

NIGHTSHIFT

Oxford's Music Magazine

**Free every
month
Issue 326
February
2024**

Barricane

"I think that autumn is
the most Barricane of the
seasons: that transition
to the dark"

**Riverside voices and splendid
isolation with the dark-folk duo**

Also in this issue:

TRUCK line-up announced
Introducing **SINEWS**

At work with **DAVE NOBLE**

plus

All your Oxfordmusic news, reviews
and gigs for February

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THE BULLINGDON

FEBRUARY 2024

GIG & CLUB LISTINGS

Thursday 1st February

Call Me Maybe
2010s Party

Doors: 11PM

Friday 2nd February

As Everything Unfolds

Doors: 7PM

Friday 2nd February

The Haus Party
Welcome to 2024

Doors: 11PM

Saturday 3rd February

Simple
Joy Orbisone
Ebitda
Soul Plaza

Doors: 11PM

Sunday 4th February

Gary Meikle: Facts

Doors: 7PM

Tuesday 6th February

Dots Funk Odyssey
Garfunkel

Doors: 7PM

Tuesday 6th February

Unauthorised Events

Rave to Save
Asian Brat, Missy P, Naim Junior
Bolojoey, Idnik, Dysfunction

Doors: 11PM

Thursday 8th February

Nastya Zukhvala
Ukrainian Stand-up
Comedy Show

Doors: 7PM

Thursday 8th February

Murder on the Dance Floor

Doors: 11PM

Friday 9th February

The Total Stone Roses

Doors: 7PM

Friday 9th February

Soul Sista

The Bullingdon Boogie

Doors: 11PM

Saturday 10th February

Beam me up 2024

Dead Letter
The Rills, Dolores Forever, Snayx

Doors: 7PM

Saturday 10th February

Hooked on: The Operation

Tommy Villiers

Doors: 11PM

Wednesday 14th February

Vittorio Angelone:
Who Do You Think You
Are? I Am!

Doors: 7PM

Wednesday 14th February

Haute Mess

Valentines Edition

Doors: 11PM

Thursday 15th February

Basketmouth:
Cancel Culture

Doors: 7PM

Friday 16th February

Nabil Abdulrashid:
The Purple Pill

Doors: 7PM

Friday 16th February

Lost in Drums

DNB Specials

Doors: 11PM

Saturday 17th February

Musical Medicine

Mr Scruff

Doors: 11PM

Monday 19th February

Garfunkel

Doors: 7PM

Thursday 22nd February

Simon Brodtkin:
Screwed Up (Warm Up Show)

Doors: 7PM

Friday 23rd February

Bad Touch

The Karma Effect

Doors: 7PM

Friday 23rd February

Tracksuit and Trance

The Rebellious Rave

Doors: 11PM

Saturday 24th February

Rawdio & Homebass

Doors: 11PM

Sunday 25th February

Luke Combs UK

Doors: 7PM

Tuesday 27th February

The Bug Club

Doors: 7PM

Wednesday 28th February

Melanie Bracewell:
Forget Me Not

Doors: 7PM

Thursday 29th February

Tom Houghton:

It's Not Ideal

Doors: 7PM

Friday 1st March

Chloe Petts:

If You Can't Say Anything Nice

Doors: 7PM

Friday 1st March

The Bully Boiler

Haus Warming

Doors: 11PM

Saturday 2nd March

Simple

Saoirse

Doors: 11PM

Monday 4th March

Sam Campbell:

Wobversations

Doors: 7PM

Friday 8th March

The Mezz

The Ariston

Tivertons

Doors: 7PM

Saturday 9th March

Reggaeton Party

Doors: 11PM

Wednesday 13th March

Gracie Petrie

Doors: 7PM

Thursday 14th March

Fin Taylor:

Ask Your Mother

Doors: 7PM

NEWS

email: editor@nightshiftmag.co.uk

Online: nightshiftmag.co.uk



SUGABABES have been added to this summer's **Nocturne Live** season. The multi-platinum-selling group, who reunited with original line-up of Mutya Buena, Keisha Buchanan and Siobhan Donaghy in 2022, headline **Blenheim Palace** on **Saturday 15th June** with support from Spice Girls' **Melanie C** and All Saints' **Shaznay Lewis** in support.

They join a Nocturne Live line-up that already features **Chaka Khan**, **Sister Sledge** and **FatBack Band** (*Thursday 13th June*), and **Crowded House**, **Sheryl Crow** and **Turin Brakes** (*Sunday 16th*) at the UNESCO World Heritage site. Nocturne Live runs from the 12th through to the 16th June. More info and tickets at nocturnelive.com.

STORNOWAY have been announced as one of the headliners at this year's **WOOD Festival**. The local heroes, who reunited last year and released their fourth album 'Dig The Mountain', play the eco-friendly festival over the weekend of the **17th-19th May** at **Braziers Park** in Ipsden, near Wallingford. Joining them over the weekend will be **Willie Mason** and **Katie Malco** as well as **Lily Lyon**, **Wesley Stace** and **Nick Cope**.

Tickets for WOOD are on sale now from woodfestival.com.

TICKETS FOR THIS YEAR'S SUPERNORMAL go on sale in March in a lottery system. The experimental music and arts festival returns after a year off over the weekend of the **2nd-4th August** at **Braziers Park**. The festival – regarded as one of the best in the UK, particularly by *Nightshift* – always sells out almost instantly so to make the process as fair as possible, organisers have put the

lottery system in place. Anyone wanting to apply for tickets needs to register at supernormalfestival.co.uk from Monday the 19th February, with the first round of tickets drawn on Monday the 4th March. Successful applicants will then have 72 hours to purchase their tickets.

EVILE AND CLOVEN HOOF are among the acts confirmed for this year's **Rabidfest**. The metal, rock and hardcore weekender returns to **The Bullingdon** on the **2nd and 3rd November**. Other acts announced include **Fury**; Recall the Remains; Imperium; From Her Ashes; Void Walker; Eschalon; Draconian Reign and Existentialist. All profits from the festival will go to the Sophie Lancaster Foundation. Tickets and info at rabidfest.co.uk.

THE 20TH AND FINAL DAY OF THE DEADBEATS takes place on **Saturday 3rd March**. The latest, and last, instalment of the free live music party hosted by The Deadbeat Apostles, takes place at The Isis Farmhouse at Ifley Lock and features a headline set from Kanadia as well as sets from The Deadbeats themselves, Killer Kowalski and special guests.

RECORD STORE DAY returns on Saturday 20th April with both Truck Store on Cowley Road and Truck Witney set to stock limited edition releases. Visit truckmusic.store for more details near the time.

Meanwhile Truck Store on Cowley Road hosts a series of instore shows this month, with south London alt. folk six-piece **Tapir!** playing on Thursday 1st (at 6pm); **Kula Shaker** playing an acoustic set on Saturday 3rd (5pm), and Brighton's rising indie stars **Lime Garden** playing on Tuesday 20th (6pm). Additionally the store will be opening late on Thursday 15th for an exclusive playback of the new **Idles** album 'Tangk', starting at 11pm.

BBC INTRODUCING IN OXFORDSHIRE & BERKSHIRE continues to showcase grassroots music from across both counties every Thursday, from 8-10pm on 95.2fm and DAB. The show, presented by Dave Gileay, is repeated on Saturday evenings and is available to listen to online on BBC Sounds.



JAMIE T, WET LEG AND THE STREETS will headline this year's **Truck Festival**.

The three main headline acts were announced along with the first wave of artists on Monday 22nd January. As has become traditional Truck teased its line-up news the week before with fans sent packets of leek seeds in the post along with a link to a game on Instagram where they could play to unlock artists' names.

This year's Truck Festival, now in its 26th year, runs over the weekend of the **26th-28th July** at **Hill Farm** in Steventon, with the now traditional Thursday evening opening for early birds.

Idles will headline the Thursday night, with other acts confirmed across the weekend including: The Kooks; Declan McKenna; Sea Girls; Holly Humberstone; The Snuts; Soft Play; Yard Act; Katy B; The Pigeon Detectives; Bob Vylan; Peace; Black Honey; Sundara Karma; The Magic Gang; The Mysterines; The Royston Club; Anthony Szmierek; Willie J Healey; 86TVS; Newdad; Nieve Ella; English Teacher; Corella; CVC; Divorce; Ditz; Coach Party; Katie Gregson-Macleod; The Wytches; Lime Garden; Folly Group; Fat Dog and Been Stellar. Additionally Barrioque with Shaun Williamson, Mr Motivator's Saturday workout, and Oxford Symphony Orchestra also return.

Tickets for Truck go on pre-sale on the 25th January and general sale on the 26th. Visit truckfestival.com to sign up, or scan the QR code on the Truck advert in the print copy this issue.

MELTING POT continues to showcase new and classic Oxford music every fortnight on Get Radio. Local acts can submit their music to the show, presented by Rich and Deadly, by emailing meltingpot@getradio.co.uk.

BANDSCANNER offers a gig guide app for phones, laptops and PCs that let's gig-goers instantly access videos by artists playing in Oxfordshire. Find it at bandscanner.net.



RIDE release their seventh studio album next month. 'Interplay' is released on the **29th March**. The band unveiled the first single from the new record, 'Peace Sign', at the beginning of January, as part of their live set, on tour in the United States with The Charlatans.

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A Quiet Word With Barricane



“I WOULD BE THE MOST dramatic, theatrical, tragic goth ghost. And then I’d probably get bored and want some company. Maybe Emily and I could wail together at the quarters of the year or on a full moon.

BARRICANE’S ROSY PIPER is considering what kind of ghost she would be, in response to *Nightshift*’s observation that there is gorgeously haunted quality to her band’s music, and in particular the ethereal close harmony vocals she shares with Emily Green. For her part, Emily would like to be more of a Caspar – a friendly ghost. “Rosy would do OTT ghost fabulously, but I’d like to be a helpful ghost – the kind who might help you find something rather than hiding things to frustrate you or freak you out. I once lived with a ghost who did that with our keys and it was very annoying. I’d like to be a ghost though as I’ve always wanted to be able to fly.”

BARRICANE’S MUSIC IS A delicate, intoxicating blend of close harmony folk singing, trip hop atmospherics and baroque-tinged shoe gaze. This month the band release two new singles, ‘Walking In the Dark’ and ‘Night Out’: the former a midnight blue dreamscape decorated by harpsichord and shimmering electronics; the latter similarly ghostly, showing off Rosy and Emily’s vocal partnership at its very best. Live, Barricane – named after Barricane beach in North Devon – sometimes swells to a six piece but Rosy and Emily are the founders and core of the band and regularly perform as a duet. They first began singing together during Covid lockdown but originally met and bonded over a chance singing session at a party. Rosy: “We really made friends when we were at a party together outside an Oxford river pub, The Punter, and started drunkenly singing Radiohead songs in perfect harmony, after both

bemoaning the fact that we both missed singing.” Emily: “Our kids were at nursery together but we didn’t really get to know each other until we happened to be at the same party in 2018. At the time, my daughter was very unwell with a serious heart condition and having just learnt that Rosy was a senior cardiac nurse at the JR, I poured my heart out to her. I had recently been given some advice from a psychologist that I needed to do something for myself to help cope with the immense pressure of having an extremely ill child. Getting back into singing in some way was the answer – something I hadn’t done seriously since high school. Turns out Rosy was also a singer and had been in a number of bands in London in the late 90s and 00s. We got a bottle of wine and slipped out of the party to the riverside where we sang together into the night! It was immediately obvious that our voices worked well together and Rosy is exceptional at harmonising.

I remember some stranger outside the pub told us that we should record together, and he was right!” Rosy: “We realised straight away that our voices work really well together. I’d always sung on my own in a band or with a male voice, so it was a new fit for me, but it was a comfortable, easy fit for both of us I think. It just fell into place as naturally as chatting.”

THE VOCAL CHEMISTRY between Emily and Rosy is something to behold, drawing comparisons to Simon & Garfunkel, First Aid Kit and The Unthanks. The pair began practising together during lockdown, sometimes by the river at Binsey near where Emily lives, or in Binsey’s tiny village church (“there was no electricity, so the day would fade to dark and we’d sit there, our voices echoing round the space with our lamps. It was really magical”). During this time they also recorded their debut album, ‘The Sky & Us’, with local music scene legend Mac. Rosy: We didn’t set out to write an album. Normally when you record a single or an album, you record the drums and bass first, then any other instruments before putting down the vocal tracks. We didn’t have a band because at that time we were a duo. So we just went to put down our vocals and Emily’s acoustic guitar during the gaps in lockdown. Mac created the rest retrospectively around the bare bones of our songs so it was a beautiful piece of musical engineering. He had some input from other musicians too including his son, Alfie, and friend Matthew Tanner.”

Emily: “We had initially only planned to record two or three songs with Mac so he could help us develop our sound. It quickly became apparent that we worked well together. We had about 13 or 14 songs by then and he suggested we do an album. I love that we didn’t set out to record an album and that it all happened very naturally, quickly, totally unforced and unexpectedly”

WITH LOCKDOWN OVER and gigs allowed Rosy and Emily set about recruiting a band to play live, making their debut at The Bullingdon in December 2021 with drummer Gary Neville a veteran of the scene with bands like Les Clochards, Earinade and Hot

Hooves; bassist Jon Carter, formerly of The Rock Of Travolta, guitarist Hamish Wall, and keyboardist Chris Alchin, all bringing years of experience to the band. Gigs and festival appearances followed but in 2022 tragedy struck when Jon died of pancreatic cancer. Rosy: “We’re still bowled over by Jon’s sudden passing; he was such a lovely person and talented bass player and we still miss him. Playing in a band with someone is a very intimate experience and you bond and gain trust and closeness quite quickly and there is something particularly magical about that.” Emily: “Jon was such an incredible person to be in a band with; he was so utterly uplifting, supportive, committed and funny. When he became ill, I remember Rosy and I having to be quite firm with him that he wasn’t allowed to play if he wasn’t feeling well; he didn’t want to let us down. We asked Warren from London Graffiti to help us out with gigs we had already committed to until Jon got better. We didn’t realise how ill Jon actually was and he died just weeks later.”

LAST YEAR BARRICANE released another single, ‘Salt Water’, but in more recent times the band has undergone further changes. Hamish and Chris have departed; Charlie Lane now plays bass with a new keyboard player just recruited. And so Rosy and Emily have once again been working with Mac on their sew set of songs, with ‘Walking In The Dark’ and ‘Night Out’ set to be followed by a second full album later this year. Rosy: “‘Walking in the Dark’ is a song about letting the shackles or the remnants of religion fall off and finding your own spiritual path. It’s a little bit about finding your own magic, your own power and your own centre and knowing you’re going to be fine. ‘Night Out’ is about hangxiety: the paranoia you get, the dread and terribleness after a big, heavy boozy night out.” Emily: “‘Night Out was actually one of the first songs I ever wrote but it was very fast and had a totally different rhythm. Rosy never really bonded with it, so I revisited it last year. Since first writing it I have taught myself finger picking techniques on the guitar. When I redid it, I slowed it down and used fingerstyle instead which has transformed it into something much more bleak but also rather beautiful, dreamy and haunting. “In terms of our songwriting, we now write knowing what they can sound like with the band. This helps with writing songs that progress and build and can incorporate dramatic dynamic shifts.”

The new songs reveal a more electronics-based sound; will that affect the dynamic of the live band sound going forward, we wonder. For a while the full band set up saw Barricane becoming more of a rock-leaning act live, whereas the recordings were delicate and intimate. Rosy: “I think we had a really cool guitar-based vibe on stage for the last couple of years that had more of a rock edge and attitude than the album did, but traded out the unusual, quirky and leftfield vibes that the synth on the album had. We’ve leaned more heavily into dark, gothy side of our music making though

“We got a bottle of wine and slipped out of the party to the riverside where we sang together into the night! It was immediately obvious that our voices worked well together”

because it seems to balance naturally against our lighter, very female, pretty vocals. We’re looking forward to getting our synth back on!” Emily: “We love those cut-through electronic riffs that stick in your brain; Mac is a real master at making those and you’ll hear them in ‘Walking in the Dark’ and in ‘Night Out’. We don’t want to go full on electro because we wouldn’t ever replace Gary and Charlie – they’re such a fantastic team and give us the very strong foundation to the band that we need to then achieve a synth yet still folk-inspired hybrid sound. “We’re really loving working with Mac again; he’s a musical wizard and has such a good ear and a leftfield take on our stuff that balances out our potential tendency to be more predictable. We’re aiming to spend the year recording it bit by bit – unless anyone wants to give us a recording contract – and we’ll release several singles across the year before the full album release. “It’s so exciting and brilliant being back in the recording process again. When we approached Mac about the new material he said ‘is this going to be a new album? You only came round for a cup of tea last time’.”

THE RECORDING PROCESS for the new songs shows that Barricane can almost be two separate entities – the full band set-up and Rosy and Emily as a duo. The pair of them played as a duo at December’s In A Different Place all-dayer at The Bullingdon, including a glorious take on the carol ‘Silent Night’. They’re set to play together at The Holywell Music Room later this year too, which seems like the ideal setting for the pair. Do they see that set up as a separate entity to the full live band or two faces of the same coin? Are there

things you can try with one format that you wouldn’t with the other? Rosy: We started as just the songs and our ideas and our two voices and the band pivots around that really. And there are all kinds of ways you can present those songs and those voices which lend a different feel and in some cases a whole different genre to the songs. So it’s a fun way to do different takes on our stuff, which also allows us to do a gig even if someone isn’t available. Plus, frankly, any excuse to sing with Emily is always, always welcome. When we play on *Later... with Jools Holland* and the Pyramid stage at Glastonbury I’d love to have an

orchestra. We’d like to try a semi-acoustic mid-Barricane with Charlie on the double bass and a pared-down drumkit and synth. We’re fairly excited about the idea of fusing stems from the recording session with our live line-up to achieve new, more synthy sounds on stage too. That’s a journey we’re planning to explore in 2024.” Emily: “We love that we have that versatility. Though playing with the whole band is very exciting the duo sets tend to be more nerve wracking because we feel quite exposed. We love doing both because all the songs stem from just the two of us and it’s nice to keep close to those origins. Ultimately, however we sing, it should always be about our two vocals.”

Recently Rosy and Emily took those vocals, and their songwriting skills, into a local girls school to teach pupils about song writing. Rosy: “It was wonderful. We took them through some of the processes that we use to write songs with the simple message: anyone can write a song. We wanted to focus on freeing the idea that you can have songs in you that you can find a way to express and put down regardless of skill, training or being perfect. It was a really successful day and we wrote five songs during the day with different groups of young people. We played them back in a concert in the evening – in one case with some brave volunteers on the piano – and afterwards we heard that several new bands had popped up as a result!”

IF BARRICANE CAN INSPIRE the next generation of young women to write and play, Oxford music will be all the richer for it. *Nightshift*’s review of that debut gig at The Bullingdon back in 2021

proclaimed them “the best folk act in Oxford” and the new singles reinforce that belief, even if they’re a way off what traditionalists might recognise as folk music. Barricane’s sound, highly atmospheric and spectral, always reminds us of the natural world and the seasons, a reflection perhaps of their origins, practising in the splendid isolation of Binsey; where do Rosy and Emily think would be the ideal setting for a Barricane show and which season do they feel best reflects their music? Rosy: “I tend towards the darker side of the yearly wheel: the autumn and the winter, whereas Emily, I think, is naturally more spring and summer. And our songwriting reflects those differences. I like the symmetry and the balance between us. So personally, I’d love to do a gig in a big, dark, echoey, candlelit cave somewhere whilst winter rolls and swirls around us – or a gig in the heart of a forest with the fire of autumn around us.” Emily: “Ooh, well, Binsey Church is an obvious one and as Rosy says, I know we’d both love to play a gig in a forest. We’ve got some ideas up our sleeves on that. I think that autumn is probably the most Barricane of the seasons: that transition to the dark. I feel you’re very aware of nature in autumn; you’re aware of the changing colours and the trees being whittled down by the wind to their winter silhouettes. But autumn is also often very sunny and the colours vibrant and I love that contrast which reflects what Rosy says about our balance.” And given those formative days on the riverbank and in the church, how different do the pair imagine Barricane might have sounded if they’d both lived in the bustle of Cowley Road back in the beginning rather than the relative isolation of Binsey? Rosy: “I’ve always been inspired by the natural world. It’s so much bigger and more awe-inspiring and hopeful than the horrors and greed of humankind and political power structures. I love Cowley Road – it’s my favourite and first part of Oxford; I used to live, go out, drink there, not to mention going there regularly to perform – but I don’t think that will ever stop me drawing on the magic I see in all things natural as inspiration. And I naturally tend towards the minor key in songs because I love the haunted and the dramatic, emotional, passionate feelings they evoke in me.”

‘Walking In The Dark’ and ‘Night Out’ are released on the 2nd February Hear them at barricane. bandcamp.com

RELEASED

KILLER KOWALSKI

‘Gunk’

(Self released)

Anyone looking for an outside bet on the next Oxford breakout act would do worse than stick a few quid on Killer Kowalski. Their fiery set at In a Different Place in December built brilliantly on the promise of their debut EP earlier in the year and this new EP reinforces much of what we’ve hoped for from the band.

Lead song and EP highlight ‘I’m No Marco Polo’ combines caustic disgust with oddly catchy indie-punk, singer Tom Hadfield’s Jello Biafra-meets-Fred Schneider snarl is almost playful but with his delicious rolling r’s he brings a sardonic venom to the piece with its punk-funk edge and primal guitar churn, like The Stooges infected by XTC.

‘Landlord Lennard’ continues Killer Kowalski’s nod to Dead Kennedys with its ominously serrated guitar, again the band preferring sharp scalpel to blunt hammer to make their point, while ‘Public Service’ really ladles on the disgust, growing its wings in the second half to



make for a proper terrace punk singalong.

Closer ‘Social Leprosy’ might do little more than continue in the vein the band have started but in plenty of modern punk acts’ arsenals it’d be their sharpest weapon and that it’s almost throwaway compared to the other three songs here shows just how potent Killer Kowalski have become in such a short time.

Dale Kattack



THE SUBTHEORY

‘Sophistry’

(Self released)

The Subtheory seem to be growing in musical stature with every new release. If last year’s divine ‘Crown of Thorns’ sounded like a futuristic film noir soundtrack, ‘Sophistry’ feels like an electro-pop torch song. As with ‘Crown of Thorns’ it starts in somnambulating style, dense synth hums making way for loping beats and Cate Debu’s hushed vocals. Like a black orchid though, it blooms darkly and brilliantly, synthetic strings rising as Cate’s vocals become increasingly racked while holding tightly to the calm at the heart of the storm and retaining a sense of serenity, reminding us of Martha Wainwright at her emotive best.

It’s something of a pocket battleship of a song: deceptively epic, with anger and romantic longing entwined in an elegantly

towering dance. Its use of space, to build, dissipate and rebuild is wonderful and makes the song’s climax all the more powerful as the night draws in around that vocal *tour de force*. The Subtheory promise to be something really special in 2024.

Dale Kattack

HE DIDNT

‘Blood Red’

(Drone Alone)

He didn’t’s full-length album of last year was titled ‘Anti-Ambient Passive Resistant’, Nick Peel – the man behind the moniker – obviously getting the anti-ambient description in before hacks like us could. This new EP features just three tracks but still clocks in at a weighty 24 minutes: plenty of time to lose yourself entirely in he didn’t’s immersive guitar noise.

Like Sunn o)))), to whom Peel has already been compared a couple of times, he didn’t use a tectonically shifting wall of distorted guitar sound much like a force field, albeit one that engulfs rather than repels all before it. These aren’t tunes or even drones really, rather, as Peel himself describes them, “sonic disturbances” – the two longest pieces here, both around the eleven-minute mark, are like giant rocks protruding from the earth: they ain’t moving much but you can feel their unyielding texture. He also recommends listening to this EP while traversing a city, which we can see, although staring into the night sky with this on headphones feels more appropriate: the unending vastness demands similarly tranquil turbulence to soundtrack it.

Ian Chesterton

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PEERLESS PIRATES

‘Adventures For

Artisans’

(Self released)

Anyone planning to boldly leap into the New Year could do worse than take Peerless Pirates along for the ride. Bold is what they do and rarely do they stray far from that chosen path on this new album, the follow up to 2019’s excellent ‘Banquet For Bandits’.

From opener ‘The Laughing Cavalier’ to closer ‘Fires & Waterfalls’ the quartet, led by singer and guitarist Cliff Adams, are all about big, lusty choruses and a swaggering form of indie-fied rockabilly that brings a surfy shimmer and twang to every song.

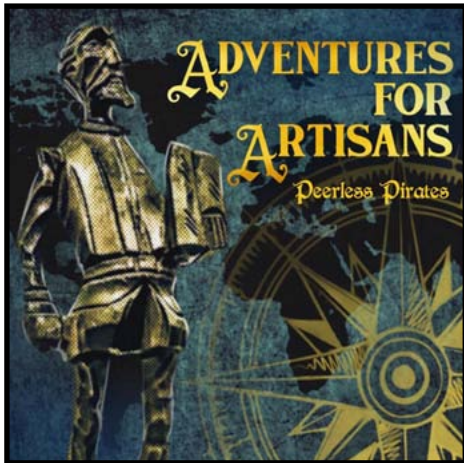
Truth be told, across thirteen tracks you occasionally start to wish for some variation to the formula – some of the band’s celebrated spaghetti western spice or something a bit more reckless, and maybe a couple of songs here could be left out to make for a more compact album – the muddled ‘Palatine Bloodline’, or ‘Critique’, which lets energy levels dip just as they’re building a head of steam.

But really, it’s not in Peerless Pirates’ job description to veer too far into musical hinterlands; what they do works just fine for the most part so why try and fix what ain’t broke.

Adams leads the line with his rich, heroic voice that owes plenty to Morrissey – particularly on the absolute belter of a tune that is ‘Where Is Michael?’ – and at various points across ‘Adventures For Artisans’ you half expect Erroll Flynn to turn up, cutlass clenched between his teeth and swinging across the rigging. ‘Salvador’ and ‘Hold Your Horses’ are lusty, broad shouldered singalongs and the album peaks at the midpoint with the gallantly elegant ‘Duck & Founder’, with its wonderful guitar work, and the similarly epic and roustabout ‘The Lost Art Of Letter Writing’.

So variety and diversions be damned; Peerless Pirates have set their course – dead ahead to the horizon and whatever adventures it may bring – and if you care for a bit of fun with your rock’n’roll you’ll be on board for the voyage.

Dale Kattack



HELEN PEARSON

‘Falling Backwards’

(Self released)

It takes a certain degree of bravery to write with complete honesty, and it takes a lot of courage to then put it to stark music that lets every emotional nuance that went into the writing process ring out. Helen Pearson does this in

TOM WEBBER

‘This Time’

(Self released)

After a slew of singles and EPs last year, culminating in the impressive ‘Rak Tracks’ EP, Didcot troubadour Tom Webber hits 2024 in good spirits if this new single is anything to go by.

Self described as “new retro”, ‘This Time’ continues to produce music that you can imagine getting heavy rotation on Radio 2 while retaining enough of an indie edge to keep gig goers happy.

The single fair bounces along with the just the subtlest of country-surf twangs, reminiscent of Last Shadow Puppets or maybe Richard Hawley in a rare optimistic mood. It’s possibly Webber’s most unabashedly poppy offering to date and seems purpose built for summer festival singalongs.

Bekti Manish

PECQ

‘Closer’

(Self released)

Sometimes a single gets passed my way that makes me stop and think “What is that?” that forces me to stop and listen. pecq’s (deliberately uncaptialized) new single ‘Closer’ is one of those.

At first it sounds like ‘VHS’ by The xx but quickly moves through several shifts in sound going toward James Blake, alt-J and Foals, but also DJ Shadow. It’s exciting to hear a group that has a sound all of their own these days, in their case literally.

In their musical alchemy, pecq avoid using sample banks, preferring to craft their own sounds. The duo draws inspiration from a vast

abundance, and without fear, on her latest EP.

Title track and EP opener ‘Falling Backwards’ features wonderful examples of Helen’s strengths: her vocal ability and lyrics. Knowing just what’s enough, she toys with atmospheres and melody that leads, effortlessly, in and out of a chorus that is as striking as it is catchy. ‘Foxes’ evokes very British imagery and humour, showcasing a beautifully simple guitar refrain which complements a witty lyric that reminds us of Joni Mitchell and Suzanne Vega. ‘Real Life’, meanwhile, has a heavy-hitting lyric over a sparse but considered melody. Subtle percussion and backing vocals help get the message over the line, and as the song picks up with further musical accompaniment, it’s back to the first track, once more, to soak up this treat of an EP.

It would be great to hear where Helen could take us with a full band, but these three tracks of shimmering truths and stark storytelling will do just fine for now – a welcome collection of songs that provide excellent company on these dark winter nights.

Caitlin Helm

library of samples, including recordings of ants attacking microphones, snares played through prepared speakers and other unconventional sources. This commitment to originality, combined with their experimentation with DIY studio equipment, tape machines, and other inventive sources contributes to the distinct character of their music.

As pecq continues to push the boundaries of their sound, this single serves as a tantalising taste of what’s to come with the release of their forthcoming EP in March.

Damon Boughen

DOM JAMES JR

‘Dom James Jr’

(Self released)

Sometimes I get passed an album that’s really hard to critique as there is nothing technically *wrong* with it, but also not a lot to get excited about.

This is what happens when listening to Dom James Jr.’s self-titled album.

After playing it a couple of times, I’m left thinking of James, Razorlight, The Housemartins and The Lightning Seeds, which is not bad company. However, as with all these bands they have a few really catchy tunes, but a lot of songs that are ultimately skippable. Contained in this album are one or two real gems, like ‘Acton Bomb’, ‘Seven’ and ‘I Want to Be You’, all of which are worth searching out. However, I struggle to recall, even after multiple listens, most of the other tracks on the album. To be fair to Dom, his voice comes across well and is matched by strong production values.

While this album doesn’t grab me, the few tracks mentioned show that Dom has some real talent, and hopefully has the ability to craft something exciting to come.

Damon Boughen

MYSTERY BISCUIT

‘The Hum & The Howl’

(Self released)

I’m a nostalgic fellow, and there’s little I enjoy more than reminiscing about the early 1990s: Off to college with my band name-daubed army satchel, slightly dazed from chemical experimentation, listening to a variety of music that often included the much-derided ‘indie dance’ and many levels of repetitive, trippy psychedelia. There was a sense of freedom and simplicity, and in the music a lack of artifice and a shunning of popular music necessities such as short track times.

Within the Giorgio de Chirico-style artwork Mystery Biscuit offer up five tracks that show them taking their time, existing in their own space, and sidestepping obsessions with brand-building and commerciality. They sit squarely in a place that typifies the timeframe mentioned above, and I love them for it.

‘I Was Born Tonight’ thunders in with a bass-heavy feedback attack, before settling into a rolling, recurring melodic backdrop. It brings to mind the unfolding guitar soundscapes of (pre-‘The’) Verve or Dr Phibes & the House of Wax Equations and is time-stamped by its use of burbling vocal samples (everybody in the early ‘90s was chucking in samples).

‘This Dingy Cage’ is a more relaxed affair, continuing with the sampled speech, this time over a twinkling, relaxed soundscape with loose, syncopated drumming and bright keyboard trills. ‘A Practical Man’, meanwhile, sounds almost like a lost mid-period Charlatans track, although its slightly forced vocal and lyrical urgency runs close to discomfort. ‘The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis’ is vocal-less and all the better for it: an exploratory, meandering, bliss-out kind of track, with constantly undulating, organic organ tones, augmented by the kind of guitar effects everybody aimed at back in the day (Phaser! Flanger! Digital Delay!). It’s a relaxed groove of a track, and would work well as a twilight-time outdoor festival pleaser.

So, the early 90s: post-indie-dance rhythmic psychedelic indie? The aforementioned bands and Scorpio Rising, Five Thirty, early Shamen, even early Chapterhouse. All good stuff. As reflected by Mystery Biscuit in this EP, there’s always room for this kind of spacey, chugging, circular and rhythmic space-rock. A nostalgic hurrah for that.

Simon Minter



G1G GUIDE

THURSDAY 1st
TAPIR!: **Truck Store** (*6pm*) – South London’s alt.folk outfit play an intimate instore show to promote their album ‘The Pilgrim, Their God and the King of My Decrepit Mountain’, released on Heavenly Records.
THEA GILMORE: **St. John the Evangelist** – Return to town for the folk star touring her new eponymous album – *see main preview*
CHEMTRAILS + DREAM PHONE + MYSTERY BISCUIT: **The Port Mahon** – Exuberant party fuzz, joyous psychedelic pop and eldritch song titles from Chemtrails at tonight’s Divine Schism show, Mia Lust and Laura Orlova sprinkling some Phil Spector and Joe Meek-like pop fairy dust on their spiky noise pop, out on tour to promote their new album ‘The Joy Of

Thursday 1st
THEA GILMORE: St. John the Evangelist
A very welcome back to the Shire to Thea Gilmore, who began her life in Oxford and North Aston before moving away. In the 26 years since the teenage Thea released her first album, ‘Burning Dorothy’, she has worked with and won the admiration of Bruce Springsteen; Joan Baez; Martha Wainwright; John Cooper Clarke; Billy Bragg; Steve Earle; Beth Orton, and The Waterboys among many others, earning a well deserved reputation as one of the leading lights in English folk music. In that time she’s released some 20 albums, including three Top 40 records. Her landmark 2011 album ‘Don’t Stop Singing’ was a collaboration with the late Sandy Denny and her music featured in the BAFTA-winning film *Bait*, as well as *Blithe Spirit*, starring Judi Dench. Tonight’s show at SJE – following on from her show at The Holywell Music Room in 2022 – is part of a tour to promote her new, eponymous album (she finally ran out of titles, we guess), the follow-up to her 2021 double offering of ‘The Emancipation of Eva Grey’ and ‘Afterlight’, for which she went under the name Afterlight. Now she’s back as Thea Gilmore and that should suit everyone in tonight’s doubtless sold-out show just fine.



February
Sects’; they’re joined by punky local hyper-pop duo Dream Phone and motorik psych-rockers Mystery Biscuit.
CATWEAZLE: **Common Ground** – Oxford’s longest running open night hosts singers, musicians, poets, storytellers and more on the first and third Thursday of each month.
CALL ME MAYBE: **The Bullingdon** – 2010s hits and club classics.

FRIDAY 2nd
AS EVERYTHING UNFOLDS + SOUTH ARCADE + DARLAH: **The Bullingdon** – High Wycombe’s rising post-hardcore stars As Everything Unfolds tour their second album ‘Ultraviolet’, drawing comparisons to Paramore, Evanescence and Marmozets.
KLUB KAKOFANNEY with DOG OF MAN + STARBELLY + SECRET RIVALS + MAEVE BAYTON & PETE LOCK: Gladiators Club – Lively folk-punk and accordion-led psychedelia from Brighton and Bristol at this month’s Klub Kakofanney shindig with Dog Of Man alongside goth-glam rockers Starbelly, Cure-inspired indie crew Secret Rivals and folk-blues singer-songwriter Maeve Bayton.
REND COLLECTIVE: **O2 Academy** – Northern Ireland’s Christian folk-rockers return to town, touring their ‘Whosoever’ album.
THE PHONICS + A BAND CALLED MALICE: **O2 Academy** – Tributes to Stereophonics and The Jam.
BLACK PARADE: **O2 Academy** – 00s emo anthems.
MUNGO BLUES: **Tap Social, Botley** – Funky blues covers and originals.
NEWSPAPER TAXI: **Fat Lil’s, Witney** – Rock originals and covers.
THE BONTEMPS: **Part & Parcel, Witney** – Live funk and soul.
BELINDA O’HOOLEY: **The Unicorn** – Solo show from the O’Hooley & Tidow singer and pianist.
GORDON MACKAY: **The Lamb & Flag, Hailey** – Laidback acoustic country, pop and rock covers.

SATURDAY 3rd
KULA SHAKER: **Truck Store** (*5pm*) – The 90s rockers play an acoustic set of songs from new album ‘Natural Magick’ at this already sold-out instore.
MUMBLES + LEATHER.HEAD + HÖÖF: **Port Mahon** – Chaotic, effusive emo, noise rock, free jazz and folk fusion from Manchester’s eclectic Mumbles – compared to acts as diverse as Deerhoof, Porridge Radio, Xiu Xiu and James Acaster – recently signed to Divine Schism and back in town to promote debut album ‘In The Pocket Of Big Sad’. Support from no-wave/indie-

funk crew Leather.head and fuzz-pop crew hööf.
FRANKIE ARCHER + THE BOBO: **Tap Social, Botley** – Fresh from her appearance on *Later...* the Northumbrian singer and fiddle player brings her mix of traditional and electro folk to town, including her tribute to our fair town, ‘Oxford City’. She’s joined tonight by local atmospheric electro-pop star on the rise The Bobo.
HIPSHAKIN’: **The Harcourt Arms** – 50s and 60s rhythm’n’blues, rock’n’roll, jump jive, jazz, boogaloo and early soul from the Hipshakin’ DJs.
PROFESSOR ELEMENTAL + CAPTAIN KUPPA-T & THE ZEPPELIN CREW: **The Gardeners Arms** – Steampunk party with chap hop star Professor Elemental and local a capella crew Captain Kuppa-T.
METAL 2 THE MASSES: **The Jericho Tavern** – First heat of this year’s battle of the bands to win a slot at Bloodstock, with Theorist, Stone Angels and Liberty going up against each other.
TRAVELS WITH THE SWEET ZOMBIE HORSE: **Central Library** – The Mighty Redox’s Phil Freizinger sings songs from his new children’s story.
SPINNER FALL + MYSTERY BISCUIT: **Strummer Room, Banbury** – Dischord-inspired hardcore from local trio Spinner Fall alongside psych-rock and motorik sounds from Mystery Biscuit.
KIKI DEE & CARMELO LUGGERI: **Tiddy Hall, Ascott-under-Wychwood** – Blue-eyed soul from the enduring singer-songwriter at tonight’s Wychwood Acoustic Club, best known for her 70s hits ‘Amoureuse’ and ‘I’ve Got the Music In Me’ as well as ‘Don’t Go Breaking My Heart’, her No.1 duet with Elton John.
PINK MAC: **Fat Lil’s, Witney** – Double tribute action, to Pink Floyd and Fleetwood Mac.

SUNDAY 4th
OPEN MIC NIGHT: **The Harcourt Arms** – Weekly open mic session.
FOLK SESSION: **The Half Moon** – Weekly Irish folk session.
OPEN MIC: **James Street Tavern** (*3pm*)
THE JAYBEES: **The Brewery Tap, Abingdon** (*5pm*)

MONDAY 5th
DOT’S FUNK ODYSSEY: **The Bullingdon** – Live funk session.

TUESDAY 6th
DALBY’S OPEN MIC: **The Fox Inn, Steventon** – Weekly open mic night hosted by local musician Tom Dalby, moving from Thursdays to Wednesdays.

THURSDAY 8th

FRIDAY 9th
TOTAL STONE ROSES: **The Bullingdon**
TOM WEBBER: **The Jericho Tavern** – Didcot’s soulful musical storyteller launches his latest single, ‘This Time’.
SOUL SISTA: **The Bullingdon** – Funk, soul and disco classics.
GHOST CAT + HANNAH OSOFSKY + N:SH + JADA PEARL: **The Port Mahon** – It’s All About the Music showcase.
THE INFLATABLES: **Cowley Workers Social Club** – Classic ska and Two Tone covers.
REM BY STIPE: **The Northcourt, Abingdon** – REM tribute.
HIPBONE SLIM & THE KNEEJERKS: **Part & Parcel, Witney** – Classic 50s and 60s-style rockabilly and garage rock.
SONS OF THE 70s: **Fat Lil’s, Witney** – Classic 70s hits.
ARTISAN BLUES: **The Midget, Abingdon** – Free live blues session with the local outfit.

SATURDAY 10th
BEAM ME UP: **The Bullingdon, O2 Academy** – Deadletter, Snayx, The Rills and Dolores Forever are among the up and coming stars at today’s multi-venue all-dayer – *see main preview*
HIPBONE SLIM & THE KNEEJERKS: **The Harcourt Arms** – Classic 50s and 60s-style rockabilly and garage rock.
METAL 2 THE MASSES: **The Jericho Tavern** – Stone Soup, This Dying Hour, Force of Mortality and Halfway Home compete to win a slot at Bloodstock in the second heat of the BOTB.
THE BILL SCOBIE BAND + MOJO DEMON + THE FAITH HEALERS + DELTA HARDWARE: **Gladiators Club** – It’s All About the Music presents The Big Blues Night Out with a selection of local blues and blues rock acts.
HOOKED ON – THE OPERATOR: **The Bullingdon** – Club night with Tommy Villiers.
TOM ROGERS & FRIENDS: **The Market Tap** – Classic blues from singer, guitarist and harmonica player Tom.
MEADOWSUITE: **Exeter College Chapel** – Original and traditional folk songs from the local quartet.

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SUNDAY 11th
DECLAN McKENNA: **O2 Academy** – The ‘Brazil’ and ‘Paracetamol’ hitmaker returns to town ahead of the release of third album ‘What About the Beach?’ – *see main preview*
OPEN MIC NIGHT: **The Harcourt Arms**
LIGHTHOUSE JAZZ BAND: **The White House** – Lively jazz standards.
FRANKLIN’S TOWER + HOLY FOOLS + EDWIN & THE KEEPER: **The Tree, Iffley** (*4-7pm*) – Klub Kakofanney host an afternoon of free live music.
FOLK SESSION: **The Half Moon**
OPEN MIC: **James Street Tavern** (*3pm*)
STEPH WILLIS: **The Brewery Tap, Abingdon** (*5pm*)

MONDAY 12th
TUESDAY 13th
YOU ME AT SIX + DEAF HAVANA: **O2 Academy** – Return to town for Surrey’s enduring post-hardcore/emo stars, touring their ‘Truth Decays’ album, with support from Norfolk’s pop-friendly stadium rockers.
N’FALY KOUYATÉ: **The Bullingdon** – Mandinkan folk music from Guinean griot N’Faly, part of the Afro Celtic Sound System.
OUR MAN IN THE FIELD: **The Jericho Tavern** – Empty Room Promotions host Alex Ellis’ UK Americana Awards nominees, inspired by the likes of Foy Vance, Ray Lamontagne and Damien Rice.
KEITH FAIRBAIRN’S GROOVE COLLECTIVE: **Tap Social, Botley** – Latin funk and Brazilian jazz.
LUTHER: **The New Theatre** – Tribute to Luther Vandross.
BREAK THE RULES + JOHN COGLAN: **Cowley Workers Social Club** – Status Quo tribute with support from original Quo drummer John Coghlan.
PETER KNIGHT & JOHN SPIERS: **The Unicorn, Abingdon** – Two modern legends of the English folk scene team up.

WEDNESDAY 14th
THE NONE + PREDECEASED + KILLER KOWALSKI: **The Library** – Noise rock from the new supergroup – *see main preview*
HAUTE MESS: **The Bullingdon** – Valentine’s Day singles night from the long-running local drag night and disco.
SISTERS OF FUNK: **Tap Social, Botley** – Funk and soul.
DALBY’S OPEN MIC: **The Fox Inn, Steventon**

THURSDAY 15th
PEA SEA + VAL: **The Library**
THE CLOCKWORKS: **The Jericho Tavern** – Irish indie rockers out on tour.
CATWEAZLE: **Common Ground**
THE ACOUSTIC ROOM: **The Plough, Witney** – Open night.
TIM FRIERS & THE MERCENARIES + HOLY FOOLS + HOGERSWOLF: **Loose Cannon Tap Room, Abingdon** – Making Music in Abingdon showcase.

FRIDAY 16th
BOSSAPHONIK presents GRUPO LOCITO:



Saturday 10th
BEAM ME UP: The Bullingdon & O2 Academy
Nightshift loves a good all-dayer and Beam Me Up ticks all our boxes for the best way to spend a Saturday. Following on from last year’s inaugural event, this year’s BMU has expanded from the O2 to include The Bullingdon. Even more to see, then, including a return to town for swaggering indie rockers **DEADLETTER** after their sold-out show at The Jericho Tavern last year; a return to town too for Lincolnshire’s punk-infused indie crew **THE RILLS**, and militant punk trio **SNAYX** (*pictured*), while effervescent synth’n’harmonies-infused pop duo **DOLORES FOREVER** make their Oxford debut. They’re joined the likes of barrelling Welsh Alcopop! signings **CHROMA**; fresh-faced soulful indie rocker **DANNY MELLIN**; warped, funky post-punk outfit **HOME COUNTIES**, originally from Oxford but now making waves in Bristol; Phoebe Bridgers and Julien Baker-inspired singer/songwriter **KATIE MALCO** and exuberant indie quartet **MAKE FRIENDS**. Among the local cast are electro-industrial-drum&bass star **TIGER MENDOZA** and summery surf-pop chap **JONNY PAYNE & THE THUNDER** as well as newcomers like **BLUE BAYOU** and **SUSPIRE**. The emphasis is on artists on the rise rather than established names and given last year’s event featured Coach Party, Prima Queen and Pale Blue Eyes, Beam Me Up’s talent radar seems to be in good working order.

Cowley Workers Social Club – World jazz dance club night with exuberant Congolese rumba and Afro-Cuban dance from Grupo Lokito, previous winners of the Lucas UK Award for best tropical act of the year, fronted by livewire singer/dancer duo Eugene Makuta and Iddo Donnatella. Host Dan Ofer plays Latin jazz, Balkan beats, nu jazz, Afrobeat and more on the decks.
MEMORIALS: **Modern Art Oxford** – Divine Schism host a return to town for Memorials after their show here last year, the band formed by former-Electralane frontwoman Verity Susman alongside Matthew Simms, who’s played with Wire and It Hugs Back, together creating an eclectic collage of motorik pop, psychedelia, electronic soundscaping, free jazz, drones and loops.
JOLLY GROGSTERS: **The Harcourt Arms**



Sunday 11th

DECLAN McKENNA: O2 Academy

The weight of expectation on Declan McKenna's shoulders doesn't seem to have weighed him down too much as the man proclaimed a spokesperson for a generation aged just 16 when he self released his debut single 'Brazil' back in 2015 – a huge viral Tiktok hit – and followed it up with the equally pointed 'Paracetamol', returns to Oxford as part of a Truck store tie-in to promote third album 'What Happened To The Beach?'. Those early singles dealt with poverty, corruption in football and trans identity and he's followed up with the likes of 'British Bombs', taking aim at the hypocrisy of British foreign policy. All of which are set to some of the most buoyant, singalong music you can imagine. Born in London and raised in Hertfordshire, Declan has taken his chief influences of Bowie and Bolan, added a hefty dose of indie rock and a fair dollop of boyband bounce and balladry. From being awarded the Glastonbury Emerging Talent Award and BBC Introducing Artist of the Year, to enjoying a 40-label bidding war, he's never looked back and another sold out show seems assured. McKenna's last showing at The O2 Academy saw him supported by a then barely known Wet Leg, so who knows who we might get this time around. One thing that's certain is there'll be a lot of love in the room for a singer with plenty to say and the pop chops to spread his message far and wide.

– Shanties and sea songs from the local vocal group.

THOMAS TRUAX + BLOODY FIASCO + ASHER DUST: The Jericho Tavern – Eccentric

musical adventuring and invention from crackpot troubadour and boffin Truax, a regular visitor to town over the years. Here he is back again with his oddly shaped songs and even more oddly shaped instruments, from a drum machine made of old bike wheels, to his (in)famous hornicator. He's joined by Bloody Fiasco, the project from Big Speakers and Brickwork Lizards man Don Mac, plus inventive electro, dub and hip hop maverick Asher Dust.

LOST IN DRUMS: The Bullingdon – Drum&bass club night.

PEERLESS PIRATES + DUDESMELL: The Port Mahon – It's All About the Music host the indie/rockabilly stars as they launch their third album, 'Adventures For Artisans'.

STAINED GLASS BLUEGRASS: Marston British Legion – Live bluegrass from the 1940s onwards.

SCREAMING DEAD + DAS GHOUL + BATS BATS BATS: Fat Lil's, Witney – Triple bill of horror-punk fun with Cheltenham's Screaming Dead, Oxford's Das Ghoul and London's Bats Bats Bats.

THE PINK DIAMOND REVUE + THE LONG TIME DEAD + QUEEN ELEANOR'S CROSS: Apothecary Tap, Banbury – Brilliant acid surf-infused sampladelica from Reading's Pink Diamond Revue at tonight's Strummer Room show, plus rock'n'roll from The Long Time Dead and classic gothic rock from Queen Eleanor's Cross.

THE VODKA SHOTS: Part & Parcel, Witney – Live blues.

KATIE SPENCER + HENRY PARKER: The Corn Exchange, Faringdon – Singer-guitarist and FATEA Female Artist of the Year Katie Spencer plays a double-headline show with singer-songwriter Henry Parker.

SATURDAY 17th

MOOGIEMAN + THE SUBTHEORY + CHOLLY: The Port Mahon – Excellent local triple bill at tonight's OMS mag show with oblique, idiosyncratic electro-pop, motorik psychedelia and post-punk from Moogiemann, plus wonderfully atmospheric trip hop and electro torch songs from The Subtheory and inventively glitchy synth-pop from Cholly.

THE VACCINES + DIVORCE: O2 Academy – West London's indie rockers are back in town for an already sold-out show after last summer's Truck Festival main stage appearance, touring their sixth studio album, 'Pick-Up Truck Full of Pink Carnations', their first since the departure of guitarist Freddie Cowan.

THE BALKAN WANDERERS: The Harcourt Arms – Lively southern European folk music with an indie twist from the local crew.

MUSICAL MEDICINE with MR SCRUFF: The Bullingdon – The long-running disco and house club night welcomes cross-genre selector Mr Scruff to the party.

METAL 2 THE MASSES: The Jericho Tavern – Third heat of the BOTB with Dead Man's Pistol, Bring To Bear, Deadblow and Payne.

SCOTT GORDON BAND: The Market Tap – Rootsy, soulful Americana from the local stalwart.
SHOW OF HANDS: Tiddy Hall, Ascott-under-Wychwood – Already

sold out show from Steve Knightley and Phill Beer at the Wychwood Acoustic Club.

MÖTLEY CRÜDE: Fat Lil's, Witney – Tribute night.

ALSO EDEN + SKYLINES: The Northcourt, Abingdon – Melodic rock from Also Eden, plus Camel tribute Skylines.

SUNDAY 18th

OPEN MIC NIGHT: The Harcourt Arms

FOLK SESSION: The Half Moon

OPEN MIC: James Street Tavern (3pm)

MALIA RAE: The Brewery Tap, Abingdon (5pm)

MONDAY 19th

GARFUNKEL: The Bullingdon

TUESDAY 20th

LIME GARDEN: Truck Store (6pm) – Bright, melodic indie pop in the vein of The Big Moon, Pip Blom and Wolf Alice from Brighton's Lime Garden.

JAZ DELOREAN & RORY EVANS: Tap Social, Botley

OPEN MIC: Cow Shed Drinks, Abingdon –

Wednesday 14th

THE NONE / PREDECEASED / KILLER KOWALSKI:

The Library

It's a very rare thing that we preview a band without even having heard them but then some bands you just know are going to be great, and so it is with The None, a supergroup of sorts formed last year by vocalist Kaila Whyte from Blue Ruth and Youth Man; bassist Gordon Moakes from Bloc Party and Young Legionnaire; drummer Chris Francombe from Frauds and guitarist Jim Beck from Oxfordshire's own Cassels.

The quartet bonded over hours of improvised jams in rehearsal rooms and picked their band name to "reflect the ideal of egoless experimentation and open collaboration". The end result is, according to the band themselves, melodic noise rock inspired by the likes of Shellac, The Jesus Lizard, Silverfish and Unwound, which will do us just fine. There are releases planned for later this year but tonight's gig – hosted by Divine Schism – is your chance to hear them first. No, we haven't heard them yet; yes, we can heartily recommend them. They're joined tonight by Manchester post-hardcore trio PreDeceased, and snarling local indie-punks Killer Kowalski



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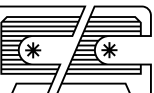
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Tuesday 27th

THE BUG CLUB:

The Bullingdon

Anyone who’s listened in to Marc Riley’s 6Music show over the past couple of years will know about The Bug Club. The Welsh trio from Caldicot in Monmouthshire get an airing on pretty much every show and good with reason, they’re an absolute joy: idiosyncratic – both musically and lyrically – scrappy and catchy as hell. Their rough’n’ready, lo-fi garage-pop is both infectiously poppy and defiantly noisy, where kiddie-simple nursery rhymes become noise-rock dirges on a whim yet never lose sight of a great pop tune, or tunes, when you consider previous single ‘Intellectuals’ (*sic*) was actually five distinct tunes in one. The vocal interplay between Sam Willmet and Tilly Harris couldn’t really be called harmonies as such but they’re the essence of the band’s appeal, reminiscent of Lou Reed and Mo Tucker’s vocals in The Velvet Underground. Elsewhere they pay due homage to Jonathan Richman, Violent Femmes and The Vaselines while always retaining their own identity. Their new double album, ‘Rare Birds: Hour of Song’ came out late last year and features a whopping 47 tracks, ranging from a few seconds long to, by their standards, an epic three minutes. This is one club everyone should want to be part of.

New monthly open mic night.

WEDNESDAY 21st

L!ES L!ES L!ES: The Library – Guitar-tinged electro-pop at tonight’s free gig.
DALBY’S OPEN MIC: The Fox Inn, Steventon

THURSDAY 22nd

SPIN JAZZ CLUB: Tap Social, Botley – The long running local jazz club hosts seven-piece band Hoop, led by sax player Paul Booth who’s worked with Eric Clapton and Steely Dan.

FRIDAY 23rd

BAD TOUCH: The Bullingdon – Hairy, heavy rocking from the Norfolk band who’ve been out on tour with The Answer, Quireboys and Skid Row.

MID AIR + LONDON GRAFFITI + IN-FLIGHT MOVIE + MAISY’S RAINBOW DREAM + COWLEYFORNIA: O2 Academy – Indie rockers Mid Air launch their new album at tonight’s It’s All About the Music showcase, joined by folk-rockers London Graffiti, synth-pop-inspired rockers In-Flight Movie and more.
DYLAN + SAY NOW: O2 Academy – Natasha Woods tours ahead of the release of her new album having collaborated with Bastille on recent single ‘Liar Liar’.
KNIGHTS OF MENTIS: The Harcourt Arms – Folk, blues and Americana from the local crew.
PEERLESS PIRATES: Tap Social, Botley – Free album launch show from the indie/rockabilly crew, playing a set of songs from their new ‘Adventures For Artisans’ album as well as a full set of older material.
THE PINK DIAMOND REVUE + SELVER + PSA: The Port Mahon – Reading’s surfadelic duo return, mixing classic surf and rock’n’roll riffage with acid house vibes and trippy visuals.
PAUL CARELLA: The Jericho Tavern
SHOW OF HANDS: The Orchard Hall, Harwell – The folk stars play an intimate village show as part of their Full Circle tour.
SPECIAL KIND OF MADNESS: The Northcourt, Abingdon – Tribute to The Specials and Madness.
JO KEEBLE: Part & Parcel, Witney
THE PETE FRYER BAND: The White Horse, Bicester – Classic rock and blues from the veteran local singer and guitarist and crew.

SATURDAY 24th

OH, COMMUNITY!: Common Ground – Divine Schism host a full day of live music on Little Clarendon Street; today’s mini-fest is headlined by the excellent Islet, back in town with their fluid, fidgety mix of motorik and kosmische and having supported Foals since their last visit here. They’re joined by a cast of indie, punk and DIY artists, including The Homesick from The Netherlands; US act Pregnant; Savage Mansion; Martha Ffion; Jacken Elswyth; Sleepers; The Medicine, and Electric Shepherd.
GAPPY TOOTH INDUSTRIES with FIVER + THE BATTERY FARM + CRANDLE: The Port Mahon – Gappy Tooth Industries host another mixed goody bag of sounds with punked-up rock and roll from Fiver alongside Manchester’s scuzzabilly crew The Battery Farm whose ‘Flies’ was awarded album of the week by *Louder Than War*, and local Lynchian loungecore duo Crandle.
REBETIKO NIGHT: The Harcourt Arms – Urban Greek music night.
RAWDIO: The Bullingdon – Drum&bass and jungle club night.
OSMOSIS: The Port Mahon – Local legend Osprey celebrates his birthday in the downstairs bar.
BREWERS’ NIGHT OFF: Tap Social, Botley – DJ Brewer Bolger and Bob E Demons spin acid house classics from the 80s and 90s.
WARRIN & MCCARTHY: The Market Tap – Country, folk and pop covers.
WHITESNAKE UK: The Northcourt,

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Abingdon – British tribute to the famously foreign metallers.

SUNDAY 25th

LUKE COMBS UK: The Bullingdon – Tribute to the American country star.
SUNDAY SESSION: Florence Park Community Centre (3-6pm) – Family-friendly live music session, this month featuring up and coming young talents The Weekend Warriors, plus ambassadors of original ska, Balkan folk and blues, Papa Nui.
OPEN MIC NIGHT: The Harcourt Arms
OPTICA + 7 AT THE LATEST + THE MERRYMEN + 16 SHADOWS: The Port Mahon (2pm) – It’s All About the Music showcase.
THE MIGHTY REDOX: The Tree, Iffley (3.45pm) – Blues, funk, folk, ska and more from the party-hearty crew.
FOLK SESSION: The Half Moon
OPEN MIC: James Street Tavern (3pm)
DAMIAN DELAHUNTY: The Brewery Tap, Abingdon (5pm)

MONDAY 26th

TUESDAY 27th

THE BUG CLUB + GETDOWN SERVICES: The Bullingdon – Return to town for Wales’ wonderful Velvets-inspired indie stars – see main preview
DOT’S FUNK ODYSSEY: The Jericho Tavern
STEVE MARTLAND HITS THE CLUB: Tap Social, Botley – Factory Records composer Steve Martland joins forces with the Komuna Collective, a group of young artists, musicians and DJs working in and around classical works.

WEDNESDAY 28th

STEPH PIRRIE JAZZ CHORUS: INTO THE GROOVE: Tap Social, Botley – New jazz club night for singers working with a live band singing jazz, pop, soul, and blues.
DALBY’S OPEN MIC: The Fox Inn, Steventon

THURSDAY 29th

STEPH PIRRIE: The Harcourt Arms – Live jazz with the singer and trumpeter and her band.
SPIN JAZZ CLUB: The White House – Saxophonist Ollie Weston, who’s played with Amy Winehouse, The Hackney Colliery Band and Tim Minchin, leads his band Time Is Of The Essence through a set of groove-led jazz.
METAAAL!: Kiss Bar – Metal club night from the crew behind goth club Intrusion and promising “everything from Gojira to Slipknot, Sabbath to Jinjer, Obituary to Iron Maiden, Immortal to Anthrax.”

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IN A DIFFERENT PLACE The Bullingdon

It's surely a measure of support for the local live scene that the Bully is nicely busy from the very start of today's journey through the pick of Oxford talent; enough to fill both rooms. Opening the show, **CHOLLY** manages the difficult task of matching fidgety, atmospheric electronic with strong vocal melody; her music ranges from playfully glitchy drum&bass to the gentle bubble, purr and pulse of synth-pop, the set hitting its peak with what sounds like Anita Ward's 'Ring My Bell' reimagined by Laurie Anderson. **LAIMA BITE** always impresses,

with her strong, deep voice and highly personal songs that pack a serious emotional punch and can make the chattiest room fall silent. Her solo work, with some minimal but perfectly placed acoustic guitar, is a fine counterpoint to Mary's Garden, her recently revived noisier project. Talking of noise, **DOGMILK** deliver that in spades, to the point where we worry about the drummer's ears. Their self-description of post-disco-punk fits better with recorded output like last year's 'Parrot' single or the no wave-y 'Deep End'; here they thrash about in an unexpected

manner, suggesting a change of direction.

Like Laima earlier, **TAMARA** plays gentle, understated songs with wry observations on life as it treats her, while her band Death of the Maiden waits til the new year to return to action. Tonight's highlight is 'Bitch Sold my Guitars', a hilarious tale of musical treachery, though it probably didn't seem that funny at the time; it's likely no one has ever sung the line "Bitch, I'm coming to get you" so beautifully.

MEANS OF PRODUCTION

get better with every gig, their take on Cabaret Voltaire-style 70s ultra simplistic electronics with undercurrents of dystopia, political observations and paranoia. With eighteen releases on Bandcamp they're no slouches regarding their own production, and today they're the first band to use the video screen effectively: mainly still images of stark, anonymous buildings. In this they follow on from early Human League, whose similar exploits were seen as radical and ground-breaking, which they absolutely were. Tonight the music almost gets funky but never too much to lose sight of their own identity. From machine-made music to the purely organic and **SIMON**

VEANEY, whose set is definitely the first we've ever seen interrupted by a baby invading the stage. Said baby is his own and can be proud of dad whose sparse lovelorn lullabies come on like Tindersticks with a kick of turbulence at times from guitarist Nick Malewski. On a day of interesting, unsual Christmas covers, we're treated to Everything But The Girl's '25th December', confirming Veaney's downbeat, romantic nature.

Trying to overlook **31HOURS** self-description as an art rock group, we find them to be anything but an easy listen, which is doubtless the intention. Where once seven members graced the stage, here they've de-evolved to the two core members, with most of the interest lying with the unusual rhythms and time signatures. Mixtures of acoustic and electronic drums come in with unexpected, often satisfying effect, but the high-pitched choir boy vocals get in the way of a truly enjoyable experience.

There's something of the midwinter gothic about **MID AIR** to start with, at their heaviest with hints of Mark Lanegan and the darker end of the Americana spectrum, but they get lighter and airier as their set progresses, from REM to (whisper it) Chris de Burgh amid their elegant, occasionally stately harmony-led rock. **ENJOYABLE LISTENS** turns out to be a solo singer, one Luke Duffett with a backing track, coming on like a lounge singer from a parallel dimension Las Vegas. Having tried formats such as a country duo and a full band he's often found playing solo like this, including five sets at Glastonbury '22. The drole crooning style may not be ground-breaking, nor popping in random cultural references, but it's all hugely enjoyable and he's treated to the biggest and most enthusiastic crowd of the day so far.

It's quickly beaten by the one for **DEADBEAT APOSTLES**. If anyone else took to the stage dressed in a sequined snakeskin suit and sailor's cap we'd think they were showing off, but it's Mike Ginger's everyday attire as far as we can see, and he – along with vocal partner Michelle Mayes – live up to their visual side with interest, kicking off with the band's phenomenal tour de force 'In Spite of It All' before careering through T-Rex boogie, Isaac Hayes funk and towering gospel soul with the spirit of Harlem truly burning within them.

Like Enjoyable Listens **BARRICANE** have left the full band at home to play as a duo. The folk-related songs are subtle and understated but the real joy lies in the remarkable interplay of singers Rosy and Emily, defying analysis to go straight to the pleasure centres of the brain. Stripped of the full band's occasional tendency to ramp up the electric guitars and give the drums a good bashing, such as

this year's great 'Saltwater' single, we get to appreciate the songs in a fresh way that complements the recordings perfectly. Plus we get their cover of John Otway's poignant 'Ever So Blue' to ice the cake.

KILLER KOWALSKI look great and feature a singer with the perfect amount of confrontational energy in his voice, echoing first generation punk and matching their no-compromise attitude. Focusing all this excitement to make a focused and enjoyable experience is no easy task, but they pull it off. Just down the road, Reading has produced many a band like this but our fair city sometimes seems on a journey towards more gentle and thoughtful pastures. Nothing wrong with that but this lot are a very welcome blast of pure adrenalin.

OLD MAN MAY is local veteran Nigel Firth (previously of Vienna Ditto) mashing up assorted sounds and beats with a few boxes of electronics in his own, completely un-categorisable style. The highlight comes with him grabbing a member of the audience to play what looks like a homemade theremin, to huge cheers. Whatever it is it works; let's hope he never stops being such a delightful thorn in the side of conventional music making.

On a day when each and every act seems to have pulled a performance out of their top draw, we close with two genuinely astonishing sets. **THE AUGUST LIST** seem incapable of being anything other than awesome, from the railroad rock'n'roll of an early number through the imperious 'God Is In A Wire' and the absolutely huge 'Distorted Mountain', to a quite stunning cover of Suffjan Stevens' 'Hey Guys! It's Christmas Time!' that could well be Dolly Parton fronting Spacemen 3. How the band aren't huge favourites beyond Oxfordshire remains one of life's great mysteries.

Worthy headliners **MANDRAKE HANDSHAKE** take us to Laurel Canyon in 1967; or is it Dusseldorf 1972; or maybe Canterbury 1974. Their great strength is drawing from classic eras of musical history and making something totally their own, with songs you tell yourself you must have heard before, even while they tell us they're newly written. Never have I seen a percussionist play with such commitment, or heard a triangle played so perfectly. 'Vitamin Sunday' is meatier and more satisfying than the recorded version, the nine members all working together quite beautifully, never crowding each other out. The signs are that recent time in the studio will produce something remarkable, while today suggests Oxford music continues to produce something very special.

Words: Art Lagun, Sue Foreman

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THE SHAPES / THE BALKAN WANDERERS The Bullingdon

It's the end of December; tis the season to be groggy and so it is, with no little irony that Jody & the Jerm's have got germs and can't play tonight. Instead it's straight into party season with the recently reconvened Balkan Wanderers. They take a few numbers to really get going, new singer Lizzie perhaps showing a few nerves initially, but the whole band grows in confidence and soon enough they're properly in gear, bringing elements of funk and indie rock to bear on traditional southern European folk songs, from lively polkas to rousing gypsy swing and klezmer, Claire Heavyside's clarinet leading the line and very much the star of the show. Tonight is The Shapes' traditional festive show and after all these years we should probably know exactly what to expect, but like Christmas itself, that doesn't matter too much when the emphasis is on good vibes and fun times. And so it is, in front of a packed house the band, led by chief songsmith Ant Kelly, range from loping, brass-driven blue-eyed-soul full of romantic nostalgia ('The Passing of the Years'), to punchy, euphoric r'n'b ('Tom Petty 1980') and on to punked-up new wave ('Johnny Marr'). The set is littered with covers that have become crowd-pleasing staples of the set, like Plastic Bertrand's 'Ça Plane Pour Moi' and The Pogues' 'Fairytale of New York', which has become, over the years, the official moment when Christmas comes to the Oxford music scene. In

fact, in the wake of Shane MacGowan's recent passing, we get an extended Pogues tribute, with snippets of 'Dirty Old Town' bookending Kelly's ebullient nod to his own Irish roots, 'Til They Put Me In The Ground', and a take on 'Rainy Night In Soho'. For all the poignancy at play, the mood never dips below celebratory and as we emerge to a rainy night on Cowley Road, it properly feels like Christmas. Same again next year, yeah? Dale Kattack

PUNCHING SWANS / SINEWS / EB The Library

Tonight's line-up has changed, in more than one way. Having lost two acts from the planned bill, local artist EB has stepped in, but also, EB has metamorphosed. Gone are the wide-eyed, smiling, pastel beats of a track like 'La Criox', and in their place we have excoriating digi-goth noise and lyrics like "Even in death I will not rest". Between bursts of sonic violence a recording informs us that we're part of some huge consumer feedback survey which morphs into an evil experiment as the vocal descends from urbane corporate avatar to glitchy screaming imp, which is perturbing, but not as much as EB within spittle-spraying distance of the crowd, howling "you made me hate that song I wrote" repeatedly, like an out of control playground chant over backing that sounds like the devil's fax playing up. By the time we get to the simulated

breakdown and song exploring strangulation revenge fantasies, our memories are gloriously scarred by the experience. In other company, Sinews might seem oppressive, but after that psychodrama their neo-hardcore rumble seems positively welcoming even as our ears are left equally battered: imagine a heartfelt hug from someone with an abrasively scratchy sweater and you might capture the balance between friendly warmth and spiky intensity. Fugazi are the reference point that seems most apposite, not because Sinews sound like them necessarily, but because their music is heavily roiling but with a true sense of beauty within the wasteland, and big, bold lines proving that music doesn't have to sound like 'Chelsea Dagger' to be called anthemic. New single 'Pony Cure' has the thick, scuffed texture of bitumen and old underlay, over which the vocals rasp deliciously, whereas another new tune is a blasted disco trudge, with an excellently rubbery, resilient bass holding it all together. Kent's Punching Swans round off the night with the most approachable set, which is not to say that they aren't also excellent. Their obscenely tight lopsided rock recalls Mclusky... or perhaps, as the humour is less mordant and more winkingly satirical, we mean Future Of The Left – a line like "A lifetime's supply of oxygen" leaps from the razor-chopped riffs like the absurd punchline to a gag you didn't catch, and math-snark sideswipes at third-rate populist culture like 'Family Misfortunes', hit the bullseye squarely. The approach is one of cynical weariness, but the playing is supercharged and passionate. David Murphy

THE BIG MOON O2 Academy "Pop" can be a double-edged sword. It means popular obviously, which is no bad thing, but as a genre label it can often be a pigeonhole that many try to avoid. Many would say "pop" is just what's in the charts, or more narrowly still the superstars like Dua Lipa or Taylor Swift who see mega sales/streams but don't fit another genre. More often than not, bands who play their instruments and play Academy-sized venues generally are given labels like "indie" (whether they're on a major label or not) or "alternative" – and we ask: alternative to what? "Pop" should not be a dirty word. It may imply something more stylistic, beyond just being popular but it should be a broad umbrella not an exclusive club for household names. All of this is the grumpy preamble to state two very apparent facts – The Big Moon are a pop band. They are also bloody fantastic. Tonight is the final night of the tour which has had two new albums to pull from: one released in Jan 2020 and one in late 2022. A lot can change in that time, and '2 Lines' and the artwork for 'Here Is Everything' point to bandleader Juliette Jackson having their first child. No doubt Jackson's world has been flipped on its head – with sleep deprivation alone – but the changes she must have felt certainly have not dulled her writing ability. Why can't a catchy pop song be about pregnancy tests or breast-feeding? No reason at all, it turns out. The Big Moon are engaging enough and have

catchy enough hooks to fill stadiums, but we're so glad to see them in this relatively small venue. The personal lyrics and the friendly crowd engagement make it feel much closer to hanging out with your mates who are just showing off their new tunes. We're trying to avoid generic hyperbole in singing the praises of the band but from having only heard them as a support seven years ago (and had actually forgotten about), to today we find ourselves staunch fans of one of the best bands on the circuit. Matt Chapman Jones

OPUS KINK / SELF HELP The Bullingdon

Tonight is the first time we've seen the remodelled Self Help and it feels they've beefed up a tad: where previously they were an exhilarating flurry of sonic sharp elbows and gleefully spiky exuberance, now they have a swagger about them, a casual belligerence that seems in less of a hurry to show you it means business. Keyboards don't so much add a sheen to the sound as fill it out, while Danny's vocal drawl adds an almost stoner vibe on occasion. There's still room for a couple of older songs in the set, though, as they finish with 'The Razz', which will always be one of greatest songs about going out on the lash in Oxford. Trombones aren't an instrument you generally

associate with punk but then Opus Kink are no ordinary punk band. In fact they're barely a punk band at all; instead they bring a punk spirit to bear on their frequently wild mix of gothic rock, jazz and blues. As such we're reminded of The Pogues some time before frontman Angus Rogers pays tribute to the recently departed Shane MacGowan and before the band close their set with an impassioned take on 'Rainy Night in Soho'. There's a similar sense of controlled chaos about Opus Kink, one that hides a tightly run ship even as the five band members lined up at the front of the stage threaten to careen into each other at any moment. Tonight's set feels like a secret peek into a timeless speakeasy show where the jazz riot comes coated in gutter grime and gothic darkness, were Nick Cave and James Brown jam it out for supremacy, where The Clash discover their gospel side and where Louis Armstrong leads Fat White Family through a mutant take of 'King of the Swingers'. Like the Fat Whites Opus Kink have drilled into London's dirt and their music positively drips with seediness. There are motorik dirges and rabble-raising power plays to get the lively moshpit ever more energised, the brass players bring sharpness and light into even the darkest moments and by the time Rogers' sandpaper voice has signed off on that Pogues classic, we're ready – in the very best kind of way – for a damn good soak to wash all the rock and roll grime off us. Deliciously dirty stuff. Dale Kattack

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WHAT’S MY LINE?

A monthly look at jobs in local music.
This month it’s **DAVE NOBLE** and he’s
A MUSIC THERAPIST.

How long have you worked in this job?
“22 years”
What is one thing you have to do as part of your job that the average person might not know?
“With music therapy being focused on the relationship and client led, sometimes in my sessions I have to *not* play music, to be able to connect to the person. This can be very challenging and take me out of my comfort zone.”
What’s been the single biggest highlight of your career so far?
“I had the privilege to play some jazz standards with legendary crooner Vince Hill when he was in a local hospital not long before he passed. He’d reached the stage where his voice had gone and he could only just about sing. It was quite emotional to share the joy and distress of this experience simultaneously.”
And the lowlight?
“Working with medically vulnerable clients, I have had to deal with loss through the death of people I’ve got to know intimately. This can be a very difficult part of the job.”
How much and how did Covid affect your job?
“I work at a residential therapeutic community for children who have experienced early trauma. Having to work with interactive music



online was really challenging. For some other clients it worked well, but mostly for these children it didn’t. This set the work back a lot.”
Who’s your favourite ever Oxford musical artist?
“Stornoway, I have watched them blossom through the years from their first gig in the back of a tiny Jericho pub to their recent reunion

shows. They are lovely lads with musical integrity.”
What’s the single most important piece advice you’d give to someone wanting to do your job?
“Knowing you have plenty of empathy, patience and a big appetite for music, if you want to continue playing music outside of your work role.”
Who’s the most awkward person you’ve ever had to deal with in your job?
“I’m too diplomatic to answer this one.”
When was the last time you heard genius?
“At times the young children I work with bowl me over with their songwriting. Unfortunately I can’t share it far beyond the therapy room but it’s much more sophisticated and heartfelt than a lot of tosh that goes into the charts.”
Have you ever compromised your integrity in the course of your work?
“I often have to compromise my musical integrity singing songs for the client, that I’m not so keen on. There are some Christmas songs that I have sung through gritted teeth, however, some of them I love.”
Would you swap your job for any other and if so, what?
“I honestly don’t think I would.”
Are you rich?
“No.”
Do you consider your job glamorous?
“Not really, although I have my own therapy room full of instruments.”
What’s your favourite thing about Oxford’s music scene?
“There always seems to be lots of live music happening, what ever you are into.”

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Dr SHOTOVER: Prog Eared

Ah, there you are, Young Jackfruit. Welcome to the East Indies Club bar. Mine’s a pint of Watney’s Red Barrel, with a packet of Crispy Bacon Frazzles on the side. Yes, we are discussing the 1960s and 1970s – how did you guess? Specifically, fictional prog bands from those days. No, not the Archies, Junior. Nor the Banana Splits, neither. *[Pitying look]*. Think more literary, e.g. the psych-folky outfit UTOPIA AVENUE, from the novel of the same name by David Mitchell. Or the tragic Scots-prog behemoth FROZEN GOLD in Iain Banks’s *Espedair Street*. Not to mention late 70s pomp-rockers FEAR TAKER in Alan Warner’s *Kitchenly 434*. Fortunately I myself was a member of (the totally non-fictional and justly celebrated) ELFGLADE, for whom I variously roadied and played the Mellotron. Sometimes both at the same time. The tracks used to last so long that I would eat three-course meals behind my keyboard onstage, and sometimes plough through a whole volume of *The Lord of the Rings* and/ or *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Reading? I loved it. Can’t tell you how disappointed I was when we were booked to play the Reading Festival, and it was full of unwashed clowns in patched denim baying for Quo. Not a book in the place.
Next month: **Book clubbing with Iggy Pop**



EMERSON, LAKELAND & PALMER: ‘For my next trick – assembling a flat pack bookcase while playing the Hammond organ!’

INTRODUCING.... SINEWS

Who are they?
Oxford post-hardcore/noise rock band Sinews are: Richard Bell (*vocals, guitar*); Brian Guerin (*bass*); Thomas Instone (*guitar*), and Luke Allmond (*drums*). The band formed out of the ashes of Brian and Richard’s previous band Hertz, who managed one show in late 2021 before disbanding forever. They recruited Luke from Spank Hair and Worry on drums (an instrument he hadn’t played in a band before joining Sinews) and Thomas from Egrets with the intention of making something noisy. They’ve played a number of shows with the likes of Cassels, Other Half, Beige Palace, and Shake Chain. At the end of January they released their debut EP ‘Reanimated’, and have just finished their first UK tour.
What do they sound like?
Brooding noise rock with sawtooth hardcore edges, woven together with punk tempos, making for a simultaneously cerebral and visceral result. EP lead track ‘Reanimated’ in particular sounds like a storm about to break with its destructive nature neatly caged and pleasingly unresolved.
What inspires them?
“I (Rich) help run Divine Schism, so I see loads of bands come through town as part of that – each and every one inspiring in some way. Some even have ideas we’ll rip off for ourselves. But I think what really inspired me initially was learning how to play Fugazi songs and realising that everything Ian MacKaye plays is both a) brilliant, and b) really easy. So we kept it simple, hit the distortion pedal, and now we have an EP.”
Their career highlight so far is:
“Supporting Cassels at Modern Art Oxford for their anniversary show of ‘A Gut Feeling’ – it was an amazing experience, where I think we played well, and it really felt like we were one with the crowd.”
And the lowlight:
“The process of choosing the name for the band was absolutely horrific. We had a list of about 80 band names, all terrible. For example Corpus



Crispy was a contender at one point, though thankfully got vetoed. Sinews ended up as the least worst option. Plus we had to play our first gig without Thomas as he had Covid – not an ideal start.”
Their favourite other Oxfordshire act is:
“Swervedriver – by taking all the best elements of Sonic Youth, MBV, Dinosaur Jr. etc and coupling that with a unique sense of melody and great riffs, they made a very inspiring noise which managed to still sound quite ‘Oxford’ if that makes sense. And the guitar tones are just amazing.”
If they could only keep one album in the world, it would be:
“Fugazi – ‘Red Medicine’. It’s an amazing album takes everything Fugazi do so well and that makes them such a unique sounding band.”
When is their next local gig and what can newcomers expect?
“Gappy Tooth, Saturday 30th March at the Port Mahon.”
Their favourite and least favourite things about Oxford music are:
“Favourite thing is the Library basement: you’ve just been to Red Star, Rice Box or got one of the Library’s pizzas; you’ve got a beer in your hand; there’s a punk band on, and it’s loud and sweaty as hell. Perfection. Least favourite thing is that all our live venues keep closing down.”
You might love them if you love:
Fugazi; Drive Like Jehu; McLusky; METZ.

ALL OUR YESTERDAYS

20 YEARS AGO

February 2004 was the first month *Nightshift* featured a full-picture front cover of the month’s featured band, in this case crazed metal tyrants **Near Life Experience**, who were serious contenders for the local super-heavyweight rock crown, having been formed by one-time **Mindsurfer** guitarist Jonny O’Neill and future **Xmas Lights** fretmangler James Gray-King, and fronted by **The Zodiac**’s head doorman Penos Bougourd, which made them pretty much the hardest band in town if every sense. The band had just released their debut album, ‘I’ll Take Your Silence As A Loud Yes’ on **Hanging Out With The Cool Kids**. “If I was going to punch anyone it would be Phil Anselmo; he’s a whinging, whining c***” announced Penos. We didn’t argue. The month’s most notable local release was a split single between **The Edmund Fitzgerald** and **Youthmovie Soundtrack Strategies** on seminal local label **Vacuous Pop**. The band that would go on to become Foals had recently morphed from post-hardcore teenage bruisers Elizabeth into an obstinate math-core outfit.
News-wise the inaugural **Oxford Folk Festival** was launched by none other than **Joan Baez** and was set to feature a headline set from **Steeleye Span**, while **Bellowhead** were set to make their debut gig at the event.
On the local gigging front **The Rapture**, **Spiritualized**, **Entombed**, **Avenged Sevenfold** and new disco hopefuls **Scissor Sisters** were coming to town.

10 YEARS AGO

February 2014 was a vintage month for local gigs, with **Foals** dropping by for a last-minute show upstairs at **The O2 Academy** – fans queued from 6am to grab tickets. Also very much on their way up and set for global stardom were **Glass Animals**, this month making a rare live outing at **The Jericho Tavern** as part of Independent Venue Week and sharing a bill with Charlie Cunningham, We Aeronauts and Salvation Bill.
But for all that, possibly the most unforgettable gig of the month was **Fat White Family**’s Oxford debut at **The Bullingdon** (at the time temporarily rechristened **The Art Bar**). Singer Lias Saudi got naked before the first song was over and proceeded to douse himself and everything in sight in a mixture of water, oil, flour and sweat as his band cranked out an astonishingly dirty mix of garage rock, gothic glam, krautrock and sinewy, hysterical rockabilly. “The only thing tempering our unfettered glee about tonight’s astonishing show is knowing that some poor sod has to clean up this mess in the morning,” said *Nightshift*’s reviewer of a show that “reminded you that in some darkened, dingy netherworld, rock music still has the power to shock and surprise.” The band themselves were charged with cleaning the mess up and paying for a new set of monitors.
This month also saw an Oxford debut for a young **George Ezra**, also at The Art Bar and on his way to headlining truck Festival a few short years later and **21 Pilots**, playing their first local gig and soon to be topping festival bills around the globe.

THIS MONTH IN OXFORD MUSIC HISTORY

5 YEARS AGO

“For a band that plays original music there is no future in Devon. Oxford is all about original music.” So said **Kanadia**, who were making their debut on the front cover of *Nightshift* back in February 2019. The core of the band – singer and guitarist James Bettis, and keyboard player Melissa Marshall – had relocated to Oxford from their native Devon and quickly made themselves favourites on the local scene. “We played some strange gigs back in Devon. We were on the same bill as The Wurzels a few times.” Fair to say the band are in a better place now.
Truck Store celebrated its eighth birthday this month with live sets instore from **The August List** and **Max Blansjaar**, while over in Wallingford long-running record store **The Music Box** announced it was to close.
A flurry of local releases was topped by **Swervedriver**’s ‘Future Ruins’ album, while **Ciphers**, **Julia Meijer**, **Catgod**, **Easter Island Statues**, **My Crooked Teeth** and **Bewarethisboy** also had new music out.
Among the highlights of the gigging month were appearances at **The Bullingdon** for **Conjurer** (supported by **Desert Storm**); **Frank Carter & the Rattlesnakes**; **Laura Viers**, and **Art Brut** (supported by **Cassels**), while **The O2 Academy** hosted ...**And You Will Know Us By The Trail Of Dead** and **Alexander O’Neal**, **Radiohead**’s **Philip Selway** was playing at **The Old Fire Station**, and **Big Joanie** were at **The Cellar** alongside **Death of the Maiden**.

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TRACKS
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TOP TRACK

SUSPIRE

After a month off from deciding who we're going to allow to become famous, and a Christmas which mostly involved imbibing enough cheese to clog the arteries of an entire army regiment, *Nightshift* returns to the fray armed with a fistful of New Year's resolutions and good intentions that you can bet your bottom dollar we'll discard as soon as we've fallen off the wagon or been confronted by some callous bastard's jazz fusion project, or likely both at the same time. But for now we're ditching the Toilet Track and trying to find the good in everyone and everything, however painful that can be. Because let's face it, the real enemy are the wankers running the world into the ground rather than some misguided funk-rock band. And anyway, having listened through to Suspire's debut song we're awash with positivity and optimism for the future of music. From the lush spangled guitar intro to the singer's almost uncanny approximation of Robyn Hitchcock, this is a psychedelic shoegaze pleasure, possessed of a casually epic sense of melody and a hazy intensity. "My pleasure cruise is flowing away" laments the singer somewhere between a croon and a snarl but he, and the rest of the band, sound so blissed out they could probably watch their house and all their possessions carried off in flood waters and make it sound like a majestic wonderland.

ZARBI
A surefire way to get *Nightshift* onside before we've even heard a note of your music is to name yourself after an obscure *Dr Who* character, in this case the hilariously awful ant-like creatures from ancient William Hartnell story *The Web Planet*. Another way to get us onside is to make intriguingly atmospheric post-dubstep soundscapes that conjure a darkly atmospheric vibe with just the right hint of menace about them. 'Land of Pewter' comes with alien horror movie vibes,

the soundtrack to a dark, underground scene where something unpleasant doubtless lurks and rides on a nicely metallic bassline, while 'The Dreaded Constance' is similarly pensive, distorted, disembodied voices adding an inhuman slice of humanity to the ambience. It's a cliché to suggested music sounds like the soundtrack to an imagine film but in Zarbi's case it feels true; in fact with a name like that it's just a shame he's arrived too late to be part of the BBC Radiophonic Workshop.

ALLIE JEAN
We're suckers for a spot of press release bullshit here at *Nightshift*; it is rich fuel for our critical fire. Allie Jean's self-description of "country grunge" is probably more exaggeration rather than outright misdirection but calling herself "defiant, empowered and laden with attitude" is probably stretching things way too far given the actual nature of her music. Her song here, 'Gasoline on Fire', is pretty decent truth be told, but it's firmly in standard country-rock territory, vocal sighs rather than snarls, guitar twang rather than shred, and bereft of anything particularly incendiary. It'd fit pretty snugly alongside The Chicks or Miranda Lambert. As we say it's a decent enough straight-up country rock track but as far as a self-described revenge song goes, it's more having unwanted pizzas delivered to the object of your ire than torching their house.

NVMERAL
That said, we have to admire Nvmerral's understatement in their biog, telling us "Nvmerral are a progressive post-hardcore band who formed during the lockdown of 2020 and spent the time quietly honing their sound," when frankly we can't imagine this lot doing anything quietly. Last time round the quintet sent us a straight-up rock cover of 'Running Up That Hill'; this time they furnish us with five tracks of their own and sound all the better for it. Mixing up prog, post-hardcore and metalcore they balance all-out heaviosity with occasional tricky time signatures in the mould of bands like Alexisonfire, at their best on the more splenetic 'SOL' when they play with the straightest bat and things flow most fully. 'Parry' similarly packs a decent punch while allowing its prog edges more space to breathe. Perhaps it's our innate aversion to a lot of prog but 'The Fear That Kept Us Quiet' feels like their least effective number, though even then they take a few moments here and there out from trying to create atmospheric sounds to let rip a bit. Stay noisy boys, none of that going quietly about your business, y'hear?

LONDON GRAFFITI
While their band name remains wilfully misleading, we continue to warm to London Graffiti. New single 'Miracles' won't set the place ablaze but it's a pleasant enough stroll through bucolic indie-folk. It starts off in Nick Drake territory – lovelorn vocals and a simple guitar spangle with an air of melancholy about it. It perhaps doesn't achieve the ghostly vibe it seems to be aiming for but the questing vocals seem comfortable in their skin and no one in the band seems to be over-egging any musical puddings. Things do err a bit towards the slightly overwrought near the end when simple understatement is the best bet with this kind of music, but in its own modest kind of way it's perfectly likeable.

HANNAH LOU LARSEN
Existing in roughly the same musical universe as London Graffiti, Hannah Lou Larsen's mellifluous folk-pop goes some way beyond merely likeable. The Danish-born, Oxford resident singer-songwriter keeps things dead simple here to the benefit of the tune in hand, 'Buddha On A Shelf'. Bar some softly judicious drumming courtesy of Zahra Haji Fath Ali Tehrani, it's just her airy vocals, a simple plucked acoustic guitar melody and the merest whisper of some synths to round out the sound. Like Laura Marling or First Aid Kit, who we're sure she won't mind us comparing her to, Hannah conjures a wistful mood with a lightness of touch. "You're good to go," she almost chirrups as her music soothes your weary bones like a warm bath. Good to go indeed.

LIFE UNDERGROUND
This is something of a hot mess, which shouldn't come as much surprise given Life Underground aren't entirely sure about what they are or where they're from – "indie-rock (ish), from Bicester (ish)", according to their email introduction – but that doesn't make it an irredeemable mess by any means. Vocally and melodically their song here, 'April Comes Around', sounds a bit like a pub rocking Bryan Adams, with perhaps just the merest hint of Neil Young about it, but they've got a nice guitar sound about them, which gets us to thinking of Galaxie 500. The whole thing is rudimentary and a little ramshackle and seems as uncertain about what's actually meant to be as the band themselves. They do admit that as their debut proper recording it's a bit immature,

though not in a pee, poo, belly, bum kind of way, which suggests they know things need working on, which stands them in good stead. For now there's just enough evidence that a decent band lurks amid the untidiness.

VAPOUR TRAIL
A band we've previously damned with faint praise and who continue to take it all in good spirits, Vapour Trail took a cue from our last review of them about shouting about Tory corruption (which they very much didn't) and return with an ode to how the whole world has basically gone to shit since David Bowie died in 2016, aged 69. Hence this new song is called '69Db' and is about as angry about stuff as they get, by which we mean don't go expecting Rage Against the Machine or Bob Vylan anytime soon. No, the ire here is reined in to the point you could almost miss it, even as it pens a sternly worded letter to the appropriate authorities. Instead it's closer to Jonathan Richman with a solid, steady Bo Diddley-style beat and a neat organ hum running through it. It never gets too antsy but you can feel teeth being gritted as singer Rob Davies chants "Liar, liar, liar", the guitar cresting a bit of turbulence (and nicking a snippet of Blondie's 'I'm Always Touched By Your Presence Dear' while it's about it), and a sense of restrained agitation making itself felt. While we don't imagine Vapour Trail soundtracking any riots anytime soon, their dander is very much up and it looks very much like they're heading to the front door with a brick in one hand and a defaced Conservative campaign leaflet in the other.

MOUNT St. HELEN
Well here's a slab of joy to end with. Mount St. Helen is the work of uni student Aris Sabetai and despite being a one-man project his track here, 'Pariahs', sounds like a miniature orchestral piece, starting off with urgent, rhythmic tapped strings, like a Steve Reich composition, and building by increments into something that feels huge. Vocally it's almost ethereal, his voice existing amid the strings, middle distance guitars and percussion rather than imposing itself too much on proceedings. It's a slow build but deftly done, tension – both musical and vocal – ratcheted up without being overdone, delicacy and intensity finely balanced. The whole thing only clocks in at just over four minutes but it feels like it could continue for another ten without losing anything. An admirable exercise in texture and rhythm and a rather special way to announce your presence on the local scene.

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 sanctimonious hippies.

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