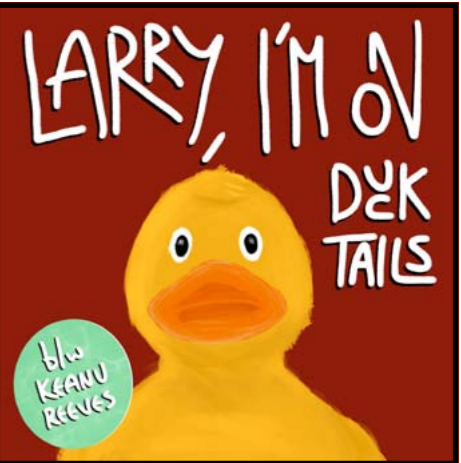
GHOSTS IN THE PHOTOGRAPHS ‘God Cult’

(Self released)
Serious-sounding business from earthy local post-rock types Ghosts In The Photographs, who have been honing their craft in the Godspeed!-meets-Mogwai zone for some years now. ‘God Cult’ suggests some kind of religious commentary, perhaps, but it’s hard to know from the music, which is largely wordless. There’s some semi-audible sampled speech at the start and end of the track’s 391-second journey, but this doesn’t offer any obvious clues. We can make out some chatter about “revolutionary suicide”, which sounds weighty and grave, so perhaps GITP have something meaningful going on.

of wine. For as the philosopher Emma Goldman might or might not have said, “a revolution without dancing is a revolution not worth having.” *Dale Kattack*

WONDERLAND ‘Vampyre’

(Self released)
When Wonderland reformed in 2019 it was a more than welcome reintroduction one of Oxford’s finest should-have-been-massive bands, and when not just their come-back gigs but their new songs, particularly Middle Eastern-flavoured powerhouse single ‘We Never Fall’, turned out to be as good as anything they’d done back in the late-90s, even this die-hard old goth cracked a smile or two. Of course Covid came and dropped a brick on further progress but here they are again with another not-so tentative step back into the arena. And of course, them being a bit gothy and it being this time of year it’s called ‘Vampyre’. And from the surging yet spidery guitar intro and cascading drums – together calling to mind prime Chameleons – to singer Leigh’s octave-stretching vocals, a sterner, more battle-ready sister to All About Eve’s Julianne Regan, this is prime goth-pop in all its imperious glory. A complete collection of the band’s old material is long overdue a compilation release but given the strength of the band’s new songs, it’s likely to be cast into shadow like a black sun eclipse. *Ian Chesterton*



ALLY CRAIG ‘Larry, I’m on Duck Tails’ / ‘Keanu Reeves’

(Self released)
Having released probably his best set of songs to date in September with his ‘Digitally’ EP, Ally Craig continues his fascination with screen stars with this double-header, but switching from the synth-led sounds of that last outing back to guitar. What remains intact is that feeling of almost childlike wonder and a slight frailty about the songs, particularly in Ally’s voice with its trademark hesitancy and cracks around the edges on ‘Keanu Reeves’, the best of the two songs here, inspired by the nicest-man-in-cinema’s appearance on the Stephen Colbert show, which went viral when he was asked what happens when we die. The song is suitably meditative, though Ally doesn’t exactly do bombastic grand gestures. ‘Larry, I’m on Duck Tails’ is also inspired by a viral celebrity interview, this time actor Danny Pudi being asked by Larry King what his favourite luxuries in life were and replying that fresh coffee and nice socks were his favourite things and pointing out his place in life when King asked why not a private jet. Such a story seems to fit perfectly with Ally Craig whose music is as modest and understated as it is consistently interesting. And if these songs don’t quite equal his last release they do serve to remind you that Ally is one of Oxford’s most endearingly idiosyncratic songsmiths. *Dale Kattack*

modernity, as played with immense skill and control. Party on! *Simon Minter*



G I G G U I D E

WEDNESDAY 1st
SELF ESTEEM: O2 Academy – Postponed from last month due to illness, Rebecca Taylor tours her new album, ‘Prioritise Pleasure’, which finds her leading a clarion call for women to enjoy life on their own terms to a sparkling soundtrack of big catchy pop choruses and glitterstomping beats.
BESS ATWELL: The Jericho Tavern – Folk-pop fragility from the Brighton singer - *see main preview*
PROGRESSION: The Bullingdon – Weekly breakbeat, electro, funk and disco club night.
OPEN MIC: The Old Anchor, Abingdon –

THURSDAY 2nd
RED SNAPPER + INK PROJECT: O2 Academy – London’s pioneering acid jazz instrumentalists build up to the release of their first album since 2014 with a short UK, the band – original trio Ali Friend,

Wednesday 1st
BESS ATWELL: The Jericho Tavern
Bess Atwell wants, in her own words, “to romanticise the mundane”, something she does rather beautifully on her recent second album ‘Already, Always’, released on Lucy Rose’s Real Kind Records. It’s a good fit since Atwell shares a similarly hushed, fragile approach to music as Rose. Other touchstones might be Daughter and in particular the wonderful Julia Jacklin – songs so delicately constructed and gently delivered you worry they might crumble in a strong breeze. There’s strength in Atwell’s voice though, an almost spectral instrument given all the room to breathe it needs by musical arrangements that centre around piano, tender acoustic guitar and judicious percussion. ‘Already, Always’ deals with family trauma and separation, a poetic, deeply personal unpicking of relationships: with her partner, with her mother and with herself, warm, serene ruminations spotted with more raw confessionals but with a satisfying resolution. Really, it’s just a gorgeous record that’ll hopefully find its way into the upper echelons of myriad end of year Best Of’s, and tonight’s gig – her first visit to Oxford since 2019’s Ritual Union – is a chance to catch Atwell in the sort of intimate venue she’s suited for but deserves to outgrow very soon.



DECEMBER

Richard Thair and David Ayers now permanently joined by saxophonist Tom Challenger, together continuing to mix and meld jazz, dub, drum&bass, breakbeat and hip hop while collaborating with MCs and instrumentalists from across myriad genres.
THE CHARLATANS: O2 Academy – Delayed 30th anniversary tour for the indie stalwarts – *see main preview*
SO FETCH: The Bullingdon – Noughties retro club night.
ISIS CITY ROCKERS: Isis Farmhouse, Iffley Lock – Weekly covers night with the band made up of members of The Deadbeat Apostles, Ragged Charms and Beard Of Destiny, playing an eclectic range of songs.
DALBY’S OPEN MIC NIGHT: The Fox Inn, Steventon – Weekly open night.

FRIDAY 3rd
RATS ON RAFTS: The Jericho Tavern – Rotterdam’s renegade rockers ramp up the revs – *see main preview*
THE SHAPES + JODIE & THE JERMS + VERNONS FUTURE: The Bullingdon – The Shapes play their now traditional festive show, the expansive pop, new wave, punk, folk and r’n'b ensemble bringing the fun in a lively Dexys-meets-Tom Petty-meets-Pogues-meets Van Morrison style and chucking their trademark take on ‘A Fairytale of New York into the show – at which point it’s officially Christmas in Nightshiftland. Great support from indie janglers Jody & The Jerms, channelling The Primitives, Darling Buds and Kirsty MacColl, plus indie rock veterans The Vernons Future.
RAVING TRIPPY: The Bullingdon – Psychedelic house and techno club night.
ROSS FROM FRIENDS: O2 Academy – Live set from Flying Lotus-signed Felix Clary Weatherall, back in town for the first time since 2019, mixing up myriad influences, from hip-hop cut’n’paste culture and 80s Eurobeat to Hi-NRG and Italo.
BLACK PARADE: O2 Academy – Noughties emo club night.
KLUB KAKOFANNEY: The Gladiator Club – With their big 30th anniversary celebrations put off until next year, Klub Kakofanney get back into party action with a one-off show at The Gladiator Club on Percy Street, with Cuban big band fun from Ran Kan Kan; fusion-pop from Papa Nui and feelgood blues, psychedelia, Calypso, ska, and funk-rock vibes from hosts The Mighty Redox, playing songs from their recent album ‘Fiesta D’Amour’.
BON GIOVI: Fat Lil’s, Witney – Bon Jovi tribute.
EMMA HUNTER + THE SUBTHEORY: TAD Studios – Live-streamed show from TAD Studios with October’s *Nightshift* cover star Emma Hunter bringing her flamenco-infused Lynchian drama-pop to the party alongside 80s filmscore-inspired electro explorer The Subtheory.
MOONAROON: Harcourt Arms – Traditional Irish dances and songs from the local duo.

SATURDAY 4th
SIMPLE feat. SHANTI CELESTE & PEACH:

The Bullingdon – A double dose of NTS Radio stars at tonight’s Simple with Chilean-born, Berlin-resident producer, DJ, presenter and label honcho Shanti Celeste, a veteran of Bristol’s Noughties rave scene, alongside Toronto/London DJ Peach, with her upbeat genre-mxing EDM.
DEFINITELY MIGHTBE: O2 Academy – The Oasis tribute band celebrate the 25th anniversary of ‘(What’s the Story) Morning Glory’.
SWITCH feat. BOU, UNGLUED & BEN SNOW: O2 Academy – Drum&bass, bass and house from Switch, tonight hosting Bou, Unglued and Ben Snow – rearranged from June.
SWIFTAGEDDON: O2 Academy – Taylor Swift-themed club night.
HIPSHAKIN: Harcourt Arms – 50s and 60s rhythm’n’blues, rock’n’roll, jump jive, jazz, boogaloo and early soul.
THE BRITPOP BOYS: Fat Lil’s, Witney

SUNDAY 5th
KAWALA: The Bullingdon – Sold-out show from London’s fast-rising indie-folksters, tour support to kindred musical spirits Bombay Bicycle Club, now on a headline tour to promote new single ‘Searching’.
OPEN MIC NIGHT: The Harcourt Arms – Weekly open night.
IRISH FOLK NIGHT: The Half Moon – Weekly folk session.
THE PETE FRYER BAND: The Tree, Iffley (3.30-5.30pm) – Rock and blues classics from the veteran local singer and guitarist and his band.
SUNDAY SOCIAL: The Star (3pm) – Free live acoustic and roots music session.
RAG’N’MOAN MEN: The Brewery Tap, Abingdon (5.30pm) – Festive-flavoured acoustic blues, folk and Americana.
HIPPY HAZE: The Old Anchor, Abingdon (4pm) – Tribute to the Flower Power hits of the 60s.

MONDAY 6th
THE K’s: The Bullingdon – Swaggering indie-punk rocking from the fast-rising Merseyside quartet.
LADIES OF NETTLEBED: Nettlebed Folk Club – Nettlebed patrons Charlie Dore, Rowan Godel, Megan Henwood and Jackie Oates.

TUESDAY 7th
NEWBIE TUESDAY: The Old Anchor, Abingdon – New acts night, with Horizon.

WEDNESDAY 8th
LUCY SPRAGGAN: O2 Academy – Whimsical hip hop-infused acoustic pop from the former *X-Factor* contestant, best known for her song ‘Tea & Toast’, back in town as part of a tour to promote her sixth album, ‘Choices’.
BARRICANE: The Jericho Tavern – Tripped-out folky indie from the harmony-heavy local starlets.
PROGRESSION: The Bullingdon
OPEN MIC: The Old Anchor, Abingdon

THURSDAY 9th
YOUNG KNIVES: The Bullingdon – Young Knives play their first hometown show for over two years, the band’s line-up now augmented by

drummer Silke Blansjaar, together playing tracks from their incredible 2019 opus ‘Barbarians’, inspired by John Gray’s book ‘Straw Dogs’, and musically the post-punk adventuring of acts like PiL, The Pop Group, Throbbing Gristle and Devo. ‘Sheep Tick’ from the album earned Young Knives the Number 1 spot in *Nightshift*’s end of year Top 30 – their fourth time at the top of the pile, a place their sublimely inventive music fully deserves.
DEEPER + HURLING + MOOGIEMAN & THE MASOCHISTS: The Jericho Tavern – Chicago’s funk-ed up post-punk trio tour their new album ‘Auto Pain’ – *see main preview*
ISIS CITY ROCKERS: Isis Farmhouse, Iffley
STEPH PIRRIE’S XMAS JAZZ: Harcourt Arms – Festive-flavoured live jazz.
DALBY’S OPEN MIC NIGHT: The Fox Inn, Steventon

FRIDAY 10th
TODD TERRY: O2 Academy – The NYC house legend comes to town – *see main preview*
MANDRAKE HANDSHAKE + FLIGHTS OF HELIOS + AFTER THE THOUGHT: The Bullingdon – A psychedelic Christmas extravaganza to add some trippy fun to proceedings with Mandrake Handshake continuing to expand their musical horizons and minds, drawing in influences from krautrock to 60s psych-folk and the spirit of free festival jams alongside similarly expansive space explorers Flights of Helios, going off-planet musically, while atmospheric electronic sound explorer After The Thought opens the show.

Thursday 2nd
THE CHARLATANS: O2 Academy
Can it really be 30 years since The Charlatans began? Well, not quite – it’s a bit more than that now but, y’know, Covid and all that. So here they are on tour to celebrate that grand occasion, and the release of a new compilation album ‘A Head Full Of Ideas’, which comes as a six-album vinyl box set. Not that the pandemic did the band too much harm beyond cancelled shows – if anything it’s catapulted singer Tim Burgess to National Treasure status for his excellent Tim’s Twitter Listening Parties, which regularly made lockdown a more fun place to be. As for the band themselves: thirteen Top 40 albums, three of them Number 1s, and over 20 hit singles speaks for itself. They’re up there in indie royalty, and they’ve done it while surviving the death of two members, as well as bankruptcy and mental illness. Tonight’s gig is, unsurprisingly, already sold out, but for those lucky enough to have bagged a ticket already, expect a career-spanning set of big hits and cult faves, timeless tunes, soul-infused rock, danceable pop, plenty of swagger and, yes, a nascent national treasure front and centre stage.



KNOWING ME, KNOWING YULE: The Bullingdon – ABBA club night with live tribute act.
ULULELE NIGHT: Harcourt Arms
INDIE DISCO: Tap Social, Botley – Dominic Utton spins classic 80s and 90s indie vinyl.
OSPREY & THE OX4 ALLSTARS + SIAMESE SIRENS + OMOON: King’s Head & Bell, Abingdon

SATURDAY 11th
MALEVOLENCE: O2 Academy – Anthemic metalcore, thrash and hardcore from Sheffield’s heavyweights, following their appearance at this summer’s Download pilot event with a tour to promote their most recent ‘The Other Side’ EP.
MAX BLANSJAAR + THE BOBO + SHOCKHORROR + SELF HELP: The Port Mahon – OMS mag relaunch gig with local indie starlet Max making a welcome return to live action alongside atmospheric electro star The Bobo and pop-punkers Self Help.
MUSICAL MEDICINE: The Bullingdon – Residents night at the monthly party club night.
TOM DALBY: James Street Tavern – Rock’n’roll action from the local singer and guitarist.
TOMMY, RICHIE & FRIENDS: Harcourt Arms
SHEPHERD’S PIE: Fat Lil’s, Witney
SYNTHECITY: Loose Cannon Taproom, Abingdon – One-man 80s synth-pop tribute.
THE SEKRETS: The Old Anchor, Abingdon

SUNDAY 12th
JOHN OTWAY & HIS BIG BAND + EMMA HUNTER: The Bullingdon – The Clown Prince of Pop returns once more, keeping it lunatic and lively over 40 years since his one and only major hit ‘Really Free’ – with Willy Barrett – for a typically madcap barrel through old faves like ‘Beware of the Flowers Cause I’m Sure They’re Going to Get You Yeah’, ‘Bunsen Burner’ etc. One of a kind. Top drawer support from *Nightshift*’s Track of the Year winner Emma Hunter.
DAN RAWLE: The Brewery Tap, Abingdon (5.30pm) – Acoustic night with the local guitar picker.
OPEN MIC NIGHT: The Harcourt Arms
IRISH FOLK NIGHT: The Half Moon
SCAMPY: OPEN MIC: The Old Anchor, Abingdon (4pm)

MONDAY 13th
SHED SEVEN + MCH: O2 Academy – York’s enduring indie rockers celebrate 25 years since the release of their Top 10 breakthrough album ‘A Maximum High’, reliving Britpop era hits ‘Getting Better’, ‘Going For Gold’ and ‘Where Have You Been Tonight’. Support comes from MCH, a new supergroup made up of Mark Morris from The Bluetones, Nigel Clarke from Dodgy and Chris Helme from The Seahorses.
CLEARWATER CREEDENCE REVIVAL: The Bullingdon – Tribute to the classic 60s rock act.
ST. AGNES FOUNTAIN: Nettlebed Folk Club – Traditional festive folk songs from Chris While, Julie Mathews, Chris Leslie and David Hughes.

TUESDAY 14th
WILL & THE PEOPLE: O2 Academy – Reggae and ska-soaked 60s pop and good vibes from Will Rendle’s enduring band.
GARDEN CENTRE + SUEP + THE DUMPLINGS: Florence Park Community Centre – Former King of Cats man Max Levy returns to Oxford with his unnerving mix of lo-fi punk, cartoon creepiness and queasy pop at tonight’s



Friday 3rd
RATS ON RAFTS: The Jericho Tavern

It might seem strange for a band from Rotterdam to name themselves after a dish born of the horrors of the Irish famine but then Rats On Rafts rarely conform to expectations. A quartet formed at school in the mid-Noughties and raised in their home city’s musical underground, they’ve taken one left turn after another over the years to the point their most recent album – February’s ‘Excerpts From Chapter 3: The Mind Runs A Net Of Rabbit Paths’, their third and their first in six years – is both their best and their most adventurous. It’s a concept album, inspired by The Pretty Things’ seminal rock opera ‘SF Sorrow’, White Noise’s phenomenal ‘Electrical Storm In Heaven’, and The Small Faces’ ‘Ogden’s Nut Gone Flake’. Except it only infrequently sounds like any of those, preferring its own strange road – one lined with psychedelia, post-punk and krautrock signposts, that touches base with acts like The Fall, Wire, Faust, Frank Zappa, and Mission of Burma. They’ve toured with the latter as well as other musical kin Franz Ferdinand and Pere Ubu, but until now they’ve made little impact on the UK’s live scene. This headline tour should hopefully rectify that as what Rats On Rafts bring to the prevailing post-punk party is something invigoratingly unpredictable.

Divine Schism show.

WEDNESDAY 15th
PROGRESSION: The Bullingdon
OPEN MIC: The Old Anchor, Abingdon

THURSDAY 16th
NINETEENTH HOUR + BEAVER FUEL + GET LOOSE + CHARMS AGAINST THE EVIL EYE: The Bullingdon – It’s All About the Music local bands showcase.
GEMMA CULLINGFORD + MEANS OF PRODUCTION + CHOLLY: The Library – Sink Ya Teeth’s Gemma Cullingford comes to town in her solo guise at tonight’s Divine Schism show, mixing up funk-ed up post-punk, disco and synth-pop on her album ‘Let Me Speak’. She’s joined by last month’s *Nightshift* cover stars MOP and High Wycombe’s Cholly, making her Oxford debut after last month’s rave *Nightshift* demo review, blending danceable synth-pop with witch house, somewhere between Burial, Grimes and Kate Bush.
PEARL DIVER + JUNIPER NIGHTS: The Port Mahon – Bluesy funk and lounge-smooth rock’n’roll from Pearl Diver with dark-minded post-grunge indie rocking from Juniper Nights.
ISIS CITY ROCKERS: Isis Farmhouse, Iffley
DALBY’S OPEN MIC NIGHT: The Fox Inn, Steventon

FRIDAY 17th

THE PEOPLE VERSUS + MATT OWEN + WOUNDED BEAR: **O2 Academy** – Sweet-natured, hymnal chamber pop with a hint of folk and bluegrass from headliners The People Versus, joined by Noah & The Whale’s Matt Owen.

ELVANA: **O2 Academy** – Return of the Elvis impersonator-fronted Nirvana tribute.

BOSSAPHONIK: **Cowley Workers Social Club** – World jazz dance with guests Electric Jalaba, playing Moroccan gnawa, heavy dub and electronic psychedelia.

THE FURROW COLLECTIVE: **Holywell Music Room** – Traditional folk balladry, festive songs and carols from a quartet of folk luminaries playing a short tour of Christmas-themed concerts.

SYSTEM 80s: **Fat Lil’s, Witney** – 80s hits.

SATURDAY 18th

OLD SKOOL OXFORD feat. **DJ FAZE:** **The Bullingdon**

THE AC/DC EXPERIENCE: **O2 Academy** – Tribute night.

SIR BALD DIDDLEY: **Harcourt Arms**

SYNTHECITY + PORT IN A STORM: **The Swan, Eynsham** – 80s synth-pop hits from

Thursday 9th

DEEPER / HURLING / MOOGIEMAN & THE MASOCHISTS: The Jericho Tavern

Originally set to happen in April 2020 before... well, you know what happened... Chicago’s Deeper finally make it over the pond as guests of Divine Schism and Freakscene. The band’s single, ‘This Heat’, was one of 2020’s best singles, everything you want modern post-punk to be: angsty rhythms, layered, neatly spiked guitars, yelped vocals and a sense of uptight, speed-addled mania about it. The influence of Devo, Wire, Gang of Four and New Order were slickly incorporated into the band’s brittle grooves and it had the feel of a song that could turn any venue into a broiling mass of dancing bodies. And we’ll finally get the chance to see if that’s true tonight, the trio making their Oxford debut having previously toured the UK with fellow Chicagoans Twin Peaks and an extensive US tour with Montreal’s Corridor. The band are belatedly touring second album ‘Auto-Pain’, the antithesis of the senses numbing drug Soma in *Brave New World*, the album dealing with depression and hope, partly inspired by the changing seasons in their home city. Great support from noise-pop crew Hurling, the band led by My Bloody Valentine’s tour guitarist and keyboard player Jen Macro, while local wayward pop heroes Moogiemann open.



Syntheticity, plus folk from Port in a Storm.

SIAMESE SIRENS: **The Old Anchor, Abingdon** – Live reggae, trip hop and drum&bass fusion.

SUNDAY 19th

ROCK SCHOOL: **The Bullingdon**

SUNDAY SOCIAL: **The Star (3pm)**

STORYTELLER: **The Brewery Tap, Abingdon (5.30pm)** – Funk, rock, reggae and soul fusion.

OPEN MIC NIGHT: **The Harcourt Arms**

IRISH FOLK NIGHT: **The Half Moon**

MONDAY 20th

BELSHAZZAR’S FEAST: **Nettlebed Folk Club**

TUESDAY 21st

LEBURN & THE MAD DOGS: **The Bullingdon**

– Soulful funky blues from the Californian guitarist, back in town for the first time in some years as a guest of the returning Haven Club.

MADDY PRIOR & THE CARNIVAL BAND: **St. John the Evangelist** – Carols and capers from the leading lady of English folk music and her band at tonight’s festival folk concert.

WEDNESDAY 22nd

YOUR SONG: **The Bullingdon** – Local bands play their favourite covers at the enduring festive fave.

PROGRESSION: **The Bullingdon**

KANDA BONGO MAN: **Thomas Hughes Memorial Hall Uffington** – The Kwasa Kwasa King makes a return journey into the Oxfordshire countryside after the postponement of his show here in September due to surgery, the man launching a new live album recorded at his last gig here. The veteran Congolese showman helped revitalised Congolese rumba through the 80s and 90s, becoming a firm favourite with John Peel and earning himself shows at WOMAD, Queen Elizabeth Hall and more before leaving these shores to live in South Africa. As a wise man once said, “if Kanda Bongo Man can’t make you dance, call an ambulance – you must be dead or dying.”

OPEN MIC: **The Old Anchor, Abingdon**

THURSDAY 23rd

RALEIGH GREEN + KOKROACHEZ

+ SCENE IT ALL + MANNEQUIN: **The Bullingdon** – It’s All About the Music local bands showcase.

NANG TUNES presents **EMMY BACHARACH:** **The Bullingdon** – House, techno and garage club night.

ISIS CITY ROCKERS: **Isis Farmhouse, Iffley**

THE PETE FRYER BAND: **The Tree, Iffley**

DALBY’S OPEN MIC NIGHT: **The Fox Inn, Steventon**

ADAM MATTHEWS: **Old Anchor, Abingdon**

FRIDAY 24th

SKYLARKIN’S REGGAE CHRISTMAS: **The Bullingdon** – Count Skylarkin’ hosts the traditional festive reggae night to get you skanking into Christmas.

SATURDAY 25th

Something, something, stocking full of kittens, wine, kittens and wine. Thanks.

SUNDAY 26th

DEEP COVER BOXING DAY BASH: **The Bullingdon** – Boxing Day party for the hip hop and UK bass club night.

OPEN MIC NIGHT: **The Harcourt Arms**



Friday 10th

TODD TERRY: O2 Academy

A bona fide legend of clubbing at the O2 tonight in the form of New York DJ, producer and remixer Todd Terry, whose name is synonymous with the advent of house, rave and beyond. Having begun his DJing life in the early 80s, spinning disco and hip hop records at house parties, he introduced those genres into early Chicago house, making it more energised and thus more commercial. From that point on his output has been phenomenally prolific, releasing myriad records under myriad monikers, including his biggest chart hit, 1988’s Top 20 ‘Can You Party under his Royal House guise. He was also behind ‘I’ll House You’ by The Jungle brothers and a remix of Everything But The Girl’s ‘Missing’. Even as he helped lead house music into global popularity he was an early adopter of drum&bass while taking time out to remix Michael Jackson in the 90s. He was also named in the Top 20 most influential DJs in the world by DJ Magazine back then and if his name has become legend over the decades, earning him prime slots at summer dance festivals, he’s retained his underground status and with 90s house as popular now as it ever was, he’s as vital a talent as he ever was.

IRISH FOLK NIGHT: **The Half Moon**

THE PETE FRYER BAND: **Seacourt Bridge Inn** – The local blues and rock veteran plays his traditional Boxing Day show in Botley.

MONDAY 27th

TUESDAY 28th

WEDNESDAY 29th

PROGRESSION: **The Bullingdon**

OPEN MIC: **The Old Anchor, Abingdon**

THURSDAY 30th

DALBY’S OPEN MIC NIGHT: **The Fox Inn, Steventon**

LOCAL BANDS NIGHT: **Old Anchor, Abingdon**

FRIDAY 31st

PYT x NYE: **The Bullingdon** – Disco, funk and soul club night to welcome in the New Year.

COUNT SKYLARKIN & FRIENDS: **The Bullingdon** – Alternative NYE fun with reggae, ska, dancehall and more.

OPEN MIC NIGHT: **The Fox Inn, Steventon**

Nightshift listings are free. Deadline for inclusion is the 20th of each month, no exceptions. Listings are copyright of Nightshift and may not be used without permission.

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WITH SPECIAL GUESTS

PET NEEDS

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HONEYMOON

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PLUS SPECIAL GUESTS

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PERFORMING THE ALBUMS UNKNOWN PLEASURES & CLOSER

PLUS AN OPENING SET OF NEW ORDER MATERIAL

THURSDAY

21ST APRIL 2022

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SUNDAY 24th APRIL 2022

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PLAYING THE ALBUM IN ITS ENTIRETY PLUS CLASSIC TRACKS

PLUS GUESTS

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SUNDAY 24th APRIL 2022

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SETH LAKEMAN

St John the Evangelist

Those terrifying album anniversaries keep on coming and we can scarcely believe it’s fifteen years since Seth Lakeman released his landmark ‘Freedom Fields’, which cemented him as English folk music’s brightest star, but here we are and here’s Seth, looking barely a day older than he did back then, performing the album in its entirety in the suitably ornate and atmospheric St. John the Evangelist’s.

But first there’s a set of mostly brand new songs, the majority from this year’s ‘Make Your Mark’, songs as dark as he’s written before – to the point he even jokingly apologises for the mood he’s conjured – but songs

that continue his ability to capture the landscapes and oceanscapes of his native Devon and Cornwall in song so poetically, like early highlight ‘Shoals To Turn’, a bleakly romantic evocation of rugged cliffs and distant horizons.

Lakeman is backed by a phenomenal band tonight, from versatile percussionist Toby Kearney to Ben Nicholls, whose alternately plucked and bowed upright bass gives his songs such a powerful undercurrent. But it’s backing singer and drone box player Alex Hart who really adds the magic, bringing an almost otherworldly feel to tracks like ‘Love Will Still Remain’. From

the menacing anti-urbanisation anthem ‘Coming For You Soon’ to his classic ode to the Penlee lifeboat crew, ‘Solomon Browne’, Lakeman’s songs are so invested with the spirit of England’s most isolated counties, you can almost close your eyes and breathe in the sea air and feel the morning dew on the moors.

Those moors are at the heart of ‘Freedom Fields’, which makes up the entirety of the second half of tonight’s show: in the myths and legends and the history, both ancient and modern, those bleak, open spaces come to life – there are witches who’ll steal your heart;

ignoble noblemen, and brave, doomed soldiers. If the passage of time has let us forget just what a superb album ‘Freedom Fields’ is, tonight is a timely reminder, from the questing ‘The White Hare’ to the stomping ‘Riflemen of War’, where Lakeman once again reminds us he is one of the finest fiddle players on the planet. Even more so on traditional set closer ‘Kitty Jay’, the title track of the album that first brought him to the world’s attention and earned him a Mercury Prize nomination – a haunting, intense piece of musical magic. Fifteen years on ‘Freedom Fields’, like Lakeman himself, doesn’t seem to have aged one iota, but how could it: such timeless stories in such adept hands are stories for forever.

Dale Kattack

ANNA MEREDITH

O2 Academy

The two acts that I wasn’t already aware of before this year’s Mercury Prize, that seemed worthy of further investigation, were Ghetts and Anna Meredith. At first look an ex-bad boy grime artist and a former classical composer-in-residence would not appear to have any obvious connection, but Ghetts, amongst multiple other collaborations, has appeared at the Electric Proms with a violinist, and Meredith is continuing to forge ever forwards into the deepest depths of electronica and experimental music. Both acts seem tireless in their drive to expand and stretch the boundaries of their art, and so it proves tonight.

The five piece band take to the stage in matching black and white Bauhausian styled outfits; the stage is similarly draped. Meredith herself is surrounded by a circle of keyboards, xylophones, drums and percussion instruments, bearing testament to the sheer scale of her fluid musicianship. The rest of the band is comprised of a guitarist, drummer, celloist and a tuba player; the latter two surprisingly provide the most to the rave style drive of the set; the tuba in particular does much to provide a dance beat and inform the uniqueness of the sound. Meredith spends the vast majority of her set pumping the air like an EDM DJ urging both the band and the

crowd to get down; when she’s not doing that then she’s beating the hell out of a floor tom or the xylophone, between takes on an oboe obviously. The opening four songs of the set mimic the start of side one of her Mercury nominated ‘Fibs’ album, with just the fourth song, ‘Bump’, substituting ‘Killjoy’, which appears later in the set. ‘Bump’ starts with the stalking brass intro that’s not unlike the *Jaws* theme, but by the time the plodding march of the guitar takes over it is strangely more reminiscent of Led Zep’s ‘Kashmir’. Only three tracks from 2016’s debut ‘Varmints’ make the set, and more interestingly, new work ‘BPM 194: Tom Cruise Runs’, which forms part of the recent ‘Bumps per minute (18 studies for dodgems)’ (*sic*) project is a fairground ride of electronics only that soundtracks Meredith’s interactive website game, where the user can score the music by bumping the cars into each other, each of which carries its own element of the theme music. Tonight’s set ends on a high with ‘Paramour’. The band make a misjudgement to come back and do a Prince segue from ‘Nothing Compares 2U’ into ‘Purple Rain’ – complete with Proms-style ticker tape cannons, but then maybe I’m only sore as I was hoping for Metallica’s ‘Enter Sandman’, which has punctuated the band’s summer festival appearances. Variety is the spice of life, after all.

Mark Taylor

PORRIDGE
RADIO
The Bullingdon
SOLD OUT

BESS ATWELL
Jericho Tavern
01 Dec

RATS
ON RAFTS
Jericho Tavern
03 Dec

KAWALA
The Bullingdon
SOLD OUT

YOUNG KNIVES
The Bullingdon
09 Dec

NOAHFINNCE
The Bullingdon
13 Jan

LLOYD COLE
SJE Arts Centre
SOLD OUT

THE NIGHT CAFE
O2 Academy2
SOLD OUT

HOME
COUNTIES
O2 Academy
26 Feb

PALE WAVES
Jericho Tavern
26 Feb

AIRWAYS
The Bullingdon
01 Mar

MELT
YOURSELF
DOWN
The Bullingdon
02 Mar

WARMDUSCHER
The Bullingdon
SOLD OUT

WHITE LIES
O2 Academy
25 Mar

ENOLA GAY
Jericho Tavern
29 Mar

DREADZONE
The Bullingdon
08 Apr

BAMBARA
The Bullingdon
25 Apr

LARKIN POE
O2 Academy
26 Apr

ROLLING
BLACKOUTS
COASTAL
FEVER
O2 Academy
24 May

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OH, COMMUNITY!
Florence Park Community Centre
Oh, yes please! This wonderful all-dayer is perfectly named, being not just a chance to catch some new music, but also an opportunity for the almost forgotten before-times practice of hanging out, chatting about sets, and buying merch from friendly faces. Fittingly, many performers are also present for the other acts, not least half of new duo **THE DUMPLINGS**, who runs the desk for the rest of the day. Their chirpy, punky bulletins are scrappier than Scrappy-Doo on *Scrapheap Challenge*, and they have a micro-song celebrating Divine Schism founder and local lynchpin Aiden Canaday: O, Captain! my Captain!

RONI SIZE / LTJ BUKEM
O2 Academy
“Music,” growled Madonna, “makes the people come together”. A truism perhaps, but she had a point, especially in the case of old-skool drum&bass. The genre has an unparalleled power to connect. The cavernous shoebox of the O2 is chockablock with hairy hipsters, Cowley Road Trustafarians, fresh-meat first years and past-it postgrads, ‘90s casualties and aging bass addicts, alongside dub steppers and indie kids. For tonight we are blessed with jungle royalty: the Kings of the Rollers, as promoters Switch would have it. *Nightshift* enters, early into Roni Size’s set, to a fierce barrage of amen beats and throbbing bass. The former taking its name from Gregory Coleman’s drum break in The Winstons’ track ‘Amen, Brother’, now ubiquitous to hip hop and jungle/drum&bass. There is, of course, more to drum&bass than drum plus bass; diminutive and musically diverse Mr Size makes a colossal sound. Prowling in front is dapper, flat-capped Dynamite MC, who melts the mic, non-stop for three hours during both DJs. Roni does not trade on

Musically, though, she’s more a mixture of Peaches and Gwen Stefani, and ‘Rodeo Queen’ manages to revel in the pleasures of urban pop whilst acting as feminist satire on the culture: O, tempora! O, mores!
YAY MARIA also rides the laptop rhythms, and if there’s sometimes more reverse reverb than songwriting on display, the set has the unpretentious cabaret vibe of early 80s underground New York. We imagine Grace Jones, Keith Haring and a pre-record deal Madonna bopping at the front: oh! you pretty things.
Chunky emo-flecked rockers **JUNK WHALE** deliver a strong set, too exciting for one reveller, who smashes the venue’s delightfully old-school mirrorball whilst leaping, fist-aloft, across the dancefloor: O Superman. Things calm down for **ALICE HUBBLE**, a synth duo who proffer slow, bleakly buzzing but oddly euphoric songs in a style we christen Giorgio Moroser, making one want to become a heartsick cyborg: oh, that this too, too solid flesh would melt.
SHAKE CHAIN’s set is approximately *Birth Trauma: The Musical*. Whilst the band plays the sort of taut, psych-fuelled aggression-rock that Fat White Family promised but never quite delivered, performance artist Kate Mahony crawls slowly from underneath the stage, wrapped in a coat, limbs sticking out like the Isle of Man flag

BYRON WALLEN QUARTET
The Mad Hatter
This gig has an early kick-off as everything including the audience has to be packed away in time for the karaoke session at eight. Trumpeter, composer and educator Byron Wallen and his band aren’t disconcerted though, and are very much on their game from the first whistle.
Wallen is one of the jazz generation who emerged in the 90s and who, with attention being focused on the current generation of London jazz musicians, seems to have slipped below the radar. Tonight Wallen’s playing, composing and big-hearted presence show that in his case the radar needs to be re-calibrated.
It helps that alongside him is rising star Rob Luft’s synth-sounding guitar; he is given plenty of space to display his virtuosic but self-effacing talent. Much of Wallen’s music is rhythm driven with drummer Rod Youngs, who has played with Gil Scott Heron, and Paul Michael on electric bass keeping it movin’ along.
Wallen has travelled frequently

gone Cthulhu. She slowly grows into an astonishing howling vortex of bemused rage which is half Chuck Schuldiner from Death, half Moaning Myrtle, and by the end she’s raging behind a Beuysian totem built from the venue’s furniture whilst the band imitates military munitions: oh! what a lovely war.
Only **CODEX SERAFINI** could follow that, a quintet enacting high-octane ritualistic space jams in black masks and bright pink robes, like the *Squid Game* guards jamming afterhours to exorcise the horrors they’ve witnessed. This is as close to witchcraft as one can get with a saxophone: oh, oh, oh, it’s magic! And they evidently summoned something impossible from an indescribable dimension (or Amsterdam) in the shape of **PERSONAL TRAINER**, equal parts LCD Soundsystem, Talking Heads, funk revue, art happening, shirts-off hardcore communion, and pep rally. There are abstract passages suddenly coalescing into ultra-tight backing vocals, there’s a bassist on a singer’s shoulders, there’s percussion played standing on a table because... well, frankly, by this point, fuck “because”. Sounds like a horrible mess? O ye of little faith. And then, suddenly, we’re out in the strangely silent suburban streets on a chilly Sunday night, wondering when the next bus is: oh, Christ is that the time?
David Murphy

TRUCK

ALBUMS OF THE YEAR 2021

- 1 LITTLE SIMZ**
SOMETIMES I MIGHT BE INTROVERT
- 2 FLOATING POINTS/ PHAROAH SANDERS & THE ISO**
PROMISES
- 3 VILLAGERS**
FEVER DREAMS
- 4 SHE DREW THE GUN**
BEHAVE MYSELF
- 5 AMYL & THE SNIFFERS**
COMFORT TO ME
- 6 ARLO PARKS**
COLLAPSED IN SUNBEAMS
- 7 SNAIL MAIL**
VALENTINE
- 8 BESS ATWELL**
ALREADY, ALWAYS
- 9 ANNA B SAVAGE**
A COMMON TURN
- 10 PARQUET COURTS**
SYMPATHY FOR LIFE
- 11 LUCY DACUS**
HOME VIDEO
- 12 THE WEATHER STATION**
IGNORANCE
- 13 DON LETTS PRESENTS**
VERSION EXCURSION
- 14 THE BLACK KEYS**
DELTA KREAM
- 15 LOW**
HEY WHAT
- 16 DEAFHEAVEN**
INFINITE GRANITE
- 17 BILLY F GIBBONS**
HARDWARE
- 18 CHUBBY & THE GANG**
THE MUTT'S NUTS
- 19 THE REDS, PINKS & PURPLES**
UNCOMMON WEATHER
- 20 DURAND JONES & THE INDICATIONS**
PRIVATE SPACE



PAUL WELLER

The New Theatre

“We’ve got a very long set tonight,” announces Paul Weller in his instantly recognisable Surrey accent, looking elegantly gaunt beneath his curtain of white hair, and a small part of us wonders what we’re doing with our life. But across two and a half hours Weller and his band deliver a set that’s expansive in its range and filled with enough eclecticism and melodic quality to balance out those tendencies toward earnest traditionalism. Opener ‘White Sky’ is firmly in the latter camp – worthy, fist-pumping blues rock that could have emerged from any year since the late 60s, but it’s immediately followed by ‘Cosmic Fringes’ from his recent Number 1 album ‘Fat Pop (Volume 1)’, and a reminder that for all his elder statesman of sensible rock status, Weller likes to push his own boundaries, in this case a staccato electro tattoo where the twin drummers come fully to the fore. Given tonight’s show is part of a short tour to premiere yet another new batch of songs, it’s pleasingly heavy on the hits, from the inventively off-the-wall-in-a-psychedelic-Beatles vein ‘Saturns Pattern’, through the meaty power play of ‘Changing Man’ and onto

the delicate, folky ‘Wild Wood’, while ‘You Do Something To Me’ rises above its slightly sentimental sheen to reveal itself as a lovingly crafted soul ballad. A short, supposedly acoustic set isn’t particularly acoustic and there are more guitars aligning the stage than the average music shop, but if this segment dips into *Later...* style worthiness at times, ‘Gravity’ saves the session, allowing Weller some space, and a final five-song encore ramps things up nicely – from the Temptations-like soul thumper ‘Testify’, to a brace of Jam classics – ‘That’s Entertainment’ and ‘A Town Called Malice’ – that get those few remaining seated audience members up and moving. Maybe Paul Weller’s oft-praised sense of musical adventure is overplayed at times, but equally so is his reputation for being a staid traditionalist: he is both curator and adventurer within certain set borders, but he’s a man who’s never let himself become entirely comfortable and if tonight’s gig does feel a little long at times, it’s littered with more moments to savour than plenty of artists will muster in a lifetime. **Ian Chesterton**

PONGO

The Bullingdon

There are rare moments, at the end of a special gig, when we go to the wall on the way out and carefully take down and roll a now defunct poster for the show as a memento to having witnessed something we felt was an extraordinary beginning. Pongo – the stage name of Engracia Silva – is the undoubted Queen of Progressive Kuduro: that post-colonial mesh of ancestral Angolan sounds, 4/4 Batida, ‘hard’ zouk and carnival soca, slathered in transatlantic techno and hip hop, that has been fulminating for years in both Luanda and her new home base of Lisbon, Portugal. After so many false dawns, it is ready once again to mainline the western nightlife and festivals, only this time, its zest of positivity and capacity to motivate will feast on the current slough of bloodletting, bed wetting victimhood that is lying dankly across our media. Her own tumultuous history of civil war, migrancy and racism makes our lives pale, but Pongo never once trades on that hurt; abusers are losers, but pardon me there is some serious living to be done here. You only have to see how, with her small band of just Fruity Loops Interface electronica and tin pan percussion, she transforms the statuesque, hands-in-their-pockets, Tuesday night Bullingdon, into a crowd that appeared to have won the lottery. In her hands the call and response of songs like ‘Tambulaya’ and ‘Uwa’ become an irrepressible dynamo of high kicking, twerking energy, that if harnessed would solve the climate crises at a stroke. Pongo sings uncompromisingly in Angolan Portuguese where words themselves become music, then also become a song’s engine, its heart and distance factor in a way that is more about the senses than pure logic. There is an element of bravery in such a big ask, but her first hit at age 15, ‘Wegue Wegue’, broke the mould of African female pop in 2008, becoming huge as the soundtrack of FIFA10, which derailed her career in a royalties heist. Tonight’s gig, part of a mini UK tour, demonstrates the power in the unity of humanity should all but end its sleep of faith, and we have the poster to prove it. **Paul Carrera**

SKINNY LISTER / THE LONGEST

JOHNS

O2 Academy

Fair to say when you turn up to a gig and there are people dressed as pirates it’s going to be a party as much as a concert. Bristol’s Longest Johns are a folk quartet from Bristol who went viral earlier this year on the back of a TikTok video of them performing 19th Century shanty ‘Wellerman’, but while there’s novelty and daft humour throughout tonight’s set they’re no novelty act. Instead their rich mix of ancient sea songs and self-penned numbers looks set to make them big favourites, particularly on the festival circuit, after a decade on the folk circuit fringes. They’re both daft and deft and irresistible, their rich tenor and baritone harmonies easily carrying us out to sea and times long gone. The pirates in the crowd are singing along and toasting them with grog and we’re right there with them. Skinny Lister are a band made for the road so 18 months without gigs has hit them as hard as any band and tonight being the first night of their first tour back, there’s an air of unfettered celebration to their set. From the positivity and bounceability of ‘Cathy’ to the more thoughtful ‘Colours’,

they’re on stage with the simple, single-minded mission to make sure everyone here is having a good time. By the end of their furiously fun set the packed crowd has long since forgotten ideas of social distancing, becoming a joyously heaving mob while singers Dan Heptinstall and Lorna Thomas conduct the merry dance, Thomas, an ebullient cheerleader, managing to lose her balance completely at one point and go tumbling across the stage, still laughing as she goes, rising again unbowed. If Skinny Lister don’t have as much muck and grime under their nails as The Pogues, they are that band’s heirs in so many ways, celebrating life in all its roughhouse ways on ‘This Is War’, turning memories of getting beaten up while drunk on ‘Trouble On Oxford Street’ into a rabble-rousing party piece, and inviting The Longest Johns back onstage for one final mass sing-along, about whisky of course. The wild rovers have returned to where and what they seem born to do, and now perhaps more than ever, this simple wild abandon is what we need in our lives. **Sue Foreman**

EMMA HUNTER / PEARL DIVER /

CHRISTINA TRUMAN / CHIIKA

The Jericho Tavern

Tonight is Chiika’s first official gig so some nerves are to be expected but it’s funny how her between-song chat draws you in – from what initially seems a bit of a flustered garble to something like a stream-of-consciousness comedy turn which is almost as much fun as her songs, and her songs are a lot of fun. ‘Natural Nicotine’ is a highlight due to repeat plays on the *Nightshift* stereo and comes across as even better live with heavier beats and an even more certain sense of purpose, but new single ‘Poseidon’, with its more languid, jazz-pop vibe and wash of positivity, almost tops it and with more singles already in the pipeline, an engaging onstage presence and a sound that tiptoes between hip hop, jazz, pop and r’n’b without treading too heavily into one genre, this feels like a very firm first step on the road to bigger things. Initially Christina Truman looks and sounds like any other post-Joni acoustic singer-songwriter, perched on a stool with her acoustic guitar and visions of Laurel Canyon, but the contrast between her light sing-song voice – not too far off Edie Brickell or Waitress For the Bees – and the frankly macabre nature of some of her songs makes for some serious fun, in particular ‘The Groom’, another song about death and haunting that’s told as a story while feeling bizarrely autobiographical. It’s like Susan Hill rocking up in a Haight-Ashbury coffee shop and delivering her ghost stories as folk songs, with a smile as bright as a sunbeam. Pearl Diver are at their best when they ditch the Van Morrison-like blues and pre-punk rock jams and draw in elements of late night easy jazz and surf, as on recent single ‘Give It All Away’, where Richard Hawley gets sweet and soulful with The Commodores, **Dale Kattack**

THE DEADBEAT APOSTLES

Isis Farmhouse

The Deadbeat Apostles could never be accused of reinventing the musical wheel but here is a band who know how to launch it down a steep slope and get the drinks in while everyone else in the room makes chase. If anything, the band revel in the traditions and clichés their music is rooted in and re-energise them en route to Having A Good Time. Which ultimately is what The Deadbeats are about, even when they’re singing about stuff that’s very definitely not about Having A Good Time, like new single ‘Leave It To Men’, their most aggressive – lyrically and musically – offering to date, infused with a punk spirit that doesn’t trample too hard on the soulful rock’n’roll that is their stock-in-trade. Musically the band switch the mood up or down at whim and without losing their momentum – from driving blues to a soft shoe shuffle that variously gets on down with or simple pickpockets The Rolling

while a new song – that singer Matt Sage dedicates to his wife in the crowd – show they’ve got the songwriting chops to elevate themselves above their earthier material. A combination of PA issues and family tragedy might understandably have scuppered any chance of triumph from Emma Hunter’s EP launch show, but a triumph it is, a reminder for those of us already familiar with her and drummer Tom Bruce’s talents that here is something genuinely special, and hopefully a revelation for any newcomers. Early on the line “I will feed you my blood” sets the scene and the scene is dark. It’s midnight on the highway and there’s a killer on the loose. Together Emma’s songs form a loose narrative of recurring characters and we dive deep into the rabbit holes of dream chasing and are caught up in the conflicted emotional turbulence of escaping domestic violence. Midnight surf guitar twangs, vocals are looped and looped again and Emma’s voice simply soars above it all on songs like ‘Nightingale’, queen of the flamenco goth club on the edge of town. ‘Treacle Well’ is one of the most inventively crafted songs you will hear this year and next, with all the atmosphere of the deepest, darkest forest, while ‘Snake’ uncoils elegantly before taking flight even as it wraps itself around the bottom of another bottle of wine. She leaves the sleepy, sad-eyed ‘Window’ til last and it crowns a sublime set, its restrained sense of drama as poised as a prima ballerina, but when it strikes, it’s as deadly as a cobra. Emma Hunter’s songs come from a place of darkness but tonight proves that when things seem at their blackest, her fire burns brightest. **Dale Kattack**

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WHAT’S MY LINE?

A monthly look at jobs in local music.

This month it’s PAUL WILLIAMS from THE BULLINGDON and he’s a VENUE MANAGER.

How long have you worked in this job? “Seven years at The Bullingdon, but fifteen years working in venues, and eighteen years promoting.”

What is one thing you have to do as part of your job that the average person might not know? “How closely I work with other venues as well as The Bully. There is a lot of love between all the venues and clubs; we all are mad for doing what we do and it’s a great support network.”

What’s been the biggest highlight of your career so far? “Seeing the success of relaunching The Bullingdon from the Art Bar and managing to convince GhostFaceKillah from Wu Tang Clan to play. The moment his foot hit the stage in a 40 degree sweaty Bullingdon I had an out of body experience.”

And the lowlight? “Not being able to do more to prevent the closure of The Coven (this isn’t talked about enough), The Wheatsheaf and The Cellar.”

How much and how did Covid affect your job? “My normal business became non-existent. I spent most of my time writing applications for



grants, which is very uncomfortable as you have to pitch what you love as a commodity; it felt that the diversity of what we have created at the Bullingdon is only for a monetary value. I also spent a lot of time hiking with other promoters, which was fantastic building friendships outside of the venue.”

Who’s your favourite ever Oxford musical artist? “Think it has to be Supergrass. But as a kid the bands that blew me away the first time I saw them were Winnabago Deal and Sow.”

What’s the single most important piece advice you’d give to someone wanting to do your job? “Don’t study it, you have to love it. It sounds like a cliché but get in on the ground doing whatever you

can and annoy everyone asking about their job.” Who’s the most awkward person you’ve ever had to deal with in your job? “The most awkward people are sound engineers. They never want to confirm dates to work, and have to check their diaries. They’re business masterminds the way they put out to bid. Apart from the act, they’re most important part of the show though. Bastards.”

When was the last time you heard genius? “I am lucky enough to hear Martin Newton’s engineering on a daily basis and it never fails to impress across all genres. I find it very annoying that touring bands constantly tell me how good he is: ‘yeah, yeah, blah, blah, blah’.”

Have you ever compromised your integrity in the course of your work? Quite recently there

was a big act that I wasn’t fully comfortable with having at the venue. I didn’t trust or find it authentic the apology they made about a previous public incident. After meeting the act my instincts were correct and I should have said the venue was busy that day.”

Would you swap your job for any other and if so, what? “I’d like to be the Queen.”

Are you rich? “We are all poor in Oxford.”

Do you consider your job glamorous? “Ask the drain company we work with poking the Oxford music scene’s shits with a stick.”

What’s your favourite thing about Oxford’s music scene? “It just won’t die, no matter what is thrown at it.”

DR SHOTOVER: Satan Claus

Ah, there you are, Young Satsuma. Welcome to the East Indies Club Christmas Bar, aka Santa’s Grott-oh. We’re over here in the corner, in a fake snow blizzard. Pull up a reindeer and get a round in. Mind the plastic holly. Tasteful, isn’t it? Mm, this Yuletide set-up has been in place since, oooh, late August. Bedingfield the Club Steward can’t be beaten when it comes to maximising festive sales. Halloween? That was celebrated round here in early June. Bloody hot it was too, trick-or-treating in one’s original Dr Who Yeti outfit. Anyway, the East Indies Club Christmas Party Planning Group has come up with the following vital ingredients: 1. Drink. 2. Mince pies. 3. Stilton. 4. Drink. 5. Festive sounds courtesy of our resident band, THE AEROSMITHS. Yes, they specialise in mash-ups, such as *This Charming Dude (Looks Like a Lady)*, and *Walk This Strange Way (Here We Come)*. Yrs Truly will be guesting on *There Is A Light That Never Goes Down (In An Elevator)*, followed by a selection of heavy metal carols. Oh you know, the usual biker-themed cornucopia. *Hark The He-ell’s Angels Sing... Violent Night, Holey Night... I Saw Three Shivs* etc etc. Meanwhile, it must be time for another round of Bedingfield’s signature Yule Log Hot Grog Egg-Nog. Cheers! Down the chimney! Now, what are we doing for Easter?

Next month: If you can’t stand the kitsch, stay out of the kitchen



“Any woman calls me Heavy Metal Carol – I’ll deck ‘er!”

INTRODUCING....

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

SLOW DRIFT

Who are they?

Slow Drift are an electronic/synth pop duo formed by Oxford-based multi-instrumentalist and producer James Askwith (who also plays bass in Easter Island Statues) and Canadian singer-songwriter Jenn Steeves. The band is a recent lockdown project but the pair met in Oxford several years ago; both were playing separately on the local scene but began playing acoustically together at open mic nights. Jenn then moved to India. During the lockdown of winter 2020, they began making the music that would become Slow Drift. James, in Oxford, sent some electronic instrumental tracks to Jenn, who was at home in British Columbia at the time. She wrote lyrics and vocal melodies, and songs started to emerge. “It felt like we finally landed on something that balanced our individual approaches to music.” Last month they released their debut song, ‘Oblivion’, which earned them a Top Track review in *Nightshift*.

What do they sound like?

The band’s Top Track review described them as “dark, sultry, silicon sci-fi synth-pop sexiness and splendour,” which they claim to like a lot. Jenn’s vocals are ghostly, gothic, almost folky, while the music “swarms like shadows and star liners”.

What inspires them?

“We have a very wide range of musical influences from electronic artists such as Burial, Rival Consoles and Lorn, to bands like LCD Soundsystem, Beach House and Black Marble. TV and film soundtracks to *Stranger Things*, *Blade Runner* and *Drive* also influenced the synth sounds we use. Lyrically, the inspiration is nostalgia, faded memories, things that never quite came to pass – probably partly the result of writing during a pandemic!”

Their career highlight so far is:

“We haven’t been around very long in the public domain but last month’s Top Track review in *Nightshift* was a highlight. Also, the moment when the songs started to come together was very exciting.”



And the lowlight:

“There hasn’t been one yet due to our limited time of existence, but the fact we cannot play live is a major drawback. It would be great to do a Slow Drift show, but we currently live on different continents.”

Their favourite other Oxfordshire act is:

“Candy Says have always been up there and probably have had the most influence on us; they were masters of atmospheric synth pop.”

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

“The Beatles: ‘Rubber Soul’. It’s maybe a predictable answer and very different to our sound but the classic stuff like this has proven that it ages well and will still sound amazing in 30 years.”

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

“No gigs planned but we hope to be able to play live next year!”

Their favourite and least favourite things about Oxford music are:

“Oxford’s music scene punches above its weight for the size of the city. It’s always incredibly supportive of new music and the likes of Mark ‘Osprey’ O’Brien make it very easy for new bands to get gig experience. He is vital to the music scene; It’s just sad to see how the scene has been impacted by recent events. The closing of The Cellar and Wheatsheaf as venues is obviously hard to see.”

You might love them if you love:

Glass Candy; Beach House; Portishead; Ladytron; London Grammar; Wolf Alice; The xx.

Hear them at:

“Spotify, Apple Music, all the usual places.”

ALL OUR YESTERDAYS

20 YEARS AGO

December 2001 found *Nightshift* compiling its Oxford songs of the year once again and there was a very clear winner in the form of **Radiohead** whose bleakly imperious ‘**Pyramid Song**’ was arguably their greatest moment, coming at the end of a year when they’d played their now legendary South Park show. “Even by their incredible standards, this is an astonishing song” ran the blurb, with the words majestic and magnificent also excitedly bandied about.

The Top 20 showcased a whole raft of new bands in town who’d given the local scene a shake-up, with **The Rock of Travolta**’s ‘Lukewarm Skywater’ at number 2 and Top 5 showings for **Meanwhile, Back In Communist Russia** (‘Morning After Pill’); **eeehlee** (‘Apologise’), and **Goldrush** (‘Love Is Here’). Also featured were **Richard Walters**’ band **Theremin** (‘Minor Planets’); **South Sea Company Prospectus** (‘Without Change’); **Six Ray Sun** (‘Bad Batz Maru’) and **Holy Roman Empire** (‘Dante’s Inferno’).

As we drifted towards the quiet Christmas period, gig highlights for the month included **Stereolab**; **Royksopp**; **The Chameleons**; **Hardcore Superstar** supported by **JOR**, and **Hundred Reasons**, all at **The Zodiac**, with Two Tone survivors **The Selecter** at **The Bullingdon**, and **Status Quo** at **The New Theatre**.

Down in the Demo pages, we met a new band in town called **Ponyclub** who we said “might be a pretty decent band if they took their collective

tongues out of their collective cheeks and stopped poncing about.” Sometime later they changed their name to **Young Knives** and while they’ve never really taken their tongues out of their cheeks, they are a pretty decent band, we reckon.

10 YEARS AGO

Oh, and what’s this, **Radiohead** topping the *Nightshift* end of year Top 25 once again? Oxford’s most successful band don’t exactly win it every year but they have had more Number 1s than any other act bar Young Knives, who they’re equal with on four now. Back in December 2011 they sat snugly and smugly atop the pile once more with ‘**Lotus Flower**’, the prime cut from ‘Moon Shaped Pool’. It pipped **Fixers**’ exuberant psych-pop anthem ‘Swimmhaus Johannesburg’ to the top, while **Young Knives**’ ‘Glasshouse’ had to settle for Number 3. **The Cellar Family** were Number 4 with ‘Father Michael’, while **Chad Valley** (‘Now That I’m Real’); **Dive Dive** (‘Ape Like Me’); **Spring Offensive** (‘A Stutter & a Start’); **Little Fish** (‘Wonderful’); **The Rock Of Travolta** (‘Last March of the Acolytes’), and **Ute** (‘The Innocent Tailor’) made up the Top 10. Dark-minded punk trio The Cellar Family also graced the cover of this month’s issue, talking about serial killers, catharsis through music and what type of sandwich the band would be (“fuck off” being the correct answer).

On the local gig front punk legends **Wire** and sample genius **DJ Shadow** played at the **O2 Academy**, while **Fionn Regan** was at **St**

THIS MONTH IN OXFORD MUSIC HISTORY

Barnabas, and a series of gigs at **The Rotunda** in Iffley featured a debut solo show from **Gaz Coombes**, playing songs from ‘Here Come The Bombs’ for the first time.

5 YEARS AGO

Poor wee Radiohead had to settle for third place and a bronze medal in December 2016’s end of year Top 25. Top spot went to another of Oxford’s biggest success stories, **Glass Animals**, whose ‘Life Itself’ took the shiny gold. “A deliciously exuberant afterhours get up and get down mix of African rhythms, silken psychedelia, electro-pop and r’n’b that might have been a tea, weed and good times-fuelled jam session with Radiohead, The Weeknd, Tame Impala and Mbongwana Star” we said.

Other choice cuts in the chart included **Coldredlight** (‘Little Scorpion’); **Death of Hi-Fi** (‘Roses & Guns’); **Vienna Ditto** (‘Busted Flush’); **Cassels** (Flock Analogy’); **Cameron AG** (‘Heroes’); **Esther Joy Lane** (‘Quest For Her’); **Lucy Leave** (‘40 Years’) and **Kanadia** (‘Into the Flames’).

Willie J Healey gazed wistfully out of the window of **Truck Store** on the front cover of this month’s *Nightshift* while his interview found him chatting about the move away from his original stage name of Sweet William (“it was brought to my attention I was competing with the Sweet William bra company”), and driving to gigs in his own limousine (“Sadly I had to sell it; it was so bad for fuel”).

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TRACKS

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TOP TRACK

RUBY FRIZZELL

Covid hasn't had many positive effects on music, but one it has had is allowing more space for solitary bedroom artists to get noticed in the absence of so many bands. In Oxford the likes of Chiika and Piripa have made themselves known, and here comes Ruby Frizzell to join the party. We say 'party', though you'll not find many dancefloor-filling bangers here, as Ruby follows more in the lineage of her declared faves like Scruffpuppie and the darker end of Billy Eilish's music with a brace of contemplative-bordering-on-morose songs. 'Strawberry Smoke Woo' is all minimalist electronic chitter chatter, synth squelches and almost folky vocals with a woozily downbeat mood hanging over it like the titular vape smoke, the song simply constructed but like an brightly-coloured child's jigsaw puzzle highly satisfying to look at in its finished form. 'Tell Me Something' is even more stripped down – a softly plucked acoustic guitar and idly ruminative vocals occasionally laced with background chat and laughter and just the merest hint Ruby's about to lose her rag completely. It's a very promising debut and even more impressive when you learn Ruby is still only 15 years old – the daughter of local musician Bill Frizzell. But then, as anyone with a soul knows, teenage girls, from Lorde to Eilish, regularly make music that's far more engaging and inventive than that made by men with an adherence to rules and tradition and heritage. Keep kicking those walls down, starting with bedroom walls.

FRED UGLY

More bedroom-made electronic noise here from Fred Ugly, who previously bothered these pages back in the Noughties under a few different names as well as being one half of more recently defunct electro-rave-rap-punk duo Restructure. If Ruby Frizzell's songs are very simply constructed, Fred Ugly's are actively unconstructed, at least on first listen. These aren't so much tunes as abstract sound collages, fractured and near-random

collections of disembodied vocals, synth bubbles, glitch stuff and drones. And yet they're still far more fun and singalong than some of the supposedly melodic shite we get sent. Best of the four pieces here is 'Conquer Space' which, as the title suggests, conjures a mood of a far future spacecraft operated by AI and cyborgs. You could even dance to 'I Have Failed You Comrades', a sort of fractured subterranean rave banger that might be an Aphex Twin side project dismantling of an old Front 242 track, while elsewhere there's future factory clang and whirr on 'My Skin Is Hot'. The more you immerse yourself in this, the more structure you hear in it – deep, deep within, and before you quite know it, you're lost inside a world within a world within a Christopher Nolan film and then you wake up and it's a thousand years into the future, this music is Number 1 in the charts and the world is populated entirely by Cybermen.

A LAKE OF AYES

Of course, sometimes you do just want to bathe in the vast, all-consuming storm of the massed ranks of noisy bastard guitars, and A Lake Of Ayes are here to fulfil that particular desire, a thunderous monolith of post-rock that might lean rather heavily on Mogwai's heaviest shoulder but comes possessed with its own gravitational force and a sense of purpose that would shame an onward march of Sontaron soldiers. While the build and release dynamic doesn't stray too far from the blueprint across these five expansive tracks, the band do charge – with suitably forceful majesty – into post-metal territory, taking them closer to Deafheaven's 'Sunbather'-era noise cascades. That they have a track called 'Attack Ships on Fire' tells you much of what you need to know about A Lake of Ayes. That it would make a bloody good soundtrack to footage of attack ships on fire tells you the rest. Remember what we were saying about men in bands following rules? Yeah well, sometimes those rules are pretty bloody great and deserve to be followed. A Lake of Ayes are immense and deserve to break your speakers because you're playing them so damn loud. We need to see them live and dangerously up close very, very soon.

BEN OSBORN

Ben Osborn's press release suggests his new song, 'The Fire', is about the feelings of dread brought on by the start of Covid but on the strength of the song, it sounds like he's rather relaxed about the whole affair. Ben – who previously played in the excellent Where I'm Calling From – last came past this way with a slightly abstract brace of songs which found him injecting distracting found sounds into his taut

tunes but this new offering sticks to the melodic task in hand, piano and violin and unobtrusive electronics backing his tender, reflective vocals. The violin does add a modicum of tension to the piece, but overall 'The Fire' seems quite at peace with the pandemic, a hushed, poetic sliver of chamber pop cake that carries the air of a doomed, slightly doleful aristocratic dandy locked up in his country pile, finishing his musical masterpiece as the plague gathers at the gates. Rather than reflect any kind of horror, 'The Fire' makes the idea of looming mass mortality and societal collapse seem rather lovely and romantic.

THE LUNAR KEYS

The Lunar Keys' new song, 'Stop This', is being released to raise money for the Nordoff Robbins trust, which uses music therapy to help those with life limiting illness, disabilities or mental health issues, so we'll look a right bunch of sods if we say anything bad about it. Not that there really is much bad to throw in its general direction. This is a perfectly passable and pleasant three-and-a-bit-minutes of lightweight indie rock that, deep down, wants to be a One Direction hit. It's got a bit of a rousing chorus and some rocking out bits that don't rock out too hard or fast, and while the band state it's about their darker feelings, it doesn't really have much darkness about it. Or any particularly bright light either. It's nice. You can sing along to it. It's for a good cause. Well done everyone involved.

NEMO SPARDING

Opening with a sort of intro track that sounds like someone humming tunelessly to themselves through a crackly transistor radio, Nemo Sparding's offering resolves into some sparse acoustic guitar plucking and a cracked croak of a voice that makes it sound like the song in hand dropped dead in the process of coming out of the speakers. Help is at hand though in the form of guest singer June Linde's breathlessly over-emoting voice, which revitalises things slightly, at least for the brief moments before you realise it sounds like the soundtrack to a particularly mawkish John Lewis Christmas advert. But no sooner have you settled into a reverie of heartwarming alien snowmen, cute kids and happiness-through-consumerism, croaky bloke is back and together the pair sound like the soundtrack to a particularly mawkish John Lewis advert that has slumped onto your doorstep and died while delivering a festive gift of, we dunno, florally fragrant bath bombs or something. There's more but things don't really improve much. In fact there's a rap interlude at one point, which we'll spare

you the details of. It's almost Christmas after all and we've had enough misery this year already.

HOT JUICE

Somewhere back in the mists of time back at the top of the page we were talking about musicians unconfined by rules, regulations, traditions and ideas of rock heritage. But here are Hot Juice, who adhere to rules and regulations that seem now to come from even mistier mists of time. With a name that makes them sound like a lost 1970s Top Of The Pops dance troupe or a forgotten Spinal Tap b-side, Hot Juice play chest-bearing, crotch-grabbing rockabogie that might just about have passed muster playing first for Aerosmith back in the mid 80s but mostly smell of damp bandanas, muscle vests and tight leather trousers. This track here, 'What You Gunna Do Now', sounds like Lenny Kravitz's 'Are You Gonna Go My Way' without the funk or swagger, but with extra grunty rock effort and excess. Still, it's better than the track that comes on after called 'Psychopath', which sounds like The Red Hot Chili Peppers trying and failing to have a poo after eating nothing but boiled eggs for a week.

TOILET TRACK

GARIENT

Ah, Garient! Our old friend! It must be a good three years since *Nightshift* was treated to your classic rock balladry, dripping with over-sentimentality and over-enunciation. Perhaps stung by our previous criticism of such things, Garient this time round serves us up a song, 'Finding Light', that has a single line of lyric, "In my life, I will find the light", albeit a line repeated throughout the song, a twinkling, tinkling piano ballad with added electronic cello for extra gravitas and, y'know, emotion and stuff. Shorn of any context (ie. knowledge of his past musical crimes) we could almost take this as some kind of strange electronic music/art project that confronts the idea of a song stripped entirely of humanity or creativity and music's war with and love of monotony. But we don't think this is that deep really, and as it tinkles and twinkles but mainly plods along, with that one repeated line the lone and lonely lyric, it feels more like a depressed and malfunctioning android chanting a motivational quote to itself in the rain while it waits for the recycling lorry to come along and take it to the tip. So, a bit like Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara & the Sun* but without the poetic melancholy or meditation of what constitutes humanity or, well, any redeeming features whatsoever.

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