

NIGHTSHIFT

Oxford's Music Magazine

Free every
month
Issue 304
February
2022

photo: Siobhan Cox

"Being alone when I write is nothing new. I love being alone; it appeals to my more introverted side."

Julia-Sophie

Heartbreak, emotional honesty and going it alone with Oxford's electro Queen.

Also in this issue:

DESERT STORM turn it up to 15

Introducing **MILA TODD**

At work with **HELEN MESSENGER**

plus

All your Oxfordshire music news, previews, reviews and gigs for February

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THE BULLINGDON

FEBRUARY 2022

GIG & CLUB LISTINGS

Friday 26th January
Sukh Ojla: Life Sukhs

Doors: 7PM

Friday 26th January

Drink and Jive

Doors: 11PM

Saturday 26th January

Rawid

Harriet Jackson

Jam Thieves

Jappa

Juiceman

Doors: 11PM

Wednesday 2nd February

Fishco

Doors: 9PM

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

Sunday 6th February

Garfunkel

Sugarrush

Sisters of Funk

Doors: 7PM

Tuesday 8th February

Saturn Returns

With Caggie

Noura Bourni

Doors: 7PM

Thursday 10th February

Jack Hutchinson

Doors: 7PM

Friday 11th February

Ulysses Wells

Doors: 7PM

Friday 11th February

Soul Sista

The Bullingdon Boogie

Doors: 11PM

Saturday 12th February

Reggaeton Party

Doors: 11PM

Sunday 13th February

A Few Too Many

Youth Illusion

Bad & Bully

Doors: 7PM

Monday 14th February

Sisters of Funk

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

HAU5 Party

Volume 1

Doors: 11PM

Saturday 19th February

Musical Medicine

Jamie 3:26

Doors: 11PM

Tuesday 22nd February

Jamali Maddix

Doors: 7PM

Wednesday 23rd February

Mad Dogs & Maddox

Feat. Leburn

Doors: 7PM

Friday 25th February

The Now

Concord Drive

Haig

The Foliants

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

Sunday 6th March

Trash Boat

Doors: 7PM

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

Saturday 12th March

Musical Medicine

Crazy P (DJ)

Doors: 11PM

Tuesday 15th March

Aurie Stylo: Green

Doors: 7PM

Thursday 17th March

Dream Wife

Doors: 7PM

Friday 18th March

Soft Machine

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

The Skinner Brothers

Teef

Rolla

Doors: 7PM

Thursday 31st March

Rosalie Cunningham

Doors: 7PM

Friday 1st April

Sean Walsh:

Back from the Bed

Doors: 7PM

Friday 1st April

HAU5 Party

Volume 2

Doors: 11PM

Tuesday 5th April

Danny George Wilson

Doors: 7PM

Thursday 7th April

Police Dog Hogan

Doors: 7PM

Friday 8th April

Dreadzone

Doors: 7PM

Tuesday 12th April

Mike & the Moonpies

Doors: 7PM

Friday 15th April

Twist and Shout

60s Night

Doors: 11PM

Thursday 21st April

Nathan Caton:

Let's Talk About Vex

Doors: 7PM

Friday 22nd April

Mclusky

Doors: 7PM

Friday 22nd April

That 70s Club

Doors: 11PM

Monday 25th April

Bambara

Nuha Ruby Ra

Doors: 7PM

Wednesday 27th April

The Stevie Watts Trio

Doors: 11PM

Thursday 28th April

Make Emo Great Again

Doors: 11PM

Friday 29th April

Bootleg Blondie

Doors: 7PM

Friday 29th April

Tracksuit & Trance

The Euphoria

Doors: 11PM

Saturday 30th April

Simple

Mayday Party

Doors: 11PM

Sunday 1st May

Kristin Hersh

Doors: 7PM

Thursday 5th May

Bobby V

Doors: 7PM

Friday 6th May

Noasis

Doors: 7PM

Friday 6th May

Drum and Bass

Doors: 11PM

Saturday 7th May

Saved by the 90s

Doors: 11PM

Sunday 8th May

Whyte Horses

Doors: 7PM

Thursday 12th May

Stray

Vambo

Doors: 7PM

Saturday 14th May

Musical Medicine

Colleen 'Cosmo' Murphy

& Kirollus

Doors: 11PM

Saturday 14th May

Bob Vylan

Doors: 7PM

Friday 20th May

Keston Cobblers Club

Doors: 7PM

Saturday 21st May

Simple

Haai

Doors: 11PM

Wednesday 25th May

The Wave Pictures

Doors: 7PM

Saturday 7th May

Back to the 80s

Doors: 11PM

Wednesday 1st June

Musical Medicine

DJ Paulette

Doors: 11PM

Friday 3rd June

Skylarkin Soundsystem

David Rodigan

Doors: 11PM

NEWS

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email: editor@nightshiftmag.co.uk

Online: nightshiftmag.co.uk

HELLO AND WELCOME TO FEBRUARY'S NIGHTSHIFT.

Sadly, if predictably, much of January was a write-off as far as gigs were concerned with Covid once again causing many, if not most, shows to be postponed or cancelled. There is still obviously some way to go until a return to anything resembling normal, but hopefully February will be better and as we head towards spring, this wave of the virus will die down. The lesson for now though is to keep checking with venues, promoters and artists before heading out to gigs, follow Covid safety rules for venues and respect fellow gig goers and venue staff.

Keep supporting live music where you can and stay well, everyone.

SAFEHOUSE STUDIOS are looking for a new home after being given notice to quit. The building that hosts the studio on Cave Street is being redeveloped later this spring and Mike Bannard, who runs the studio, is searching for a new location.

The news comes just two months after Shonk Studios were forced out of their premises in Magadalen Road. Shonk have since relocated to Warehouse Studios in Kennington. Anyone who can help Mike in his search can get in touch at mike@safehousestudio.co.uk

SALVATION BILL releases a new EP this month. The singer-songwriter recently signed to Divine Schism's fledgling label, joining Lucy Leave and Canada's Slow Down, Molasses. 'Has Had It' is available on cassette and download via Bandcamp on the 18th February. Prior to that Salvation Bill supports experimental electronic artist Anmireal at Fusion Arts on Saturday 5th February. Order your copy at divineschism.bandcamp.com.

GRANT BALDWIN releases a 13-song album this month. 'Dungeon Songs 92-99' features tracks recorded through the 1990s at Dungeon Studios with the late, great Rich Haines and remastered by Martin Newton. Many of the songs are from releases previously reviewed in *Nightshift*, which often found Grant winning the Demo of the Month award for his, dark, dramatic chamber pop, inspired by Scott Walker. The album costs just £1 from grant5.bandcamp.com with all proceeds going to Cancer Research in memory of Rich Haines, and The British Heart Foundation in memory of guitarist Gary Simpson.

WEGOTTICKETS are recruiting for a full-time customer and client support agent. The locally based, ethical ticket agency are looking for a

music fan who can work with venues and gig-goers alike. Find out more and apply at www.wegottickets.com/jobs.wgt.

RIVERSIDE RHYTHMS on **Windrush Radio** has launched a new monthly live gig broadcast event to feature alongside their Tuesday night shows. Hosted by Fergus McVey, part of the team who organise Charlbury Riverside Festival and the Riverside stage at Combury Festival, Riverside Rhythms

A quiet word with

Julia-Sophie

photo: Siobhan Cox



“THERE’S A LOT IN A NAME.

It is our identity and a powerful thing. A name is a descriptor that forms part of our first judgments and assumptions about ourselves and others. It describes who we currently are.”

JULIA-SOPHIE IS TALKING

to *Nightshift* about her new music and her new identity, at least as far as the name she goes under is concerned.

The singer, musician, composer, producer, remixer and general musical polymath, is currently carving out an enviable reputation for herself with a succession of supremely inventive EPs under her birth name. In her previous band Candy Says she was known as Jules, and before that, helming Little Fish, she was Juju. Different bands, different music, different names. “Thinking about it now, my use of abbreviated names probably represented how I perceived myself in the world and how I wanted to be perceived by others at a particular time,” Julia continues. “I don’t think I felt that I could live up to my full birth name when I was younger and so ran away from it. Over the years I have changed, as has my music, and with that my identity has also changed. Part of becoming

a solo artist was that I wanted to finally express and accept my full sense of self and part of that meant embracing my name’s uniqueness and sitting in all the uncomfortable feelings that my name brought me. Changing identity is a fluid process and identities are moulded and changed by different circumstances, so who knows – in time I might use a different name again.”

ONE THING THAT HAS

never changed in all the years *Nightshift* has been following, and championing, Julia, is how great her music is. Little Fish, the duo she fronted with drummer Neil Greenaway, were all laceratingly raw rock anthems, Julia exorcising her demons by way of Patti Smith, The Velvet Underground and The Pretenders. Candy Says, a more nebulous ensemble formed with partner Ben Walker, were brighter, busier, often euphoric, and far poppier.

The music Julia is making now, solo and under her own name following Candy Says’ dissolution in 2019, is more introspective – all bubbling, densely layered electronics and skittering electronic beats alongside her sometimes almost ghostly vocals.

The thread that runs through all

those incarnations though is Julia’s often breathtakingly emotional honesty; her feelings are forever laid bare in her music. Her most recent songs, like ‘x0x’ from her solo debut EP ‘y’; ‘And You Know It’ from last year’s sublime ‘</3’, and ‘Dial Your Number’, her new single out this month ahead of an EP, ‘Feels Like Thunder’, deal with heartbreak, disconnection, loss and longing born of the trauma of marital breakdown. Glitchy and mechanical, they are also deeply, beautifully human: airy yet suffocating in a way that reflects the understated emotional turbulence at their heart. *Nightshift* described ‘And You Know It’ as a lullaby for heartbroken cyborgs – a description Julia isn’t entirely taken by.

“I don’t connect so much with lullabies or cyborgs but I do with the heartbroken. Lullabies to me are soft and soothing and I’m not quite there in my being. I always have a little edge. Cyborgs make me feel disconnected and devoid of emotion so I don’t feel connected with that either. Heartbroken: yes. My personal life over these last years has been quite the rollercoaster.”

JULIA’S SONGS HAVE

always been very emotionally open – half French, she’s previously

noded to her Gallic blood as a source of her musical and lyrical passion. Does she ever find herself hesitating about what she puts out there, or is complete honesty integral to the music?

“I think if you don’t have the confidence to be honest in your art, be it songwriting or whatever, then forget it, it doesn’t interest me. Music that makes me feel the most is honest music: when I feel it as authentic, then it touches me the most. I have struggled a lot emotionally these last years and I wanted to echo this in my writing, and hoped that by doing so, others could explore their own struggles and not feel so alone with them. My music has come from a dark place, from heartache, from pain, from frustration, aggravation, and that is sometimes what life is. Music helps me feel something deeper.”

Equally, there’s a feel to some tracks, like ‘CCTV’ off ‘</3’, that sound as if they’re reflecting the dehumanisation of the world we live in.

“Yes; I often feel like a messy imperfect human with too much feeling, trying to navigate this increasingly sterile dystopian world and totally want to reflect this in my music.”

There’s something of a Thom Yorke-meets-Laurie Anderson feel to that song.

“I enjoy Thom Yorke’s music very much and yes, his work has inspired me. There’s a part of me that always gets frustrated that it’s mostly male artists ever who get compared to him: James Blake, Muse, Midlake, Beirut, Alt-J, Bon Iver, Jon Hopkins, Ratatat, Four Tet. I know there are exceptions, such as Beth Gibbons, FKA Twigs and Bjork, but I guess there is a little part of me that is trying to tell the world ‘hey, women can work with beats too you know’.”

SOLO, SURROUNDED BY

her technology, is perhaps the best vehicle for Julia to untangle and expose the heartbreak that fuels her songs. It feels reflective, ruminative and exudes a beautiful form of loneliness. It sounds, in short, like perfect Covid isolation music.

“I think I’m still processing Covid. Brexit made me rethink my whole life purpose and identity. It vitalised me and jolted me out of a depressive stage; it inspired me to be political and fight. Covid

on the other hand has had the opposite effect. I feel that I’m slowly distancing myself from life, interactions and people. I feel the underlying constant stress and anxiety and the theme of death living with us daily. By being aware of this I find that I have to actively push myself to keep contact with people, stay upbeat and motivated.”

With Little Fish and Candy Says Julia had a musical foil alongside her; on a purely practical level, how different has it been writing, recording and performing solo? “I have always written the songs, so being alone and isolating myself when I write is nothing new. I actually love being alone; maybe it appeals to my more introverted side? There’s so much noise in the world that finding that time alone feels increasingly special.

“Recording alone has being interesting, as I have definitely felt myself going a little mad, endlessly questioning my decisions. Not having someone to bounce ideas off has sometimes been difficult. I now have a few trusted friends who I play things to and value their feedback, which feels helpful. With regard to performing solo, I have found it to be very rewarding, but also feel the burden of taking on all the responsibilities, risk and workload. At times it can be lonely.

Equally, is there a sense of liberation about having first and final say in all matters musical? “I think what I have found most liberating is being able to record songs that would never have worked as a band. I have always been a prolific writer and felt that I needed a more intimate and faster process to record songs that I knew would never be recorded otherwise. This expression has felt liberating; it wasn’t a new side, I had always written introverted music, but I had never recorded it. Being able to be myself as an individual, in a non-compromising way, has helped me find myself and breathe life back into my being. It has also been accompanied by a lightness: the freedom to move, hop, be flexible, dynamic, speedy, which feels a lot like me as a person.”

JULIA’S SOLO LIVE SHOWS

have been another step into the unknown for her, but onstage is always where she has thrived – her innate nervous energy a force of nature in itself, making her a relentlessly engaging performer. She remains animated onstage; is it hard to put in such an energised performance when she’s stood behind banks of synths, or does her natural exuberance and nervous energy take over?

“I think so. I find it very hard to

stand still but having said that, I think part of that is my anxiety taking control and me thinking that if I give ‘more’ of myself to the performance that it will compensate for my ‘not good enough’ underdog feeling. Maybe if I truly accepted myself I could be confident enough to stand still, be cool enough to just bop my head a little. I am always tempted to try this. Having said that, there is a part of me that has grown up to appreciate the importance of performance and performing is what I do and will always do. I enjoy it. Being on stage makes me feel free and that is important to me, so yes, I have no idea who I should and shouldn’t be on stage. I’ll just stick to being me, whatever that is, on the given day, in that given time and space.”

Someone once wrote that you can’t properly understand an artist until you’ve seen them play live; is that

compared to her earlier time touring and recording with Little Fish a decade and more ago?

“For some reason I played quite a few shows in Manchester. Manchester offered me my first headline shows as a solo artist, which seems wild. I only wish it had been my hometown. I haven’t had anything strange happen to me, although I have been pretty proud to have been asked to do remixes for Telemann and Art School Girlfriend along the way.

“I have managed to connect and resonate more as a solo artist with other female artists around the country, and at first glance you could see that as a reflection of a more balanced representation of women making their mark in the industry. When you look more closely however, beyond the likes of Billie Eilish and Olivia Rodrigo dominating the charts, women are

“When I perform I want people to fully feel the emotion, expression and physicality of my music”

something Julia would agree with?

“I love the immediacy music has when it is being performed and for me the additional facet of entertainment, that one maybe doesn’t need when recording, comes into play. When I perform I want to be as expressive and authentic as possible, and for me this certainly involves losing myself within the music. People relate to live music in different ways to recordings and feeling that connection with an audience heightens this experience. When I perform I want people to fully feel the emotion, expression and physicality of my music. I think that I do come into my own.”

WHILE JULIA’S MUSIC

has found her getting the critical acclaim beyond Oxford that she’s long been due, championed by the likes of 6Music’s Lauren Laverne, Bandcamp and the influential Quietus website, her live shows have taken her around the country when Covid restrictions have allowed – from Brighton and London to Manchester and beyond, and she has played alongside the likes of Haiku Salut; Art School Girlfriend; Lætitia Sadier; Stealing Sheep and Sink Ya Teeth. Does she feel she’s connecting to other artists more now than ever before? And does she feel the world has changed for the better for female musicians trying to make their mark, particularly with the availability and affordability of technology, and a growing awareness of how female musicians are treated now

compared to her earlier time touring and recording with Little Fish a decade and more ago?

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psychologically safe, who I trust wholeheartedly in their talents as well as their personal motives for working with me.”

With the new EP releases planned and a label behind you, is there a renewed sense of optimism about 2022?

“I don’t know. Over time, I have learned that we cannot predict what’s going to happen and so I just try to live day to day and in the moment. I don’t think about the future. I just think about what my day to day task is, what I am feeling in the here and now. Working with both Anna and my new manager is still embryonic, only time will tell me if this path was the right one. I do however have a little glister in my eye and I would like to add that I wouldn’t just work with anyone. I have been offered other things but have declined, so yeah, the fact that I accepted to work with them must mean that I am a little excited.”

IT’S GREAT TO HEAR

Julia excited, animated and optimistic for the future. If the background to her latest music is heartbreak and sadness, the music itself is some of the best she’s ever made – and that is saying something of an artist who stands alongside the very best Oxford has ever produced and who might, finally, be getting the dues she deserves.

Fair to say Julia has never been the most self-confident of people but, with all the attention she’s now getting, does she feel vindicated after working so hard for so long? “In some ways I do and in other ways I feel sad that it’s taken me so long. Most days, I still don’t feel like I have actually achieved much. I think about who from Oxford has made it and all I see, with the exception of Supergrass and Ride, is a long list of private school boys. I sometimes wonder what my life would have been like had I been male and privy to a different upbringing. I still find it amazing that no Oxford woman has made it to the level of fame that any of these men have and I think this says a lot about how the music industry still works and it’s something we should really question more.”

One thing Julia has over all those acts is the number of *Nightshift* front covers she’s had. This month’s makes six across her career – only Gaz Coombes in his various guises can equal her. Does she feel like an Oxford music treasure?

“I feel more like a rough cut diamond. I don’t think I know what people in Oxford think of me. It’s not something I go around asking.”

Hear Julia-Sophie at juliasophie.bandcamp.com

RELEASED

IOE AIE

‘Shells’

(DDC Music)

The band name looks like something your untrustworthy uncle would try to play in Scrabble – “But it’s the rutting call of the Kenyan ice otter!” – though it stands for It’s Only Ever Autumn In England. Climate scientists might refute this assertion, but it’s typical of the wry poetic chilliness of this new trio, featuring occasional Foals collaborator Kit Montieth. Their debut album, ‘Shells’, is an intoxicating collection of crepuscular techno tracks intertwined with sententiously intoned vocals, like an introspective, slightly paranoid Underworld.

Opener ‘Four Quarters’ sets the tone by coupling knotty, pun-laden lines with a misty version of a club banger, as if Faithless had been formed by Faber & Faber editors, with a hypnotic high-speed train rhythm only emphasising an air of hollow sadness (‘Trans-Europe Depressed’, anyone?). Elsewhere there is almost a whiff of oiled EBM leather to ‘Divide’, a soupy, late Orb digidub haze to ‘The Pacific’, and a dizzying synth build worthy of Luke Slater to the second half of ‘Autumn In England’, but perhaps ‘18’ will cause the biggest waves: a wryly mournful

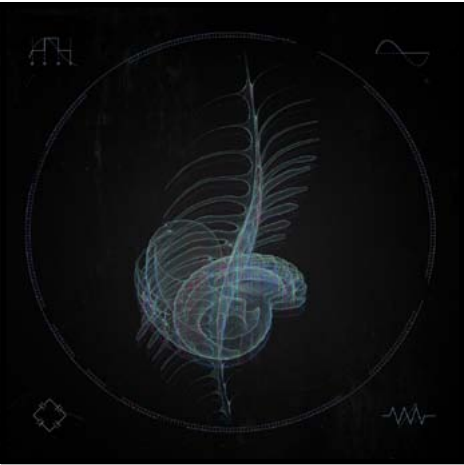


he didnt

‘Ascension’

(Self released)

A release that’s so far up my street it entered my house, made itself at home and doesn’t seem to be going anywhere fast. he didnt (with a lack of capitalisation and apostrophe that’s intentional, it seems) is a one-person act, with everything – guitars, bass, vocals and beats – played by the mysteriously-named NJ. The single-minded focus that can come from doing everything yourself results in ‘Ascension’ having incredibly tight, precise relationships between its (admirably few) musical moving parts. This is warm, emotional, close and slow-paced indie guitar rock, awash with minor keys, in the vein of what used to be called slowcore and in particular reminiscent of the 1990s heyday of NYC’s Codeine. Opener ‘King’ starts beautifully with a careful,



coming-of-age magic realist narrative delivered over a relentlessly snaking ostinato, like a rave comedown version of writer Kirk Lake’s experiments in sonic storytelling. The final track, ‘Cities & Memory’, proffers a funkier samba-like rhythm and global travelogue lyrics, but it’s not urbane windswept euphoria that will bring you back to this excellent album, but the melancholic mystery at its dark heart: dark autumn nights are eternal, and mellow fruitfulness is off the menu.

David Murphy

plaintive combination of guitar strum, bass notes and soft kick drums. It’s sparse, precise and crisp, making as much use of space as it does dynamics and contrast. Slow and sombre in tone, with distant, almost monotone vocals, it’s something like a stripped-down take on either early or late period Telescopes, side-stepping that band’s dalliance with Creation Records-endorsed psychedelia. When ‘King’ transforms the skeletal outline of the song’s opening, and brings in overdriven guitar washes, carefully-controlled feedback, and more rock-solo-esque guitar lines, it’s powerful. It’s repetitive and simplistic in the very best way: the simplicity is hard to spot, as the sound is so carefully crafted.

‘March of the Econowives’ has a questioning, call-and-response-like main melody, based around an odd set of notes and making good use of subtle guitar string bending. Slint would be proud of this otherworldly creation. ‘Trouble Every Day’ stretches beyond seven minutes, based around a more traditionally heartfelt melodic core. In the same way that Red House Painters often introduce a dark edge to their musical sweetness, this piece turns a corner, morphing into a slowly striding rhythm that counteracts the delicacy of the first section. As chanting is added to the layers of sound, it becomes an almost magical invocation of a song. ‘Ascension’ is a palette cleanser, albeit it one that arrives at the end. Sub-two minutes, it revisits the initial sweetness of ‘Trouble Every Day’, with sparse, reverbed melodies and almost playful, albeit precise, notes dropped into the atmosphere. A 10-second fade leads to the perfect ending for this EP. Everything here shares a specific soundworld, but each song has its own personality. I’d happily listen to hours of this stuff.

Simon Minter

Sponsored by



CASSELS

‘A Gut Feeling’

(God Unknown)

There’s a strong history of raucous two-person bands. One relentless drummer and guitar bathed in distortion and often-as-not some effects to fill in the bass frequencies – it can be a winning formula. While there are some clear reference points to bands like Death From Above 1979 or JOHN, what is more exciting is what has always separated Cassels from their like-minded brethren.

The brothers Beck have long carved themselves out a more cerebral and observational corner of the Big Scary Monsters-and-friends punk scene. Case in point, opening track ‘Your Humble Narrator’ moves from a blast of super-jagged guitar, to robotic rhythmic loops that sound like Battles and then on to sprechgesang vocals with the sly and wry lyricism and delivery of Scroobius Pip, all spread over the course of eight minutes. Not your typical two-man punk affair at all.

‘Mr Henderson Coughs’ – the tale of a school teacher succumbing to cancer – starts with just loping bass and off-kilter drums but builds and layers almost imperceptibly until the final burst of riffs is a wall of distortion. There’s nothing extraneous in these arrangements; when the journey needs apocalyptic ferocity the guitars are there to knock you over, but equally if bleak sensitivity and minimal instrumentation are what’s called for, that’s what you get. That sense of restraint and purpose really does raise this, the Chipping Norton born’n’raised pair’s third album, to a higher level.

Many of the angular guitar stabs evoke early Biffy Clyro, and there are even moments of the Scots’ melodic triumphs or down-tempo sensitivities too, but the core of ‘A Gut Feeling’ is stop-start pile-driving riffs and social commentary, mostly through the lens of characters trapped in the modern rat-race, and frankly it’s bloody brilliant.

Is this punk music? I think so, as much as that can mean anything in 2022. It’s punk for your (virtual) commute as much as it is for a sweaty club gig. Punk for the young and angry as much as it is for those whose hair lines are retreating but still have a weekend wardrobe full of band tees.

Matt Chapman Jones



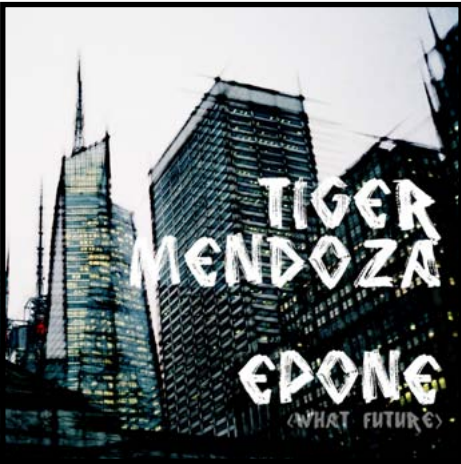
MILA TODD

‘Pepper’

(Self-released)

Mila Todd is the singer in Ciphers, though this EP is a world away from the rock leanings of that outfit. She wrote these three songs during lockdown, partly as a reaction to her adopting an orphaned magpie that sadly didn’t make it through the experience.

Things get off to a less than promising start; ‘Wildstar’ meanders around without finding its feet, from spacey electronica with light beats into dubstep territory, sprinkled with ethereal vocals. Towards the end it starts to toughen up with some more complex melodic lines, but then it’s all over. ‘Biscuits’ starts piano-led and beatless, before the sound of a lighter being flicked signals a move into a dub direction, though crisply digital. But then it’s all change



TIGER MENDOZA

‘Epone’

(Self released)

‘Epone’ is the first of three EP releases due from Tiger Mendoza over the next few months. The timing is fortuitous; this is – or will soon be – the Year of the Tiger, so omens are good for Ian de Quadros. We have been waiting for this kind of hefty old skool TM drop for a while and this goes back to the roots inna ‘Lovesick Vandal’ stylee. ‘The Getaway’ is pleasingly threatening: all heavy kicks and distorted keys, best enjoyed on a system with a heavy sub, as, of course, are most things.

An ambient bridge gives way again to the pounding riff, and ends leaving us wanting more. ‘Ghost Step’’s glacial synth opening gives way to dubsteppy drums and punishing hi hat riddims. ‘Resting Wish’ is the standout track: 90s-style euphoric dance keys and a pleasing jungle beat. ‘Not A Comedian’ is a critical appraisal of the Trump presidency and parental discretion is advised for the sample from Marc Marron’s WTF podcast. Closer ‘Arpex’ has a sublime arpeggiated riff, and is the most ambient of the offerings, despite its fiercely skittering beats.

According to Ian, each EP represents a different emotional state experienced over the course of the last year. As inspirations, Mendoza lists The Chemical Brothers, Burial and David Holmes. However, we detect the perennial influence of DJ Shadow (check out his majestic remix of Shadow’s ‘Blood on the Motorway’). Tiger



again into a light techno section with some some slowed down vocals referencing Neil Armstrong’s moon landing speech. ‘Chatter’

Mendoza has clearly been a busy boy during the lockdowns with his diverse mixtape ‘TMSK8’; Isolation Wave DJ live streams; his audio production workshop videos and these EPs, and fair to say this tiger is burning bright.

Leo Bowder

SPANK HAIR

‘Just Like Me’

(Self released)

The rise, fall, resurrection and continuing endurance of emo is one of music’s great survival stories. It might not have the widespread commercial popularity of the early Noughties these days but it endures in underground strongholds with retro club nights keeping the faith alongside waves of new bands. And through all that it’s never changed a huge amount; Spank Hair’s new four-song EP could as easily have been released in 2002 as this month.

The band, made up of members of Daisy, Holy Moments and more, adhere to a simple but mostly effective formula of delicate, almost mathsy spangle coupled with outbursts of anthemic noise.

Luke Allmond’s transatlantic vocals over a melodic flood of fuzz immediately pitch the band close to the likes of Modern Baseball and Hawthorn Heights. The cohesion and power they’ve developed since their ramshackle 2018 debut is as impressive as it is welcome: they’re hardly pushing the boat out stylistically but the hull is now watertight, the boat no longer rudderless. This is uncomplicated and purposeful.

Best of the four songs here is ‘Claws’, not just because *Nightshift* will always approve of love songs to cats (“You make my nose run / You make my skin sore” and “I miss that when you lie across my keyboard” among the choice, easily relatable lyrics), but also because it has that feline mix of slinkiness and warm, cute aggression. ‘Tony Hawk’, meanwhile, pays homage to the veteran skateboarder with tip toes and hammer blows, while ‘Walk You Home’ is more wistful and perhaps a bit too lovelorn but still capable of landing a noisy punch when needed.

Ian Chesterton

provides a resolution: a driving, punchy beat signals ominous bass noises with more vocals that don’t really constitute conventional singing but somehow work. Rich keyboard lines are overlaid, complementing each other very nicely in a manner reminiscent of early Giorgio Moroder, making it the closest we get to an actual song. We could do with more of this, and suggests some potential re-edit or remix work.

This release is clearly not intended for the dancefloor, but you couldn’t really call it ambient, partly because it’s too unsettling, even sinister. The issue with digital electronic music is that you are literally bound only by your imagination: you can create sounds that even a decade ago were outside the realm of the possible. Music like this runs the risk of facing into the void without a constituency, but the sparks of brilliance show that there’s good reason to keep Mila under review.

Art Lagun

OLD ERNIE

‘Chrysalis Like Me’

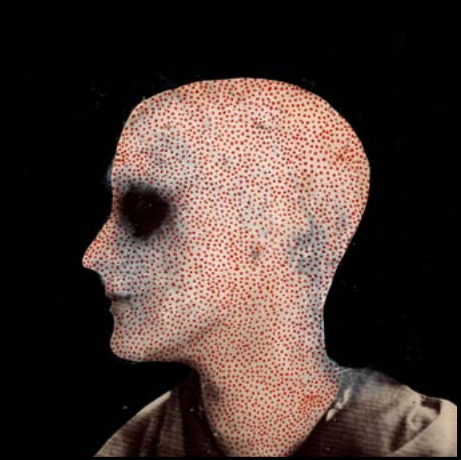
(Self released)

The follow-up to his excellent, off-kilter 2019 album ‘Flowers For Hardcastle’, ‘Chrysalis Like Me’ finds David Kahl and myriad guests continuing his skewed journey through post-grunge rock with slightly more mixed results. There’s nothing here that’s substandard as such but at well over an hour, a handful of the 13 tracks on the album feel like they could be jettisoned without losing too much – and even gain something with a more succinct approach.

The best stuff remains excellent though, from the opening gothic folk lament of ‘Honey’ that becomes an almost hysterical mantra with Kahl’s wracked vocal performance wonderfully offset by Gemma Moss’ witchy back vocals. Gemma’s voice makes even more of an impact on ‘Ice Hole Atrium’, adding a ghostly feel to the huskily plaintive slow march. Elsewhere the stately piano march of ‘Reichel’ continues to bring the darkness and Kahl shows he can pile on the portent even while playing a more gentle bat on ‘Minute’.

From its mid-point though, there’s a feeling the album is losing its focus – the simmering rage remains but it has nowhere certain to go. The Mighty Redox’s Phil Freizinger adds some lilting flute and Sue Smith joins in on vocals, theremin and singing bowl but tracks like ‘Birch’ and ‘Byes’ add little to the previously imposing mood and it’s left to last song ‘Edith’s Weeping’ to recapture that bitter magic.

Sue Foreman



G1G GUIDE

TUESDAY 1st
JOHN FRANCIS FLYNN + CLARA MANN
+ **ERIN SNAPE: Fusion Arts** – Dublin singer, guitarist and flautist JFF – stalwart of Skipper’s Alley – tours his debut solo album ‘I Would

Friday 4th
ANDY BELL SPACE STATION: The Jericho Tavern

A bona fide Oxford music legend, one of the finest indie guitarists of the past 30-plus years and a lovely bloke into the bargain: it’s going to be a real treat to see Andy Bell playing live in the venue where his musical career began with Ride back in 1989. With Ride Andy put Oxford music on the world map and helped inspire generations of noisemakers. Subsequent to their split in 1996 he formed Hurricane #1 before joining Oasis and then Beady Eye before a Ride reunion brought things full circle. Additionally he’s continued to make his own solo music – 2020’s ‘The View From Halfway Down’ was very much in the spirit of Ride while last year’s Glok album saw him explore his love of electronic music, and he already has another solo album, ‘Flicker’, set to go. Space Station came about during lockdown when Andy began live streaming from an empty coffee shop near his North London home, expanding and experimenting with his material – improvising, extending and deconstructing his solo works on guitar. Those streams earned him a support slot with Stereolab and now he’s touring in support of Independent Venue Week. A modern day guitar master and an Oxford hero back in the venue that launched him. Bring that noise.



FEBRUARY

Not Live Always’ at tonight’s Divine Schism show, mixing trad with tape loops as he creates gloriously dark and hypnotic yet warmly rustic folk songs – spiritual kin to neighbours Lankum who he supported previously. An opening set from recent *Nightshift* cover stars Erin Snape. **JOHNNY PAYNE & THE THUNDER** + **DAZE: Part & Parcel, Witney** – Indie-Americana from local stalwart Johnny Payne and his band at tonight’s Riverside Rhythms’ Live Music Tuesday show for Windrush Radio.

WEDNESDAY 2nd
OPEN MIC NIGHT: The Old Anchor, Abingdon – Open night hosted by Andy Robbins.

THURSDAY 3rd
THE ELO EXPERIENCE: The New Theatre – Tribute to Jeff Lynne and the gang.
SUBJECT TO CHANGE: The Jericho Tavern – It’s All About the Music show with Thame newcomers Subject To Change.
ISIS CITY ROCKERS: Isis Farmhouse, Iffley Lock – Weekly covers night with a band made up of members of The Deadbeat Apostles, Ragged Charms and Beard of Destiny, plying r’n’b, punk, rock’n’roll, blues and soul classics and obscurities.
THE SHAPES: Thame Snooker Club – The First Thursday Music Club welcomes the local r’n’b, new wave, punk and folk stars to Thame.
DALBY’S OPEN MIC: The Fox Inn, Steventon – Weekly open night.

FRIDAY 4th
ANDY BELL SPACE STATION + APHRA TAYLOR: The Jericho Tavern – Ride man Andy takes solo flight – *see main preview*
JAMES TAYLOR QUARTET: The Bullingdon – 35 years on and the Hammond maestro and his band continue to bring the funk, jazz and rare groove, having helped pioneer and then outlived acid jazz, incorporating psychedelia, hip hop and 60s film score vibes into their enduringly electric live shows.
LLOYD COLE: St. John the Evangelist – Already sold-out, rearranged show from the Commotions singer, whose enduring career has seen him go from 80s pop pin-up to cult hero and elder statesman, tonight playing songs from his recent ‘Guesswork’ album as well as classics from his career, including ‘Perfect Skin’, ‘Lost Weekend’ and ‘Are You Ready To Be Heartbroken’.
DRUM&BASS: The Bullingdon – Club night.
MOONAROON: Harcourt Arms – Traditional Irish dances and songs from the local duo.

KLUB KAKOFANNEY: The Gladiator Club – After last month’s Covid-forced postponement, Klub Kak kick off their 2022 with indie swashbucklers Peerless Pirates, dark-edged folkies Firegazer, and psychedelic jangle pop dreamers Charms Against the Evil Eye.
LUCILLE & THE LIGHTNING SOUL TRAIN: Fat Lil’s, Witney – Classic funk, soul and disco covers.

SATURDAY 5th
BOB MOULD + KATIE MALCO: O2 Academy – The Husker Du and Sugar legend brings his unique noise – *see main preview*
KURUPT FM: O2 Academy – Brentford’s ill-starred UK garage massive bring their west London pirate sounds to Oxford for a greatest hits show, MC Grindah, and DJs Beats and Steves and gang forever attempting to match ability to ambition.
ANRIMEAL + SALVATION BILL + RICHARD LEWIS: Fusion Arts – Wonderfully surreal tech-pop from London-based Portuguese singer, musician and composer Ana Rita de Melo Alves, making her Oxford debut tonight as guest of Divine Schism, Ana mixing minimalist electronics, repetition, odd samples and found sounds – from bird song to coffee percolators – to make for a glitchy, poetic ambience that shares space with Julia Holter, FKA Twigs and Caroline Polachek. Great support from long-time local favourite Salvation Bill.
SIMPLE ft. JOB JOBRE: The Bullingdon – House and techno club night, tonight featuring Amsterdam DJ Jon Jobre, who made his name at the city’s renowned Trouw night.
HIPSHAKIN’: Harcourt Arms – 50s and 60s rhythm’n’blues, rock’n’roll, jump jive, jazz, boogaloo and early soul.
BOB NESTA MARLEY EARTHDAY SALUTATIONS: Cowley Social Centre – Reggae extravaganza in celebration of the late, great Mr Marley, with Wayne McArthur & The Universal Players, Esther McArthur and Dennis Emanuel.
HEAD OF TWO DOGS: Fat Lil’s, Witney – Status Quo tribute.

SUNDAY 6th
GARFUNKEL + SUGAR RUSH + SISTERS OF FUNK: The Bullingdon – Funk and soul classics from Oxford University covers band Garfunkel.
LANGKAMER + PREMIUM LEISURE + JOELY: Jericho Tavern – Country-fuelled rock’n’roll from Langhamer, touring their recent ‘West Country’ album with support from Chris Barker’s psychedelic 60s and 70s-inspired rockers Premium Leisure, plus emotive acoustic pop from Joely.
OPEN MIC NIGHT: The Harcourt Arms – Weekly open night.

IRISH FOLK NIGHT: The Half Moon – Weekly folk session.
OPEN MIC: James Street Tavern (2.30pm) – Weekly open session.
HIPPY HAZE: Old Anchor, Abingdon (4pm) – 60s Flower Power classics.

MONDAY 7th
STEVE KNIGHTLEY: Nettlebed Folk Club – Solo show from the Show of Hands man.

TUESDAY 8th
WEDNESDAY 9th
SEAN MCCONNELL: The Jericho Tavern – Plaintive, introspective folk roots and Americana from the Nashville singer-songwriter at tonight’s Empty Room show, McConnell touring his new album ‘Secondhand Folk – his 13th – having written hits for an array of country, rock and pop stars, from Meatloaf and Christina Aguilera, to Tim McGraw, Jake Owen and Martina McBride.

Saturday 5th
BOB MOULD: O2 Academy
One of the most distinctive voices in alternative music, and one of the most influential musicians of the past few decades, Bob Mould’s place in rock’s firmament is assured, even if he remains below the radar of glossy Hall of Fame ceremonies. With Husker Du he helped break the mould of American rock music, providing the bridge between punk and what became American alternative, indie and college rock, inspiring everyone from Pixies to Nirvana as well as releasing one of the greatest albums of all time in ‘Zen Arcade’. From there Mould formed Sugar, whose ‘Copper Blue’ remains one of the 90s finest records as well as his biggest selling album to date. Since 1996 when Sugar split, Mould’s career and life has gone an ever more eclectic journey, from working in wrestling scriptwriting to exploring electronic music, dance and remixing, DJing and becoming both a gay icon and advocate for gay rights and marriage. His most recent musical output was 2020’s ‘Blue Hearts’, something of a return to the harder guitar sounds of Husker Du – short, sharp bursts of noise with that trademark melodic heart. His influence is everywhere but no one sounds like Bob Mould and this visit to the O2 – upstairs too as an extra bonus – is something to treasure.



808 SWAMP + LUCY MEHTA: The Bullingdon – Laidback funk and rap from local newcomers 808 Swamp at tonight’s It’s All About the Music showcase.
PROGRESSION: The Bullingdon

THURSDAY 10th
JACK J HUTCHINSON: The Bullingdon – Heavyweight blues rocking with the emphasis on rocking from the British guitarist, touring his new ‘Hammer Falls’ album and bridging the gap between The Allman Brothers and Lynyrd Skynyrd, and Deep Purple and Black Sabbath.
MEANS OF PRODUCTION: The Jericho Tavern – Austere, acid house-tinged post-punk and synth-pop in the vein of Cabaret Voltaire, Human League, Felix Da Housecat and Chromatics from the recent *Nightshift* cover stars.
ISIS CITY ROCKERS: Isis Farmhouse, Iffley Lock
DALBY’S OPEN MIC: The Fox Inn, Steventon
JAM NIGHT: Old Anchor, Abingdon

FRIDAY 11th
SOUL SISTA: The Bullingdon – Classic funk, soul and disco tunes.
THE NIGHT CAFE + SUNSHIP BALLROOM + ON VIDEO: O2 Academy – Exuberantly funky indie jangle from Liverpool’s fast-rising youngsters, back in town for another sold-out gig after their show here in 2019 and touring their debut album ‘0151’.
CASSELS + UNMAN + DREAM PHONE: Florence Park Community Centre – A homecoming show for Chipping Norton brothers Loz and Jim Beck, touring their third album ‘A Gut Feeling’, continuing to mix poetic ire with sharp-bladed punk and post-hardcore noise. Serious ear-destroying fun from electro-jazz-noise-rock improv crew Unman and riotous punk rock from Dream Phone in support.
FAUX FIGHTERS: Fat Lil’s, Witney – Tribute night.

SATURDAY 12th
DOUGLAS DARE + AFTER THE THOUGHT: Fusion Arts –Dorset-via-London chamber-pop singer and musician Douglas Dare, tours his third album ‘Milk Teeth’ – recorded in Margate with Tunng founder and Laura Marling collaborator Mike Lindsay, more stripped back than his previous outings as he explores memory, family, childhood loneliness, and identity. Atmospheric shoegaze and post-rock instrumental noise from ATT.
REGGAETON PARTY: The Bullingdon – Club night.
HIPBONE SLIM & THE VALENTINOS: Harcourt Arms – Valentine’s Day garage rock, r’n’b, rock’n’roll and 60s beat.
FALLEN ANGELS: Fat Lil’s, Witney – Rock and pop covers.

SUNDAY 13th
A FEW TOO MANY + YOUTH ILLUSION + DAS GHOU: The Bullingdon – Dancingman presents Green Day/Blink 182-influenced pop-punkers A Few Too Many alongside London rockers Youth Illusion, and gothic psych-horror-



Tuesday 15th
RUTH GOLLER’S SKYLLA: Holywell Music Room

Ruth Goller’s footprint in the British jazz renaissance is so deep it’s almost incomprehensible that ‘Skylla’ is her debut solo recording. A member of Acoustic Ladyland and the superb Melt Yourself Down, Goller is widely regarded as one of the finest bass players in modern music, playing with everyone from Paul McCartney to Shabaka Hutchings, while finding time to work with Oxford luminaries Pecq and Ally Craig (as part of Bug Prentice). Not bad for a self-taught musician who started off playing in a punk band. Maybe it’s being so in-demand that’s meant her own solo work has taken this long to happen but with ‘Skylla’ – released last summer – she proved she’s as much a leader as a sidekick, the album, based on Greek mythology, simultaneously playful and disconcerting, free-flowing yet tightly reined. Unsurprisingly it’s a bass-led record but the glossolalia vocals – Goller joined here by Lauren Kinsella and Alice Grant – are what gives it its strange, almost supernatural vibe. It feels almost like it could be a soundtrack album to some seriously weird sci-fi movie, much like Mica Levi’s score for *Under the Skin*. Tonally light but intense, it’s music well suited to the rarefied setting of the Holywell.

popsters Das Ghou.
OPEN MIC NIGHT: The Harcourt Arms
IRISH FOLK NIGHT: The Half Moon
THE MIGHTY REDOX: The Tree, Iffley (3.30-6.30pm) – Funk-blues-psych-ska-folk-rock fusion fun from the local stalwarts.
OPEN MIC: James Street Tavern (2.30pm)
OCK STREET BAND: Old Anchor, Abingdon (4pm)
RAG’N’MOAN MEN: The Brewery Tap, Abingdon (5pm) – Blues, folk and Americana.

MONDAY 14th
SISTERS OF FUNK: The Bullingdon – Classic funk and soul from Oxford’s expansive all-female funk ensemble.
FEAST OF FIDDLES & PIG: Nettlebed Folk Club – A special set from the fiddle ensemble, featuring the original line-up of the band, including Simon Swarbrick, plus backing band Pig playing their own set.

TUESDAY 15th
BASTILLE: O2 Academy – Truck Store

host electro-pop crew Bastille for one of just two intimate shows this month as they launch their ‘Give Me the Future’ album, with ticket’n’album bundles available.
RUTH GOLLER’S SKYLLA: Holywell Music Room – The jazz bass maestro goes solo – *see main preview*

WEDNESDAY 16th
SHE DREW THE GUN: O2 Academy – Revolution popstyle from Louisa Roach and the gang, touring new album ‘Behave Myself’ – *see main preview*
BENJAMIN FRANCIS LEFTWICH: The Bullingdon – Wistful melancholy and a heart full of yearning from York’s romantic poet troubadour, back in town for the first time since his show in 2016, this time round touring last year’s ‘To Carry a Whale’ album, offering raw reflections on his alcoholism and recovery with his trademark quavering vocals and sombre, understated, yet optimistic pop.
HOME COUNTIES: The Jericho Tavern

Wednesday 16th
SHE DREW THE GUN: O2 Academy
When the world is heading inexorably towards the abyss and our supposed leaders simply cry “Tally ho!” while lining their pockets, it’s a warm welcome back to town for Louisa Roach, who we’ve previously suggested would make a far better prime minister than anyone else on offer. A casually charismatic frontwoman, Roach sparkles on stage, mixing poems-cum-rants about the destruction of the NHS with barbed songs about homelessness, zero hours contracts and wealth inequality with a soundtrack of a summery psychedelic surf shimmer, proving that politicised music doesn’t have to be loud, fast and angry; it can be bubblegum fun and sunshine light done right, and her band She Drew the Gun definitely do it right. It’s this weird juxtaposition of words and music that makes the band so enthralling. Roach’s rich Wirral accent lends everything she sings a slightly laconic edge and her band’s spacey, melodic, grunge-tinged synthy surf-pop is an easy joy, so the simmering rage and disgust that oozes from her lyrics almost sounds like a sunbeam love song. ‘Behave Myself’, the title of her latest album, might sound like a note-to-self to tone down the ire but it’s very much the opposite: spiky pop with a soft yet strong heart and wearing steel-capped boots remains the order of the day until Louisa Roach’s place in Number 10 is finally confirmed and the world can start to mend.



– A homecoming of sorts for the former Oxford crew, relocated to Bristol, and recently working with Alcopop! touring their new, self-titled single, with a warped, funky take on post-punk.
FUZZY LIGHTS + GREEN HANDS + MORNING’S THIEF: The Library – Cambridge’s recently revitalised psych-folk crew bring some epic darkness at tonight’s Divine Schism show – *see main preview*

THURSDAY 17th
THE PINK DIAMOND REVUE: The Jericho Tavern – Brilliant, acid-fuelled electro-surf from Reading’s hypnotic duo.
STEPH PIRRIE JAZZ QUARTET: Harcourt Arms – Live jazz from the singer and trumpeter and her band.
SO FETCH: The Bullingdon – Noughties retro club night.
ISIS CITY ROCKERS: Isis Farmhouse, Iffley Lock
DALBY’S OPEN MIC: The Fox Inn, Steventon

FRIDAY 18th
HAU5 PARTY: The Bullingdon – Techno, house and disco club night.
KAVIANI: Fat Lil’s, Witney – Rock from the Joe Lynn Turner and Ricky Warwick tour guitarist.
ANDY ROBBINS: Old Anchor, Abingdon

SATURDAY 19th
MUSICAL MEDICINE ft. JAMIE 3:26: The Bullingdon – Monthly party night with Chicago house selector Jamie 3:26.
GENTLEMEN’S CLUB + MOZEY + HAMDI + BURT COPE: O2 Academy – Switch host Gentlemen’s Club’s Oxford debut alongside the cream of local DJs.
APPIN ON SAX: Harcourt Arms

SUNDAY 20th
OPEN MIC NIGHT: The Harcourt Arms
IRISH FOLK NIGHT: The Half Moon
OPEN MIC: James Street Tavern (2.30pm)
CHASING DEER: Old Anchor, Abingdon (4pm)

MONDAY 21st
SNAPPED ANKLES: O2 Academy – There’s something in those trees! It’s Snapped Ankles! – *see main preview*

TUESDAY 22nd
TOM ODELL + SAM RYDER + ETTA MARCUS: O2 Academy – Dear little Tommy’s new album is called ‘Monsters’. Is it too much to hope one of them gobbles him up before he makes it to Oxford?
KANADIA: The Jericho Tavern - Stadium-sized rock in the vein of Radiohead and Muse from the local stars.

WEDNESDAY 23rd
LEBURN & THE MAD DOGS: The Bullingdon – Soulful funky blues from the Californian guitarist, back at the Haven Club.
PROGRESSION: The Bullingdon



Wednesday 16th
FUZZY LIGHTS: The Library
Oh, Fuzzy Lights, how we missed thee. It’s been eight years since the Cambridge post-folk collective last released an album but listening to ‘Burials’, not a moment of that time has been wasted. It’s a phenomenal record: a perfect storm of deep, dark forest folk music and turbulent psychedelia. At the heart of the band is singer and violinist Rachel Watkins, whose pure, very English vocals provide the sweet, traditional folk heart and soul of their sound, while around her that violin swirls, drum tattoos march on and black clouds gather, all the better to throw everything into glorious tumult. Some of the songs on the new record come from very dark places indeed – not least lead track ‘Maiden’s Call’, written from personal experience of miscarriage – but great folk music has often been rooted in those bleakest of places. Like musical kin Trembling Bells, Fuzzy Lights mix that bucolic strangeness and charm with huge dollops of West Coast acid rock and monstrous lashings of noise-rock and post-rock, so they’re as much Godspeed or Mogwai as they are Sandy Denny. How the intimate confines of The Library will contain music this vast is anyone’s guess but our advice is to get in early so you can be near the front when the wave hits.

THURSDAY 24th
SALIVA + PSYCHO VILLAGE + DEVILSBRIDGE: O2 Academy – Tennessee’s enduring hard rock and rap-metal cult heroes celebrate the 20th anniversary of their ‘Every Six Seconds’ album.
IN-FLIGHT MOVIE + O MOON: The Jericho Tavern – 80s-inspired synth-pop from In-Flight Movie at tonight’s It’s All About the Music show.
SUPERMILK + DOGMILK: Fusion Arts – Great, grungy alt.pop in the vein of Guided By Voices, Sebadoh and Buffalo Tom from London one-man band Supermilk at tonight’s Divine Schism show.
ISIS CITY ROCKERS: Isis Farmhouse, Iffley Lock
DALBY’S OPEN MIC: The Fox Inn, Steventon

FRIDAY 25th
MAVERICK SABRE: O2 Academy – Soulful hip from the Hackney singer, touring his fourth album, ‘Don’t Forget to Look Up’.
THE NOW + CONCORD DRIVE + HAIG

THE NIGHT CAFE
O2 Academy2
11 Feb
SOLD OUT

HOME COUNTIES
Jericho Tavern
16 Feb

SNAPPED ANKLES
O2 Academy2
21 Feb

PALE WAVES
O2 Academy
28 Feb
SOLD OUT

AIRWAYS
The Bullingdon
01 Mar

MELT YOURSELF DOWN
The Bullingdon
02 Mar

WARMDUSCHER
The Bullingdon
23 Mar
SOLD OUT

WHITE LIES
O2 Academy
25 Mar

ENOLA GAY
Jericho Tavern
29 Mar

MANDRAKE HANDSHAKE
Jericho Tavern
02 Apr

DREADZONE
The Bullingdon
08 Apr

BAMBARA
The Bullingdon
25 Apr

LARKIN POE
O2 Academy
26 Apr

ROLLING BLACKOUTS COASTAL FEVER
O2 Academy
24 May

PEANESS
The Bullingdon
26 May

AMYL AND THE SNIFFERS
O2 Academy
07 June

NOAHFINNCE
The Bullingdon
09 September

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+ **THE FOLIANTS: The Bullingdon** – South Wales rockers The Now tour their new EP ‘The Truth Will Always Come Out in the End’.

TRACKSUITS & TRANCE: The Bullingdon – Ibiza 90s club night.

OSPREY & THE OX4 ALLSTARS + BEARD OF DESTINY + THE HOLY FOOLS + ENJOYABLE LISTENS: The Jericho Tavern – Funked-up blues from local legend Osprey and his band, playing tracks from his recent ‘Epic’ album and joined by blues duo Beard of Destiny and more.

BLUES PEOPLE: The Cornerstone, Didcot – Modern and classic blues from Mark Harrison and his band.

SATURDAY 26th

PALE WAVES: O2 Academy – Heather Baron-Gracie’s poppy gothsters unleash their inner Avril Lavigne – *see main preview*

Monday 21st

SNAPPED ANKLES: O2 Academy

If the past few months have involved more looking at trees on your daily walk than watching bands, here’s the gig for you: a band who are actually trees. Seriously. Well, semi seriously. London’s Snapped Ankles subsume their actual identities to a carefully crafted band image, claiming to be descended from the forests, and dressing in ghillie suits on stage. Their first album was titled ‘Come Play the Trees’; their most recent was called ‘Forest of Your Problems’. Appropriately enough they’re signed to the Leaf label, who’ve put out all four of their albums so far. So far so gimmicky, but beyond that they’re bloody fantastic: from their early days improvising electronic soundtracks over 60s film footage at DIY gigs in London, they’ve blossomed to become one of the best live bands around, fusing uptight funk, abrasively melodic post-punk, austere synth-pop and propulsive krautrock with pagan incantations to create a spectacle that’s something like a Morris Dancing offshoot of The Fall raised on ESG, Gang of Four, Can, Goat and Fela Kuti. It’s an ever-shifting musical landscape that’s consistently seen them stealing the show at festivals over the last few summers when, obviously, they’re in full bloom, and their first foray into Oxford is, oh yes, tree-mendous news.



DESERT STORM + BATTALIONS + UNDERBELLY: O2 Academy – Oxford’s hard rock titans mark their 15th anniversary with a headline show as part of their latest UK tour. The quintet have been at the forefront of Oxford’s rock and metal scene for over a decade, gracing the cover of *Nightshift* no less than four times as they mix up desert blues, monolithic metal, stoner rock and more into an unstoppable edifice of sound. Tonight will also be their last show with founding bassist Chris Benoist, so an emotional celebration in every way – *see interview feature*

BLACK PARADE: O2 Academy – Noughties emo club night.

GAPPY TOOTH INDUSTRIES with SO LONG, SPACE GIRL + NOSSIENNES + MAGNESIUM PROVERBS: The Port Mahon – GTI continue to mix it up style-wise on the last Saturday of every month, tonight with local emo power pop crew So Long, Spaceboy alongside Bristol’s experimental shoegazers Noissieness, plus American guitar primitivism and baroque folk from local music veteran Andrew Thompson in his solo Magnesium Proverbs guise.

FLIGHTS OF HELIOS, CHRIS HILLS & PAUL LODGE: Old Fire Station – Psychedelic space explorers FoH host an evening of sound adventurism. Philosophy professor and singer/songwriter Paul Lodge opens before Flights team up acoustically with renowned table player Chris Hill. Everyone then comes together for a set of songs from the ‘Cantat Ergo Sumus’ project they have been working on, mixing music, poetry and philosophy, based on Descartes’ ‘Cogito ergo sum’.

FREDDIE GORDON LENNOX: Harcourt Arms

MOOGIEMAN & THE MASOCHISTS + THE SCOTT GORDON BAND: The Caddyshack, North Oxford Golf Club – Strange, brilliant motorick post-punk and electro-pop from Moogiemane and his gang at tonight’s Caddyshack, plus bluesy rock from Scott Gordon in support.

ROXANNE de BASTION: The Listening Room, The Cross Keys, Thame – Emotive indie-folk and 60s-inspired pop from the singer-songwriter who has previously opened for Lambchop and The Wainwright Sisters as well as performed at Glastonbury and Cambridge Folk Festival.

SUNDAY 27th

PAUL DRAPER: O2 Academy – Former Mansun frontman Draper tours his new album, ‘Cult Leader Tactics’, the follow-up to 2017’s Top 20 ‘Spooky Action’, playing stripped-back versions of songs from his two solo albums as well as Mansun tracks.

OPEN MIC NIGHT: The Harcourt Arms

IRISH FOLK NIGHT: The Half Moon

THE PETE FRYER BAND: The Tree, Iffley (3.30-6.30pm) – Rock and blues covers from the veteran local guitarist and his band.

OPEN MIC: James Street Tavern (2.30pm)

ADAM MATTHEWS: Old Anchor, Abingdon (4pm)

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.



Saturday 26th

PALE WAVES: O2 Academy

Pale Waves frontwoman Heather Baron-Gracie has always proudly declared her love for Avril Lavigne, but with her band’s second album – last year’s Number 3 hit ‘Who Am I?’ – that love is worn less on sleeve to stamped in bold neon letters on heart and forehead. When *Nightshift* first encountered the band, formed in Manchester by Baron-Gracie and drummer Ciara Dorcan, their more gothic side was further to the fore, a mix of Cure-inspired pop and anthemic emo. With songs like ‘Change’, ‘Easy’, ‘Fall To Pieces’ and ‘You Don’t Own Me’ – produced by big name producer Rich Costey, whose previous credits include Muse and Foo Fighters – they’ve gone the full MTV-friendly pop hog. No bad thing when the result is a band who look set now to top festival bills over the summer in place of the litany of bloke bands on offer. It’s all very slick: a neatly polished form of stadium guitar pop with empowering soundbite lyrics tailor made for mass singalongs and that original hint of darkness is gone, perhaps for good. Not that will trouble an ever-growing legion of teenage devotees too much, and if you’re going to bounce around a field in the sunshine, far better to Pale Waves than someone like Catfish & the Bottlemen.

MONDAY 28th

McGOLDRICK, McCUSKER & DOYLE: Nettlebed Folk Club – Another chance to catch three of the contemporary folk scene’s leading lights together in an intimate setting, with the Transatlantic Sessions trio back at Nettlebed’s renowned weekly club – Michael McGoldrick plays flute, whistles and uilleann pipes, with John McCusker on fiddle and John Doyle on vocals and guitar for a run through of their combined catalogues and traditional numbers.

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The Wave Pictures
Wed 25th May
The Bullingdon



LOS PEPES / JACK GOLDSTEIN / BASIC DICKS

Fusion Arts

When life gives you lemons for leaders, make hand grenades. Basic Dicks’ bombs might be of the musical kind but come infused with venom as they set about the patriarchy with righteous fizzbomb punk with a dual vocal attack that leaves plenty of room for a good dollop of humour, notably in

‘Slap’, their ode to being yourself and two fingers to the male gaze by way of a bucketload of make-up. On the night the world lost one of its great rock showmen in Meatloaf, Jack Goldstein is almost the personification of the command to dance like no-one’s watching. Everyone is watching though; it’s

hard to take your eyes off Jack as he cavorts, contorts, invokes deities and generally makes out like Future Islands’ Samuel Herring possessed by Timmy Mallet playing the part of The Reverend Jim Jones in *Jonestown – The Musical!* Or maybe he’s Gibby Haynes following his calling to

become a gospel preacher in The Church of Madonna. Whatever part Jack is playing – and he switches roles on a minute-by-minute basis – he’s never less than an enthralling spectacle: kitsch but earnest, bombastic and glam but lo-fi (just him and his phone), spaced-out and psychedelic but fuelled by punk spirit. Keep dancing Jack, and let people stare – the disco in your head is the place to be. If Jack’s set is all over the place, Los Pepes are headed in one direction and one direction only: down the punk-metal highway at 120mph with no diversions or toilet breaks. That’s not surprising given the band are fronted by Ben Perrier, previously singer and guitarist with local noise terror duo Winnebago Deal. As with that band the spirit and energy of Motorhead looms large and loud but while it’s a relentless ride, there’s plenty of room for strong punk melody with nods to The Undertones and Stiff Little Fingers as well as The Replacements that are coated in but never cowed by the raucous, rampaging rush of Ramones-y rock riot. Maybe a breather or two in the set might give Los Pepes an extra musical dimension but slowing down has never been in Ben’s songbook and after forty minutes, a pleasingly packed room feels suitably battered and bruised.

Dale Kattack

ORLANDO WEEKS

Truck Store

This first Truck instore event since last August is one more hopeful sign that the local scene is beginning to revive. Until we went along, our only encounter with ex-Maccabees frontman Orlando Weeks had been the day before when he turned up on BBC Radio 4 being interviewed and showcasing a song from his new second solo album, the upbeat ‘Hop Up’. Then he had a keyboard player alongside him; here it’s only him sitting with his back to Truck’s window with what looks like a tenor guitar. Willie.J. Healey, one of several collaborators on the album, had been due to join him but couldn’t make it. Weeks is charmingly honest about his guitar playing which he says “hasn’t caught up yet,” so that what we are likely to hear, “are sad versions of upbeat songs”. But rather than sadness, his guitar brings a greater vulnerability that’s at one with the vulnerability his

singing can convey. His set is just four songs from ‘Hop Up, so short and sweet, or joyful, short and sweet. Opener ‘Way to Go’ has foot-tapping potential aplenty and the lovely line “Sun shimmering over Loch Ness” shows Weeks can paint a beguiling picture with words. ‘Look Who’s Talking Now’ is bouncy and ‘High Kicking’, the one on which Willie J was going to sing, is more of a ballad. Final number ‘Bigger’, a popular choice with the crowd, is a pacey celebration of being changed by fatherhood. “Its scratchy stuff” is the affable Weeks’ own verdict on how it’s going. Yes, it is scratchy around the edges, but mysteriously this adds to the feelgood vibe. Perhaps it’s that Weeks’ sunny-side-up combination of vulnerability and optimism is just right for the zeitgeist of now as we emerge from under our stones into the light.

Colin May

THE WOMBATS

O2 Academy

With no support act for this evening’s album release it’s hard to dismiss the anticlimactic atmosphere that hangs over the audience. However, as soon as The Wombats arrive onstage this feeling is most definitely shaken off. Even though the band’s live energy has never wavered tonight shows a more subdued notion, to potentially leave room for the album to shine rather than the band alone. Album release gigs are often hit or miss; it’s hard to hold an audience’s attention with songs few people know yet, but an EP in November gives The Wombats a head start in capturing attention and the album itself carries this with ease. The Wombats have never failed to evoke a feeling so closely intertwined with after-school romance which makes the new album, ‘Fix Yourself, Not the World’, something of an outlier in their discography. They’ve clearly adopted new tones and methods in their creative output, allowing room

for appeal to a wider audience. It’s refreshing to see a band develop their sound with their progression in the industry; The Wombats have already enjoyed three Top 5 albums and don’t show signs of slowing down, yet you get the feeling this album is something of a step into a new era for them. By implementing new sampling loops, there’s a clear shift in their influences but they haven’t strayed so far away from their roots; the album still encapsulates what we know and love of The Wombats: melancholic lyricism hugged by upbeat ‘put the roof down’ summery instrumentals. The new album has a strong focus on societal observations as well as dealing with emotional torment; most notably in ‘Worry’ and ‘Work Is Easy, Life Is Hard’, so if you’re after more depth, substance and heavier, fuzzier rock sounds from one of the UK’s most recognisable bands ‘Fix Yourself, Not The World’ might be for you.

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FEBRUARY NEW RELEASES



WHAT’S MY LINE?

A monthly look at jobs in local music. This month it’s HELEN MESSENGER and she’s a MUSIC PHOTOGRAPHER.

How long have you worked in this job? “I first started taking photos at gigs in 2015, so around six years ago, but from very much a hobby point of view; it was only by adding in other types of photography I finally got to go freelance. I’ve also done a few volunteer roles looking after online music publications.”

What is one thing you have to do as part of your job that the average person might not know? “Learning how to hoof inflatables back into the crowd and dodge the heels of crowd surfers as they go flying over my head whilst still shooting.”

What’s been the single biggest highlight of your career so far? “Probably photographing Paramore at the O2 Arena in London. A few of the photographers managed to blag ourselves spare tickets so we even got to watch some of the show, which is a rarity for an arena.”

And the lowlight? “All the times someone got either angry or gropey at me when trying to get through a crowd to or from the photo pit. Just trying to do my job here!”

How much and how did Covid affect your job? “I finally quit my accounting job to go full time as a freelance photographer two weeks before lockdown hit. I was in some ways lucky that I managed to keep my job for part of the year whilst safely working from home but after



planning the move for two years it was pretty frustrating to have every piece of work disappear in front of my eyes.”

Who’s your favourite ever Oxford musical artist? “Cassels. I saw them first at the Punt in 2014 or 2015. They are both ridiculously talented of course but also the loveliest and nicest people in music. I got to drive them and photograph them on tour a couple of years ago and had the best time.”

What’s the single most important piece of advice you’d give to someone wanting to do your job? “Build relationships, be reliable and stay open to opportunities because you never know where they might lead or what you might learn. Find a good community of other

photographers for support and don’t listen to every piece of advice or follow every rule.” **Who’s the most awkward person you’ve ever had to deal with in your job?** “Oh definitely me. I can reach *huge* levels of awkwardness on occasion, but music photography has given me the biggest confidence increase and I’m very grateful for it.”

When was the last time you heard genius? “That bit in ‘Chinatown’ by Bleachers when Bruce Springsteen just turns up and I suddenly feel alive again.”

Have you ever compromised your integrity in the course of your work? “Probably at some point but I’ve had to make the decision to not cover certain artists or turn down photo passes with rights grabbing contracts from bands.”

Would you swap your job for any other? “I’d swap it for some musical talent so I could be a super cool bass player and wear sparkly purple flares.”

Are you rich? “Nope, and there are very few people in the world that can claim 100% of their income comes from music photography; it’s damn good fun though.”

Do you consider your job glamorous? “I don’t think I’ve ever reached the heights of music photography to hit the glamorous times but there’s been some cool moments standing on stages or getting to chat to people I’ve admired for a long time.”

What’s your favourite thing about Oxford’s music scene? “How supportive and varied it can be. I started taking photos at gigs because I didn’t know anyone who wanted to see the same bands as me. Now I can turn up and I know half the people in the room, and that’s a great feeling.”

Dr SHOTOVER: All Tomorrow’ Tories

Ah, there you are, Jackfruit Minor. Welcome to the East Indies Club bar. Pull up a peerage and buy us all a drink. Mine’s an Essex On The Beach, with a Lorraine Chaser. [*Klaxon*] Festival alert! It will celebrate the forthcoming blood-soaked struggle for the leadership of the Tory Party aka the ‘Secret Illegal Party’ Party. Possible names for the event include All Tomorrow’s Tories, Sleazefest, U-Turnbury. Acts confirmed so far? Title holder Dildo Johnson will headline the Friday, showcasing tracks from new album *Ah Um Forgive Me Forgive Me*. He will be ably supported by Symons & Garfunkel and The Stone Cronies, with their ever-expanding line-up of donors and all-purpose crawlers. Pay to play? You bet. The Saturday sees stiff competition from prog headliner Liz ‘The National’ Trussed, performing her magnum opus *Yours Is No Cheese Disgrace*. Venomous support from The Priti Things and 1860s revivalists Jacob Rees Mogadon and Spiteful ‘Ladbroke’ Gove. Warning – there may be internequine heckling in the moshpit, not to mention knives in backs. DJ sets from Raab Da Bank and Nigel Garage take you through the night to Sunday – when, in a controversial turn-around, the main attraction will be Emerson Lake & Starmer, supported by local favourite The Young Dodds, not to mention the Colston Gang of Four. Something for everyone, I think you will agree. Cheers! Down the harbour!

Next month: *For How Much Longer Do We Tolerate Mass Tories?*



‘Boris WHO?’

INTRODUCING....

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

MILA TODD

Who is she?

Mila Todd is a local singer and musician. Born in Glasgow, she moved to her dad’s native Mauritius aged 13 before returning to the UK in 2002 and has lived in Oxford ever since. Raised on her mum’s “eclectic bad music tapes” and “a library of VHS tapes that had every episode of *Top of the Pops* from the late 70s”, she “developed my singing voice by emulating the stars of the show, from Patsy Cline to Showaddywaddy”.

Mila picked up a guitar and learned how to play by watching Youtube videos. “Eventually I got fed up with Youtube telling me what to do and went into the fields at the back of my house with guitar in tow. I would sit and play around until I found notes that I liked and just felt my way into creating a tune with one finger and some plucking; this is why I have perplexed looks at my shows sometimes!” After “braving a few open mic nights” she joined the band Ciphers in 2018 and has also collaborated with Tiger Mendoza and Just Emma. “When Covid hit, I threw myself into learning how I could express my musical ideas, so I bought a pretty electronic guitar and a looper. I also felt I had a lot to say and decided that music was going to be a tool in my activism.” Last summer Mila “discovered GarageBand and also adopted a wild magpie; during periods of isolating with the bird I would sit for hours playing around with synth sounds and breakbeats whilst watching this funny little creature terrorise my home. I was grief stricken when he died and the only way I could cope was by focusing on making an EP out of the songs I made whilst he sat on my shoulder. I’m very proud and happy that I was able to immortalise him.”

What does she sound like?

Spacious, celestial electronic spacescaping where starlit synths wow, swoon and bubble over skittering electronic beats, Mila’s voice an almost ghostly presence in the middle distance, creating a soothingly optimistic soundtrack to deep space travel.

What inspires her?

“Love. The love that my mother and father have for me, which in turn allows me to give abundantly and which allows me the freedom and safety to explore. The love that you find in solidarity, whether you’re in a sun



soaked field feeling the same vibrations or on the streets holding hands tight in the face of hate.”

Her career highlight so far is:

“Being asked to collaborate with Just Emma and Tiger Mendoza were great experiences. I’ve made some good friends throughout the process and they are both musicians that I have a lot of respect for and who taught me a lot.”

And the lowlight:

“Being compared to Belinda Carlisle.”

Her favourite other Oxfordshire act is:

“Starbelly. I love those boys; I’ve watched them grow as a band and they have always encouraged and supported my solo journey by inviting me to play with them and have helped with my musical education. They rock.”

If she could only keep one album it would be:

“Radiohead: ‘OK Computer’.

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

“None as yet but expect weird electronic dreamscapes and funny hats.”

Her favourite and least favourite things about Oxford music are:

“Favourite is the diversity of the music scene and being part of different collectives of musicians to learn from and collaborate with. Least favourite is the closing down of treasures such as The Cellar and The Wheatsheaf.”

You might love her if you love:

Portishead; Vangelis; Tim Hecker; Slowdive; Bjork.

Hear her here:

Spotify / milatodd1.bandcamp.com.

ALL OUR YESTERDAYS

20 YEARS AGO

Good and bad news on the local venue front back in February 2002. On the plus side, **The Pit** in Witney was set to return as a gig venue. The venue, behind **The Hollybush Inn** in Corn Street was back in action with a new promoter, Mark Warwick. It had been at the heart of a fertile Witney scene for a number of years under the guidance of musician Dan Goddard, who drummed in The Nubiles and most recently The Long Insiders. Sadly the place is no longer host to live music.

Nor is **The Skittle Alley**, the live music club night that ran at various venues in Abingdon for many years. Back in February this year it was at The Horse & Jockey but was being threatened with closure by the police on no evidence, with no disturbances reported but probably some miserable sod objecting to people having fun. Most of the pubs the Skittle Alley called home are now flats or housing. As ever, live music has to jump through flaming hoops just to exist while it can be shut down on a whim.

In other local music news, record label **Shift** **Disco** celebrated its fifth birthday with a week of gigs in Oxford and London featuring sets from **The Samurai Seven**, **Frigid Vinegar**, **Dustball**, **Black Moses**, **eebleee**, **Meanwhile**, **Back in Communist Russia** and **Theremin**, among others. Elsewhere local favourites **Suriki** called it a day while **Vade Mecum** relocated to Los Angeles.

Metal monsters **Mindsurfer** released their long overdue debut album ‘The Right To Remain

Violent’, while the Metal Supremacy Tour brought **Charger**, **Minus** and **Matter** to town at **The Zodiac**, which also hosted **All About Eve**, **Chumbawamba**, and **The Icaras Line**.

10 YEARS AGO

We always enjoy a bit of good news here at *Nightshift*, and in February 2012 **Truck Store** was celebrating its first anniversary flying the flag for independent music retail on Cowley Road. The store – happily still with us today – hosted a weekend of live music, with sets from **Danny & the Champions of the World**; **Nick Cope**; **Spring Offensive**; **Jess Hall**; **Deer Chicago** and **Gunning For Tamar**, among others.

Talking of shops, this month’s cover star was maverick MC and hip hop producer **Asher Dust**, pictured sat in a sweetie shop, which was a neat reflection of his pick’n’mix approach to electronic music. He talked about his childhood singing with his dad’s pioneering sound system, being signed to EMI and ZTT, working with Trevor Horn and Paul Hardcastle and finding himself awarded *Nightshift’s* Demo of the Month and being stuck in the Demo Dumper. “Both my parents are born again Christians now, so they believe I’m making the Devil’s music,” he laughed, while proving the Devil really does have all the best tunes.

Five years on from his front cover feature, **Richard Walters** was back with a new EP, ‘Young Trees’, while there were releases for **Vienna Ditto** (‘Bells’); **Abandon** (‘Monsters’), and **Shaker**

THIS MONTH IN OXFORD MUSIC HISTORY

Heights (‘Sitting in the Fire’ / ‘Poised As Robots’). Big gig of the month was dubstep hero/hate figure **Skrillex** at the **O2 Academy**, while down in the demo pages, **Dallas Don’t** topped the pile, making their presence felt for the first time.

5 YEARS AGO

“Country music is at its best when the music is fun and the words are sad,” said **Ags Connolly** – *Nightshift’s* cover star back in February 2017, the Witney-based outlaw country musician chatting to us about his new album ‘Nothin’ Unexpected’, the man having unexpectedly found his music readily accepted over in the States: “people there know country music and they are excited that a British blokes is playing it.”

Future cover stars **The Deadbeat Apostles**, meanwhile, were making their first impression on *Nightshift* this month with a Demo of the Month review for their songs ‘I Can’t Stop the Rain’, ‘Pilgrim’s Dreams’ and ‘The Man Who Sold His Soul’. “It’s rare to hear some genuine soul music in the demo pile,” ran the review, “but when it’s this good, it makes the wait more than worthwhile.”

The band have gone on to be one of our favourite live acts but back then star names coming to Oxford included **Loyle Carner**, **Ladyhawke**, **Kate Nash**, **Union J** and **White Lies** – all at the **O2 Academy**; **Cabbage**, **Chuck Prophet**, **Menace Beach** and **Ben Watt** at **The Bullingdon**, and **Rhys Lewis**, **Thought Forms**, **Tom Grennan** and **Hidden Charms** at **The Cellar**.

Harcourt Arms

FEBRUARY

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MOONAROON

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TRACKS

Yin & Yang Audio

Top track of the Month wins a free mix/master from Yin & Yang Audio, courtesy of Umair Chaudhry. Visit www.yinandyangaudio.co.uk/nightshift

TOP TRACK

THE BOOYAH SETTLEMENT

With Omicron continuing to run riot through the gig calendar even *Nightshift* has had to resort to playing Wordle, if only to distract us from either ploughing through what remains of the Christmas chocolates or ploughing through the gates of Downing Street in a stolen Challenger tank to deliver a special New Year greeting to our beloved leader. Sadly most of the words we can think of for him are four rather than five letters, though PRICK seems to bring up all the green squares. We're snapped out of a our word game reveries though by this debut offering from enigmatic local crew The Booyah Settlement about whom we can find out very little but whose music tells us plenty about how good they are. From the early-Spiritualised gospel-tinged pastoral-psychedelic opening, all reverby guitars, tambourine and middle-distance vocals, their song, 'Jesus Won't Be Long', builds gracefully into a full-on Velvet Underground-style gutter-level spangle. It's a narcotic daydream of a song, utterly immersed in late-60s / early 90s psych and as it dissipates into the ether at the end we're filled with a newfound love for life and all mankind. And then the bastard news comes on and that contemptible CHODE (five more green squares!) is smirking his way out of another crap-spattered corner, chucking minions under assorted passing busses to cover his ample arse once more. Time to stick The Booyah Settlement on again, twice as loud this time, to make it all better again. Five letters to sum them up? How about MAGIC.

COGWHEEL

Is it really over a decade since we reviewed Rebecca Mosley? It would seem so from a scan of our past issues, so an extra big welcome back to her. And it seems not too much has changed in her musical world since that last time as once more she takes the sombre folk-pop path out into the fields then proceeds to get lost in the woods, taking the song – 'Herrings, Red' – from simple, almost primitive folk lullaby into an

almost gothic pagan lament – pretty, plucked acoustic guitar and plaintive yet mournful vocals. It's a fragile song seemingly conjured from autumn leaves, personal reflection and uncertainty, offering just the merest glimpses of hope amid the rumination, like Emma Ruth Rundle or Lingua Ignota at their most bare-bones and insular. Probably best listened to while sat gazing across calm waters while dressed as a wood nymph. And possibly accompanied by a black cat, for full witchy effect.

SHAUN MICHAEL

If the skies remain relentlessly grey, unrelenting drizzle and dampness hangs in the air and pretty much every opportunity to escape the house comes with a 'Postponed' sign, in Shaun Michael's world life continues to be a Caribbean beach. He was last round these parts back in 2019 with a selection of reggae-flavoured tropical tunes, and again here he's mixing Jamaican dancehall into hip hop and r'n'b. It doesn't always work: 'Interlude' is a beefy hip hop bump but lacks a hook to hang its hat on, while 'Clap For Me' finds him in confident vocal flow and helped along by some lovely soulful singing from London's ESE but feel just a bit too home-made and in need of a big chorus to call its own, but 'So Special' hits the dancehall sweet spot far more firmly while best of the lot is 'Cool and Deadly' with its woozy, jazzier r'n'b vibe, rich patois vocal and even a steel drum cameo that is slick and succinct but also more memorable. Get those rum cocktails mixed Mr Michael, we're on our way.

MARLIA RAE

More r'n'b, this time from Abingdon/Steventon singer Marlia Rae whose song here, 'So High', was apparently used on *Love Island* last year. *Nightshift* knows slightly less about *Love Island* than we do theoretical astrophysics, but what little we've seen of it involves well-toned but vacuous narcissists trying to cop off with each other for cash and a precious 15 minutes of fame, which might well describe modern day politics if you remove the well-toned bit. And at least the contestants are halfway honest about just wanting sex and attention. Anyway, yes, so 'So High' sounds much like we'd imagine a soundtrack to *Love Island* to sound: well toned, buffed, meticulously tanned and with little substance beneath its burnished surface. Personally we'd prefer to watch a dating show filled with scowling goths who prefer to sit inside reading Robin Hobb novels and would prefer to spiritually bond with a wolf than strip off and go anywhere near a hot tub.

NINE IS THE LEVEL

If the ongoing shitshow of the Tories' incompetent, dishonest, corrupt failure to maintain even the most basic modicum of

integrity makes you wish you could go and live on another planet, you might find Doug Tolley here has got there before you, since this sounds like music recorded on a dying tape recorder on some distant haunted alien world. Four sort-of-instrumental tracks made from vocal cut ups of unknown origin found on an old Dictaphone spliced with Casio hums and plenty of FX pedals, this is radioactive half-life ambient music that we can imagine soundtracking a movie adaptation of Adrian Tchaikovsky's glorious dystopian sci-fi space opera *Children of Ruin* – music that drifts in the firmament, pulsing out a decomposing warning not to come near, those who made the message long-since dead and left to gaze out into forever with empty eyes. And, oh, sorry, where were we? Ah yes, got a bit spaced out there for a while – Nine Is The Level do that to you. For in celestial oblivion there is peace, which is a damn sight more than you get from watching the news right now. Never mind a plane to the Caribbean – we're off to nick Jeff Bezos' rocket and go and live on Mars and this will be the soundtrack to our arrival party. It won't be a raucous Downing Street garden party kind of do, more a staring-up-at-the stars-while-gently-stoned affair, but Boris Johnson won't be there, with or without an enquiry, so it'll be a bloody great party.

GSQUARED

There are artists who, however badly we treat them, keep coming back for more, like sad puppies to cruel masters, and contrary to popular opinion, or at least the bleatings of the odd online cry baby, *Nightshift* isn't one to dish out punishment above and beyond what's necessary to instil a modicum of musical tolerability into bands. Gsquared have previously earned short shrift for their harmless but inconsequential good-time pub rock and perhaps in the hope of upping the ante have come back all funky on this new song, which in case we hadn't noticed the new funky direction, is called 'Funkasaurus'. A party-hearty fusion of James Brown, Funkadelic and Lizzo, right? Let's just say no, it really isn't and all move on. That way kickings can be averted, blushes spared and precious moments of everyone's lives saved. Same time next month, guys?

O MOON

And then there are those bands who, having been critically eviscerated in these pages, change their name in the hope we won't recognise them next time round, like a cartoon spy in a comedy beard and glasses combo. It might even have worked for O Moon if they hadn't then accidentally sent this new set of songs from their old band email, so now we know they used to be Sleeper Service whose last offering had us suggesting they sounded like music in a persistent vegetative state that shouldn't be resuscitated under any circumstances. And what have the buggers gone and done?

Revived themselves with herbal smelling salts and some weak, milky tea, and, having returned to the land of the living with no memory of their past crimes, like in some second-rate ITV drama miniseries, they're knocking on our door again with more soft-focus jazz-fusion yacht-rock that comes with a shadow of a hint of Steely Dan but without any of artful precision even that band's biggest detractors have to admit is quite clever. No, this is polite, polished Perspex pop so without gumption it probably isn't even aware of its own existence. Even the plaintive vocal performance on 'Breathe' speaks more of a grown man who's discovered his mum bought the wrong breakfast cereal than the devastation of romantic trauma. 'How Could I', meanwhile is silky, jazz-pop in the vein of Jamie Cullum, if Jamie Cullum had necked a fistful of Nitrazepan and slipped into a torpor so deep he hallucinated that Curiosity Killed the Cat were the defining band of the past 50 years. Oh dear, O Moon, we fear another name change might be in order – maybe this time go for the full surgical facial reconstruction than the fake moustache approach.

TOILET TRACK

MICHAEL

VALENTINE

Michael Valentine's glossy website features a slideshow of photos of him lifting his guitar heroically aloft in silhouette; holding his guitar enigmatically on a beach and, erm, lifting his guitar heroically aloft in silhouette again. He doesn't, sadly, have a song titled 'Heroic', but he does have one called 'Brave', featuring poetic lines like "We are strong / We are free / We must be brave". He also has songs called 'Rise'; 'Beautiful Life'; 'Thankful', and 'Alive', though after half a dozen elongated plods through the worst excesses of 80s pomp pop as reimagined by a hopelessly jaded stadium rock session guitarist who got kicked off the last Vamps tour for being too boring, we sort of wish we weren't. There is much guitar widdling and fretwanking while his voice is almost comically over-earnest; if it was an egg pudding it would, somehow, be overegged. None of which should be a huge surprise from a musician whose website talks about his "journey" – one that doesn't feature the No.2 bus but does talk about looking for deeper meaning in life. It also lists one of his hobbies as "sunset watching". This is music as fitted kitchen: neat, tidy, functional and well engineered but utterly devoid of soul or any kind of spirit. It makes Mike & the Mechanics sound like Motorhead, and sitting through ten whole tracks of it makes two hours stuck in a lift with Michael Gove feel like a tequila slammer session down Sunset Strip with Motley Crue and The Go Go's. In conclusion, in Wordle world: SHITE.

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

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