

NIGHTSHIFT

Oxford's Music Magazine

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LOW ISLAND

"Our insecurities have been commodified by the likes of Google and that doesn't feel like a comfortable place for society to be in."



Oxford's club-friendly electro-pop crew talk technology, mental health and dancing into the revolution.

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Introducing **THE GRAND MAL**

plus

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LOW ISLAND



“MUSIC DOESN’T HAVE borders in terms of our ability to listen to it,” says Low Island’s Carlos Posada; “we can listen to music from all over the world without lifting a finger. But in terms of travel, this question is particularly important for British artists at the moment. Touring in Europe is a really important part of any UK band’s career, and up until now it’s been relatively easy and feasible to do on tiny budgets. All of this could change after Brexit and, needless to say, that is a huge shame. We work on such tight margins on tour; throw in a carnet, higher merch taxes, more paperwork, and the whole thing immediately becomes far more challenging to do on your own.”

CARLOS AND HIS bandmates in Low Island are talking to *Nightshift* in the wake of a hectic year that’s seen them playing across Europe where their star is very much in the ascendance, as well as festivals and shows across the UK, including Glastonbury and a tour support to Crystal Fighters. This month the quartet head out on their biggest headline tour yet, in support of a new EP, ‘Shut Out the Sun’, that gathers together recent singles ‘In Person’, ‘Search Box’ and ‘When You Wake’ as well as most recent release ‘Long Answer’. The tour will bring them

back to Oxford for a show at The Bullingdon on the 6th December as well as featuring a one-off reprisal of their Low Island & Friends multi-media shows in London that sees the band collaborating with artists to make for something more than a simple gig night.

LOW ISLAND ARE CARLOS, alongside fellow singer and multi-instrumentalist Jamie Jay, bassist Jacob Lively and percussionist and drummer Felix Higginbottom. Childhood friends, the band formed from the ashes of previous local favourites Wild Swim who split around the time the members headed of to university. United by a love of electronic dance music, Low Island’s mix of house, funk, synth-pop and airy, almost ethereal vocals has seen their shows blur the lines between gig and club night: like neighbours and friends Glass Animals, they’re a band to dance to.

IT’S BEEN TWO YEARS since the quartet last appeared on the cover of *Nightshift*, so Carlos updates us on some of the stuff they’ve been up to in recent times. “The last two years have gone by in a semi-blur of van calls and fiddling about on synths at 2am in studios, but thankfully I can still remember some of the highlights; our song ‘In Person’ got on the

6Music playlist; we’ve played a lot more in Europe; we supported Crystal Fighters at our favourite venue in London, Brixton Academy, and we played at Glastonbury. It’s important to give a shout out to the lowlights too: gear failure at Glastonbury in the 30-degree heat; being accidentally booked for a drum&bass festival with an unsympathetic crowd, and missing our flight back from Malaga after a show in Gibraltar because the border guards were trying to charge us €3000 duty on our own gear!” “This year has been really great for us, especially squeezing in several outings into mainland Europe... while that’s still possible for a touring band,” adds Jamie; “I’m sure all these shows have got us better known, but that’s probably easier to judge from the outside. Ultimately, we’re having a good time and playing to new audiences in new places... and they seem to be into the music.”

MAINLAND EUROPE IN particular has taken to Low Island, where they are regulars on the festival circuit, and the band have noticed the difference between gigging there and back in the UK. “It’s such a cliché to say but from an artist’s point of view the difference is really night and day,” says Felix; “there is a very different infrastructure around organising

festivals in Europe; often there is only one band playing at a time and the audience move altogether between stages. Obviously for artists like us that’s amazing as it guarantees a massive crowd... and the catering is better.” That said, the band are excited to be heading out on a headline tour here in the UK, with a full stage production to complement the music. Jacob: “We’re buzzing. The Arts Council have given us some financial support so we’re bringing a proper production with us on the road. Although we’ve played round the UK a fair amount in the past, this feels like something exciting and new for us.” Having previously toured their ‘And Friends’ night, this time round only London gets the full works. Felix: “Low Island & Friends originally came from getting bored with the standard format of gigs. We wanted to share the platform with phenomenal artists from beyond music. We offer them a fee that we pay out of our own pocket and they bring their dance, performance or artwork to our unsuspecting audience. Sometimes we can afford to do this, sometimes we can’t. To be honest, the amount of organisation and red tape it takes to get the industry to do something different, especially at our level, means that it takes a lot of people

getting on board just to make it happen.” Do you feel you’re bigger in London than Oxford? Jacob: “What a question! The honest answer is, I have no idea. Oddly this will be the first tour in which we’ve played in both London and Oxford so I guess we’re about to find out!”

LOW ISLAND’S DESIRE TO break out from the standard band-doing-a-gig format has also taken in interactive choreograph pieces and a live soundtrack to a catwalk show at University of the Arts London; what different challenges do those projects bring them compared to writing new songs, and what things have the band learned from each that have maybe fed into their songs and live show? Jamie: “We’ve always enjoyed collaborating with artists from different mediums on their projects and ours. There are so many technical differences to each art form, which can pose difficulties because everyone is speaking a different language. But there’s also a lot of common ground and understanding when it comes to the more fundamental aspects like form, pace, journey, meaning and emotion. For me, these processes point out the elements of music that matter, and those that really don’t! We’re often more experimental in these collaborations, which allows us to discover new sounds, which we then take back into our songs/productions.”

THE LATEST SET OF THOSE songs takes the form of that new EP this month. The four songs on it share a common theme of people’s connections with each other through the prism of online technology, from search engines to social media and the effects, often detrimental, that can have on them. Most recent single ‘Long Answer’, which came out close to World Mental Health Day, deals with mental illness and the way society views it, in particular the damaging way people can be embarrassed to talk about how they feel. It’s written from close personal experience of a friend. Was it difficult to write a song like that when it concerned someone so close to home? Jamie: “We like to think that our songs apply to a lot of people’s experiences, so it was much more painful to see a friend go through such a horrible time than it was to write a song about it. The worst part was the stiff upper lip things they said: “it’s just one them things”; “it is what it is”; “this is so embarrassing”, and “I’m supposed to be there for everyone else”, some of which ended up as lyrics in the song.

It was really frustrating to hear these phrases because the person sounded like some sort of involuntary spokesman for a distinct and ancient brand of male repression, one which people are finally starting to question.” What do you think needs to change as regards how mental health is seen and treated? It seems to be something that, at last, people, particularly men, feel able to talk about. Do you see grounds for optimism? Jacob: “There are definite grounds for optimism; it’s becoming a national discussion which is really important. Artists like Idles and Dave are breaking ground in the debate and it feels like this is an issue that is really cutting through and resonating with everyone that

“There are grounds for optimism. Artists like Idles and Dave are breaking ground in the debate and it feels like this is an issue that is really cutting through and resonating with everyone that listens to their records.”

listens to their records. Obviously it’s all part of a process and there’s a long way to go but if everyone keeps the conversation going, I feel we’re heading in the right direction.”

MUSICALLY, ‘LONG Answer’ is heavily inspired by Brazilian and Congolese music; having lived in Brazil for a while, Felix experienced the country’s musical roots first hand and brought that inspiration back to the UK with him. “Yeah, I moved to Rio after I graduated from music college. I’d been playing a lot of Brazilian music in London but I wanted the real shit. So I found a room, brushed up my Portuguese and tried to integrate; it was pretty difficult. Being a white skinny guy from Oxford, I was a bit of a target. Music is treated very differently there: it’s not special that you can do it; literally everyone is expected to sing and play percussion. It really changed how I played and thought about music. I got the chance to play with local musicians every day for six months. Obviously with rhythm/groove based music, it doesn’t get much deeper than traditional music from Latin America and Africa. We want to make people dance, so we’re totally open to any influence that might sink in from genres that do it much better.”

SHARING A SIMILAR theme to ‘Long Answer’ on the new EP, summer single ‘Search Box’ deals with the way people interact

with the internet, particularly the likes of Google. How unhealthy do Low Island feel people’s increased reliance to the online world is? Carlos: “I think it’s unhealthy, and we all know it. In terms of search engines, I don’t think it’s all bad. It has opened up the possibility for people to look into things about their health, sexuality, identity and a whole host of other issues which they might not have done otherwise as a result of feelings of shame, or being stigmatised in their peer group or community. What is unsettling is that the information and data we provide when we search is being sold to third parties. Our insecurities have been commodified, and that doesn’t feel like a comfortable place for society to be in.” And that song followed ‘In Person’;

does the way technology and humanity interacts scare you? Do you see humans becoming more isolated and thus feeding into mental health problems? Jamie: “Yes. It’s sad to hear stories of lives being ruined through social media, and it’s worrying to think that small groups of people are in charge of these platforms, doing little to intervene. We are only now starting to see the effects of social media on mental health, particularly amongst the youngest in society, who have never known a world without it. It’s scary to think how much worse this could get, as the technologies become more and more ingrained across future generations.” Much of the core themes of ‘Shut Out the Sun’ were inspired by Carlos reading about the Japanese Hikikomori – young men, haunted by a sense of failure in life, who seal themselves off from the world. Is that a particularly Japanese thing or does he see it happening in the UK and elsewhere? Carlos: “The Japanese Hikikomori are a generation of young men who’ve shut themselves away in their bedrooms because of perceived failings in their lives. I am no expert but a huge part of their strife seems to come from a claustrophobic Japanese society that deeply stigmatises failure of any kind. It can lead to a profound level of isolation, far-reaching family tensions and surrounding mental health problems. Whilst much of this is specific to Japan, there are elements to do

with masculinity, online loneliness, and external social pressures that felt globally relevant when I was learning more about them. I won’t pretend to have the answer for Japan, or anywhere else, but I do think that we need to safeguard against the manicured social media environment where everyone lives an imagined life. We are creating a non-existent ideal to measure ourselves against even though we know it’s unrealistic. It’s not healthy.”

GIVEN THE SUBJECT matter of ‘Search Box’ but set against its thumping dance soundtrack, not too far removed from Underworld, *Nightshift*’s review mentioned the idea of partying while the world burned: music as an escape while dealing with what is quite a grim subject; do Low Island ever feel they just want to forget about what’s wrong with the world and dance? Carlos: “As someone who is half-Colombian, yes!” The anarchist political activist Emma Goldman famously said “a revolution without dancing is not worth having” – a line later borrowed by Alan Moore for *V For Vendetta*; is that a philosophy you can subscribe to?

Jamie: “Yes, but only because of the word *worth*. Revolutions are definitely *possible* without dancing, but there’s probably little point in it if people weren’t to come together and celebrate. We’re all fans of electronic dance music, and while I don’t know how essential it’s been to the success of any revolution, it most likely provided a purpose.” What do you think of the current Extinction Rebellion protests? What do you think is the best way to force change in the world? Felix: “A thousand times yes. Educate yourself and talk about it. Also, stop eating beef: there is absolutely no excuse for it and it’s very easy to stop doing.”

LOW ISLAND’S homecoming show in December will give Oxford gig-goers a chance to think about the ideas discussed here as well as have a good dance, and the band’s popularity is increasing at a rate that means hopefully many more people will get the same chance on this tour and beyond. Before we let them go though, if Google could definitively answer one question for the, what would they ask? Jacob: “What’s up with Jeff Goldblum?”

‘Shut Out the Sun’ is released on the 19th October. Low Island play The Bullingdon on Friday 6th December.

RELEASED

LINA SIMON

‘Live a Little’

(Self released)

As Young Knives said in last month’s cover feature, when you have no-one to answer to other than yourself, only then do you have musical freedom. Lina Simon sounds free. This new seven-song EP is the follow-up to her Demo of the Month-winning debut at the end of last year. It’s an EP of mischievous, lopsided tunes that are alternately languid and scurrying, hysterical and playful, intricate and slipshod. It sounds like music made by actual pixies (as opposed to Pixies, although there’s some seriously uptight guitar on the go here that Mssrs Black and Santiago would be happy to call their own).

From the high-wired Knife-like synth-pop opening number ‘Meet You There’, through the tense, fidgety ‘Conch’ and messy, half-asleep ethereality of ‘Never’, to the playfully sleazy ‘Tortoise’ with its chitter chatter beats, rambling synths and Lydia Lunch-goes-pop feel, to ‘My Embrace’, where Lina fully crunks up her guitar, ‘Live a Little’ sounds like an artist taking a pair of scissors to the component parts of her songs and cutting them into shapes that don’t quite fit together, so the finished article is wayward, often on the brink of collapse. In a week where an



over-enthusiastic record company PR person has sent us the new Sherlocks album no less than four times and its pale, male staleness has threatened to tip us over the edge, Lina’s busy-bee, butterfly-pretty take on lo-fi synth-pop, post-rock and general wobbly oddness makes it feel like we’ve bypassed autumn and winter and gone straight back into fresh-aired, sunlit spring but still get to keep our Christmas presents. Oh, that more music makers would approach their art with such a childlike sense of freedom.

Dale Kattack



CAMERON AG

‘One By One’

(Is That It)

If Cameron AG’s self-released EP’s ‘Way Back Home’, and ‘Homeward Bound’, from either end of 2016, hinted at a crystalline talent, then ‘One by One’, the multi-instrumentalist singer-songwriter’s full-length platter of new material, is notable for its soaring confidence.

Where once his timorous, high-register vocals were shyly masked behind layers of echo and distortion, now they are seated right at the microphone, and boy does it pay off. His is a voice of no little addictive purity as it captures the essence of enjoying love and then mourning it.

The whole package is a fascinatingly beautiful piece of art: the lonesome, elevated beach house on the cover; the clever semantics of its name, and the recordings completed in Bristol and New York with Brooklyn producer Doug Schadt;

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MOWVES

‘Wet Signal’

(Self released)

It’s been a curious few years for straight up, wiggle your hips and pump your hands in the air techno. Twenty years on from the Phils from Bedford of this world ringing in to make a request for Dave Pearce’s Love Groove Dance Party, naked showmanship at Manumission and the original release of Goldie’s ‘Saturnz Return’, the movement has been through the wringer. The comedown has been hard and had seen dance music disappear under a rock of introspection in some quarters and repackaged in a highly commercial way in others, the latter following the America’s refashioning of the genre as EDM. In the former camp, the likes of Factory Floor, Jon Hopkins and Daniel Avery have returned dance to its intelligent beginnings but there have been encouraging signs lately of a return to the hedonism of the glory days. A recent release by Maya Bouldry-Morrison as Octo Octa has proved to be something of a landmark in this respect but Oxford has also not been slow to produce some highlights. Pandapocalypse have created a stir with their Fat Boy Slim homages and now Mowves have followed suit with a quite frankly exceptional four track volley in ‘Wet Signal’.

The title track begins with the headbangingthump of a Paddock or Coloureds – two Oxford outfits of the past, and it’s from the ashes of the latter that Mowves have sprung – but laces the brutality with a dancefloor ready wail of a refrain, creating an instant earworm. ‘Bad Graph’ then recalls another Oxford enterprise, Tiger Mendoza & Dave Griffith’s landmark ‘The Shadow’, with its beginning of real menace but then spills into another mood entirely, evoking Calvin Harris of all people and providing less an invitation to toe thump, more an absolute obligation. ‘Dry Signal’ maintains the mood, an anniversary two fingers to the Criminal Justice Bill with its insistent BPM assault but then producing something really special with a nagging keyboard ringtone.

By now, were this a club, shirts would be off and wheeling skywards, Fabrizio Ravanelli style, and ‘Chrono Trigger’ does everything to maintain the mood as the denouement, sending us into the virtual taxi queue with a warm feeling of euphoria in our hearts.

Rob Langham

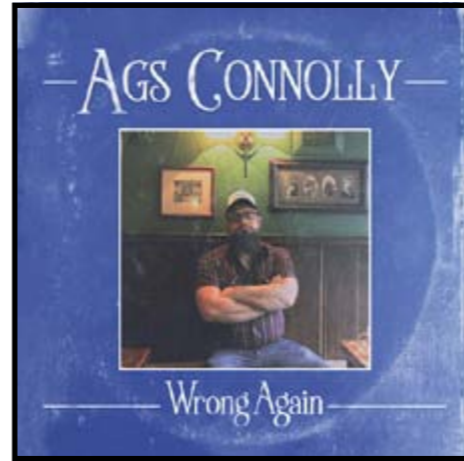


the genre’s heartland of heartache, with lonely night laments like ‘Indian Sign’ and album highlight ‘Lonely Nights in Austin’ typical of his way with a through-a-glass-darkly storytelling and late-night reflection.

Connolly is joined by a sterling band across these ten songs, including fiddle player Eamon McLoughlin, who’s worked with Emmylou Harris, and Michael Guerra, the in-demand accordion maestro whose credits include The Maverick. The former brings a sweeping elegance to songs like ‘Early Morning Rain’, while the latter’s contribution to the sparse ‘Lonely Nights...’ brings the song fully to life. Perhaps the unsung hero of ‘Wrong Again’ though is bass player Anna Robinson, particularly on the album’s title track with some inventive underpinning of the song.

These are Ags Connolly’s songs though and as ever he sounds older than his years and like a man steeped in the spirit and traditions of American roots music. The album finishes with the ironically titled ‘Sad Songs Forever’, the most upbeat song on it: barroom sing-along western swing with the fiddle to the fore, and even as Ags sings “I want sad songs forever” he sounds like he’s having the best time he’s had in a long while.

Dale Kattack



AGS CONNOLLY

‘Wrong Again’

(Finstock Music)

The photos of Ags Connolly on the cover and inside the album sleeve show the singer sat alone in a bar, looking variously wistful and defiant. Perfect for the music really, since Ags’ unreconstructed old time country is set firmly in

THE GRAND MAL

‘The Grand Mal’

(Self released)

The Grand Mal is made up of Desert Storm twins Ryan and Elliot Cole alongside Dave Olgesby and Rob Glen, of the now defunct Mother Corona. Stylistically there are few surprises on this debut album: steady, solid stoner and desert rock riffage, over steady, solid rhythms and Oglesby’s rasping vocals, partway between Ozzie Osbourne and Billy Corgan. Steady and solid really the order of the day across these ten songs, mostly sounding like they’ve been cut from granite and standing imperious in the face of relentless sandstorms. But there’s not much here that’s truly inspiring. ‘Synapse Transmission’ is a stand out piece – a towering song that even in this company sounds

heavy and beefed up but with the quartet keeping to a medium paced assault for the most part, the album can feel like it lacks variety. ‘Glitch’ ups the pace a few notches but seems to sacrifice some weight in the process and on occasions across the album the vocals don’t lock into the music, making the band sound like they’re still finding their feet. ‘Black Spiral’ manages that balance between a faster pace and staying true to the heavyweight cause but often you’re wishing they’d really tear it up and Oglesby fully let rip and ruin his tonsils.

Maybe The Grand Mal are victims of their own pedigree: we love their parent bands that much we expect magic each and every time. If not exactly an album that’s going to lay waste to all before it, like much of Desert Storm’s output, this is a decent album that should appeal to fans of Kyuss, Sabbath, Clutch etc.

Ian Chesterton

MOOGIEMAN & THE

MASOCHISTS

‘Ghost Driver’

(All Will Be Well)

“Monsieur Descartes, if you’re so smart / Why do ghosts and zombies always live apart / One is disembodied, the other has no mind / Now isn’t that a match of the perfect kind?”

Never one to tackle things in the most obvious fashion, Shan Shriharan once again takes an oblique approach to life on this elaborate, meandering, engaging new single, which clocks in at over seven minutes, has no obvious chorus or hookline beyond sporadically yelled “I’m a ghost!” and seems to exist on a different plane to most music. Pretty much like ghosts themselves. It’s both a mood piece and a motorik journey, a tangle and jumble of oddly shaped, disparate parts that somehow manage to coalesce into a far greater whole. Shimmering, middle-distance guitar, handclaps, sax skronks, softly bubbling electronics, some elegantly soulful backing vocals and the odd bit of wandering Mick Karn-style bass. It sounds like The Fall having a pop a The



The’s ‘Soul Mining’ in the style of Gary Numan’s ‘Dance’ album. Of course it shouldn’t work. It should be a complete mess, and yet it’s both hypnotic and immersive, the musical equivalent of finding a battered box wrapped in newspaper under the Christmas tree and finding a strange looking but ultimately beautiful stray kitten inside. The very best kind of surprise.

Dale Kattack



MSRY

‘Loss’

(Self released)

Sprechgesang is the word used to describe a vocal style partway between singing and talking. We’re not sure if there is an equivalent word to describe that meeting point of screaming, bellowing and vomiting, but if there was it could be MSRY vocalist Kial Churcher’s new middle name.

After the huge critical acclaim afforded last year’s ironically titled ‘Safety First’ EP, ‘Loss’ finds the band in no mood to rein things in, six belligerent blitzkrieg slabs of virulent metalcore with no room for niceties or anything clean, the addition of bassist Harvey Lake since the last EP only serving to further bolster a sound that already had its dials set in the red.

‘Imposter’ actually seems to feature the sound of Churcher vomiting for real, but the way he spits the words out across the EP suggests a man whose mind is a burning building and his ideas can’t get out fast or furiously enough as guitarist Keir French fans the flames with spiky sheet metal guitar carnage. High point of an exhilarating ride is closer ‘Still Breaks My Heart’, featuring a guest turn from Cancer Bats’ Liam Cormier, one of MSRY’s closest musical kin and chief influences, but at this stage, MSRY are leading their own charge – full pelt to death or glory. Or, given Churcher’s onstage antics, both at the same time.

Ian Chesterton

LOW ISLAND

‘Shut Out the Sun’

(Self released)

Low Island have been drip-feeding tracks from this new EP for a few months now. The first two singles, ‘In Person’ and ‘Search Box’, explored our relationship with technology, and how much of the internet distorts how we connect with each other, by way of a Friendly Fires-esque electro-jam and big house beats respectively. However, ‘Long Answer’ – the third and most recent single – moves to challenge poisonous notions of masculinity (“You can shake all the old ideas of how you should be... we need to talk about it”) over a glorious groove that harks back to the Burundi beat drumming and rambling ostinato basslines of early 80s bands like Bow Wow Wow. The message is emphasised by the juxtaposition of this sadly only fairly recently openly acknowledged sentiment with the retro-sounding synthesisers; how did we get here? Where did we lose our way? We really do need to talk about it.

Kirsten Etheridge



RITUAL UNION

Various venues

It's barely past midday and not only are we stood in a packed Bullingdon we're wondering if **KNOBLEHEAD** might have made a great headline act for Ritual Union. Ten-strong and featuring at least two dedicated tambourine players, their loose grooves, alternately otherworldly and folksy vocals and tripped-out jams are a full-on psychedelic treat.

If the bar is set high from the off, Ritual Union spends the next twelve hours upping it. Cowley Road feels almost flooded with festival goers, clutching timetables and buzzing with a sense of excitement.

Julia Walker is very excited; the **CANDY SAYS** singer tells us as much a couple of times, but it doesn't detract from the band's understatedly imperious set, their songs matching serenity with claustrophobia, restless, insomniac lullabies like 'London' fuelled by insecurity, yet stretching to become something quite magnificent.

There's probably no-one out today as excited as **EB** (pronounced Ee-Bee), a very late stand-in for

Do Nothing, who are stranded in France. It's not just her inventive, kooky blend of poetry, hip hop and electro-pop – where Kate Tempest meets The Streets – or sweetly existential songs like 'If Tomorrow Never Came, How Would It Be Spent?' that makes her such fun; it's also her infectious enthusiasm, unselfconscious dancing and genuinely funny, self-deprecating humour. She brings a surfeit of good vibes and everyone leaves the room grinning. Today's act most likely to make it as a kids TV presenter, and also the best surprise treat of the day.

Is it too early in the day for **BO NINGEN**? Is anyone ever truly ready for Bo Ningen? Their cacophonous space rock is all starship riffs, black hole grooves and demonic incantations and screams. A stray helium balloon drifts across the stage like an alien jellyfish and it seems entirely fitting. This is an incredible spectacle from one of the absolute greatest rock bands on the planet.

Worried we've almost used up

our quota of superlatives before we've even had a drink, we're further impressed by **WORKING MEN'S CLUB**, whose sonorous gothic-motorik post-punk and harsh electro-pop is indebted to Joy Division and New Order but never at the expense of its own character.

THE MURDER CAPITAL deserve an entire dictionary full of superlatives to themselves. The Dublin quintet play a scene-building masterstroke, starting pensively, all brooding atmospherics and delayed gratification, before finally erupting, letting all that gothic tension out in well-aimed salvos, coming to an incendiary climax with singer James McGovern executing an elaborate dive into the crowd while the band contort themselves into a cataclysmic frenzy. Incredible stuff from a band who, like neighbours Fontaines DC, are set to go stratospheric.

We need a little light relief after that and **SELF ESTEEM** provide it, their close harmony chant-pop moving into almost folksy sweetness, while retaining an almost Anna Calvi-like sense of drama about it. **FLAMINGODS** seem like a cheery bunch, what with their hippies-raid-the-dressing-up-box get-up and

funky take on psychedelia. Their new album is called 'Levitation'. Obviously. They're fun enough though there's a strange feeling they might be the previously unexplored pathway between Hawkwind and *The Wiggles*.

Getting into The Library today is a Herculean task in itself (and getting out again even harder) so we find ourselves perched on the staircase for **MAX BLANJAAR**'s set, just about making out his fun, unabashed mix'n'match approach to garage pop that laces Beck-like eclecticism with Jonathan Richman-like rock'n'roll whimsy.

If The Library isn't the place for anyone with claustrophobia, **PIGS PIGS PIGS PIGS PIGS** only increase the sense of the walls closing in, even downstairs at the Academy. "It's rock o'clock" announces singer Matt Baty and he's not wrong. Pigs are heavy personified, a wrecking ball of riffage where subtlety, frippery and sweet, sweet melody are subsumed – or simply crushed – by the onward bulldozer sonic assault. It's unrelenting. And really quite wonderful. If Bo Ningen cracked open the gates of hell earlier, Pigs kick them off their hinges and allow

everything out in all its sulphurous glory. We need fresh air.

Musically that's what we get from **THEO**, whose airy, soulful jazz-pop comes backed by her band's funky hip hop grooves. She's actually at her best when it's just her and her piano, allowing her smoky, mellifluous voice room to do its thing, recalling Sade and Liane Le Havas at times.

SHE DREW THE GUN might sound sweet, but their message sure ain't. Louisa Roach (today wearing a Crass t-shirt) has managed that rare thing of packaging political anger and social commentary in sunshine singalong pop songs like 'Paradise' and the band hit their peak today with a remodelled take on Frank Zappa's 'Trouble Every Day'. If we are to have a revolution with dancing, let Roach be our cheerleader.

A quick trip upstairs in the O2 finds **OLDEN YOLK** also in a poppy mood; if their name conjures images of old time America, singer Caity Shaffer compounds the image, looking like an escapee from an Amish community, while they have songs called things like 'Cotton & Cane' but for all their occasional folksy leanings, they're a pretty

straight-up and enjoyable pop band.

BESS ATWELL has a similar folk-leaning poppiness about her, possessed of a lovely dreamy voice, which is matched by Rachel Goswell of **SOFT CAVALRY**, whose electro-pop retains some of Goswell's other band Slowdive's ethereal quality but takes it into a more pastoral psych-folk place.

From here Ritual Union gets a serious groove on. **IBIBIO SOUND MACHINE** are fantastically funky – strident and heavy like The Temptations to begin with before upping the electro-funk and Afro-futurism, getting down with Isaac Hayes while Eno Williams belts it out Aretha Franklin style and the sax player threatens to lead the room astray Pied Piper-style. Anyone who keeps still throughout this has feet of clay and no soul.

Incredibly **THE COMET IS COMING** are even better. To begin with, it seems as if the comet isn't coming at all; there's a lengthy delay before they finally get started and they seem to provoke a strong reaction in at least one punter who claims to have gone to school with their saxophonist. "I'm a trumpeter," he says, "I play jazz; this isn't jazz..."

you're going to stand there and listen to this aren't you?" he moans before heading off towards south London (apparently). He's right of course, this isn't jazz, and that's why it's packed to the rafters in The Bullingdon. There's certainly links to the obvious influence of Fela Kuti and John Coltane, but there's a whole dollop of electro dancefloor nous and krautrock thrown in for good measure. It might irk the purists but if they don't have the sense to know a good thing when they hear it, that's their problem and their loss. The Comet came and it destroyed - in an entirely friendly way.

Funk of a far more laidback flavour from **PREMIUM LEISURE** who sound like they're happier to lie in bed than hit the dancefloor but has more than enough slacker charm to get away with it, particularly on 'Water Pistol' with a joyous Supergrass vibe and Ariel Pink-like carefree stoner-pop.

While **TELEMAN** provide the pop-friendly finale downstairs at the Academy, upstairs **YOUNG KNIVES** offer a far more strange and frightening end to the day. Henry and Tom Dartnall are joined tonight by Zahra Tehrani on

percussion and she's a perfect fit for their malevolently skewed music. There are moments tonight where the trio sound like they're preparing to go head to head with industrial noise pioneers SPK, so obstinately noisy are they, and for all their innate way with a glorious tune – 'Owls of Athens', 'Terra Firma' – they're determined to take this set to some place few have ever dared to journey before. It's tribal; it's funky. Sort of. It's downright oblique at points but at every single point it is just fantastic, and when you think it can't get better, they're joined on stage by the **YOUNG WOMEN'S MUSIC PROJECT** drumline, hammering out a militant tattoo that drives Ritual Union to its close and out the other side into a whole new musical universe.

It's a superb end to a fantastic day. Organiser Simon Bailey and his team have built the event up over three years to the point it's a centrepiece of the local gig calendar. And if there's a ringing in people's ears come Sunday morning it's either the dissonant leftovers from Young Knives' set or the buzz of excitement from the day that lasts well after it's packed up and gone to bed.

Dale Kattack

LIVE



ALL TAMARA'S PARTIES

The Jericho Tavern

All Tamara's Parties is back for another all-day instalment, this time bringing its inclusive vibes, 11-band bill and no-asshat policy – surely soon to be rolled out scene-wide – to the Jericho Tavern.

JOELY kicks things off with her sunny, jazz-inflected songs, swiftly followed by **GHOSTS IN THE PHOTOGRAPHS**, straightaway showing off organiser Tamara Parson-Baker's bravura programming, as Oxford's loudest drone-band follow Oxford's jazziest rising-star, but the two sets complement each other perfectly and set the mood for a diverse, quietly boundary-pushing day.

Bristol's **DRUNKEN BUTTERFLY** are immediately

impressive, their mainly waltz-time folk-tinged protest songs, acoustic-on record, are pushed by the fuzzed-out guitars first into shoegaze then Riot Grrl territory, before stripping back to a ukulele number; it's a striking, intoxicating sound. **RAINBOW RESERVOIR** songwriter Angela Space today performs intimate keyboard-only versions of her sometimes punkier pop gems. The stripped-back set-up proves the perfect platform for her inch-perfect lyrics, deliciously blending deadpan humour and understated anger: "She's a woman not a boat – for all sorts of practical reasons, you might want to know."

JEN BERKOVA's opener 'Crazy For You' is the best pop song to

THE BEVIS FROND / BIRDS OF HELL / SHOTGUN SIX

The Jericho Tavern

Local heavy psych favourites Shotgun Six deal in glassy-eyed riffing, and their main technique is to keep riffing until one of them starts hitting a big gong (not to be confused with hitting a gig bong, though this may also be relevant). For all their New York cool, what they most resemble is a 60s London blues basement band gone wild. They're effectively The Yardbirds, if the yard were a prison yard and the birds were being forced to trudge round it until they'd walked off their heroic drug intake.

"This song's set in the future. And Great Yarmouth". The epic followed by the bathetic; it's a perfect summation of Norwich's Birds Of Hell, who spend 30 minutes squeezing huge emotions into cheap synthesised pop songs, and the bulges where they won't fit make for fascinating listening. 'Spiderman's Let Himself Go' is a melancholic rant about life on minimum wage delivered over the sort of cheeky tune Moogiemann might come up with in a pensive moment, whereas 'Practice Punching My Hands, Son' is a breezy ambient wash coupled with an impassioned meditation on the complexities of masculinity that could have been penned by Idles. It ends with a tossed off gag, which suddenly defuses the tension, as does the fact the vocalist looks like Cheech Marin with

noisiness with fractious energy. The defiant lyrics to 'Get Your Hands Off Me!' are given a powerful feminist voice by lead singer Steph, backed up by a muscular rhythm section and heavily fuzzed guitar.

Baroque-poppers **DEATH OF THE MAIDEN** open with a new solo number from bandleader Tamara. Her crisp voice and sorrowful guitar speak eloquently of heartbreak and bad men, bringing tears from band and audience members alike. The mood is then transformed by the triumphant swearsy singalong 'Shut Up', a supremely sarcastic anthem to unchecked privilege.

London funk-rock outfit **WINNIE AND THE ROCKETTES** explode onto the stage, hurling the gig into a glorious retro whirlwind. Lead singer Winnie's electrifying vocals light up the room, as the band's towering guitar twang and languid running basslines ooze cool.

WOLFS play as charmingly and as goofily as their name suggests, but most importantly they write excellent powerpop songs like 'Are You Ready'; we're not sure quite what level of irony 'We Came Here To Rock' operates on, but we love it.

SELF HELP can sound pretty brutal these days, but they ease us in with the sweetness of 'Gemma', immediately demonstrating that they really are one of the city's very best – the way drummer Silke Blanjaar pulls back during the chorus is just one thrilling moment of many. 'Glucosed Face Kilah' ramps up the discord like a lot of the band's newer songs – thanks to guitarist Sean Cousin's noisy solos and barked vocal passages – but despite all the grime the humour still shines through, as do those catchy tunes.

ATP's approach could be seen as a niche thing – 'women's music', diversity for the sake of it – but really it's about looking beyond the mainstream to put on the best day of music possible.

Mike Smith & Tom Fitz-Hugh

Heidi's hairdresser. This is the sort of excellent set you want to watch again as soon as it's finished, to catch the subtleties you missed.

Less of a danger with The Bevis Frond, where one could pop to the bar, the loo and the local Co-Op, and return to find them on the same solo. For theirs is psychedelia of the Keep On Chuggin' school, exemplified by expansive blues-based rockers something like Hawkwind down the Sunday afternoon pub jam, where you might be forgiven for thinking a long solo exists to let one of them visit the carvery. Not that we're saying long-form rock and adept fretboard flightpaths are bad things, and the band does it with an affable effortlessness it's impossible to dislike, but the best moment of the set is 'He'd Be A Diamond', a lovely little folksy jangle that sounds like Richard Thompson trying to get on the 'C86' compilation. Frankly, though, a cult band like this has bought the right to do whatever they want; when was the last time you heard an act with a discography stretching back over 30 years say "we're going to do a new one" and get a rousing cheer? So chug on, dear Fronds, you've earned it.

David Murphy

THE DIVINE COMEDY

O2 Academy

It's now thirty years since the Divine Comedy formed and they've been through a lot of transformations in that time; the only constant has been Neil Hannon, though if anything defines Hannon it's unpredictability. Tonight he's true to form, and we're treated to everything from jokes and gimmicks to suave ballads, improvisation, silly costumes, and pastiches of Depeche Mode and Kraftwerk. Opener 'Europop' sets the mood: Hannon's dressed in a cherry red suit and punctuates his deadpan croon with bounces, eccentric dancing, and as much camp buffoonery as the song allows. Surprisingly, none of this seems over the top or cynical. Hannon's charisma is so egotistical and self-ironising that it's all just doubly funny: we're laughing at him and with him at the same time, and loving every minute of it.

It helps, too, that the songs are excellent. 'Generation Sex' is now thoroughly dated lyrically but still irresistibly catchy; 'Commuter Love' is a wonderful ballad; hits like 'National Express' and 'Something for the Weekend' are raucous fun. Gone are the days when Hannon could hire an entire

orchestra to support him (and it's already crowded enough in here), but the band does a great job of filling the space regardless, keeping everything tight and energetic without ever distracting from their flamboyant frontman.

There are a few misses. Hannon screws up some of the pranks, but draws such charming attention to his own mistakes that it's often funnier when he fails. Some gimmicks, though, seem to go smoothly without adding anything to the show. For instance, there's a large clock at the back of the stage whose hands get moved throughout the set but it's never clear how the time on the clock links up with the songs, and there's so much else going on that no one ever seems to find time to explain. We can choose to ignore the clock, but that's a lot harder with a misguided Kraftwerk parody called 'The Synthesiser Service Centre Super Summer Sale'. The title tells you all you need to know.

The energy drops in the second half of the set, and everything ends a bit messily but it's hard not to come away smiling all the same. Eclectic, camp, and utterly ludicrous, it's the funniest gig we've been to in ages.

Tom Kingsley

PAT THOMAS & KWASHIBU AREA

BAND / PAPA NUI

Isis Farmhouse

Bossaphonik's 15th anniversary party was always going to be a night to remember and even a biblical burst of rain hasn't put off the party faithful, determined to dance away those clouds. Much as we all miss The Cellar the Isis is probably a better venue for the monthly club night, surrounded by nature and with more room to dance.

Papa Nui are as sharply turned out as expected and realise that their ska tunes are most likely to catch the night's mood. Like so many local bands they've come a long way from tentative beginnings and they brim with a newfound confidence, their playing tighter and sharper than when last caught.

Tonight's main act should not be confused with local keyboard legend Pat Thomas, a longstanding part of the improvising scene and collaborator with, amongst many others, Hot Chip's Alexis Taylor in The About Group. This Pat is the 72-year-old, even more legendary highlife legend from Ghana, who has been busy making music since the 1960s. His moniker The Golden Voice of Africa could in truth be granted to many other worthy contenders but his music and

perseverance, leaving his homeland in 1979 for Berlin then Canada, grants him a special place in many hearts.

What makes this band so special can be put down to economy: seven players working in perfect harmony, the guitar and keyboards carrying the melody, lush harmonies, unflashy drumming and a two-piece horn section contributing beautiful little motifs that together create something nothing short of transcendent. 'Onfa Nkosi Hwee' from new album 'Obiaa!' is a fine example and a reminder that "African music" is as meaningless a phrase as "European music". In fact it's more so considering the continent's vast size. His return to a more acoustic sound after flirting with electronica has paid off in spades, a balance also achieved so well by Nigeria's King Sunny Adé in the 80s. 'Atesem' if anything works even better, with a tempo far slower than most Western dance tracks yet the darting bassline and neat, nimble horn and guitar lines make any response but dancing impossible. The packed crowd certainly aren't complaining, for this is music truly for the heart, head and feet.

Art Lagun

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The Half Moon 15th Nov - Osprey & Co. + Special Guests - 8:30pm 16th Nov - La Phooka/Doug Graynes/The Saxtons/Superloose - 8pm 17th Nov - The Sunday Social Afternoon with Tim Moy/Ady Dovey/The Unaccompanied + more - 3pm 22nd Nov - TBC 23rd Nov - Franklins Tower 24th Nov - The Sunday Social Afternoon with Sai & Tony Batay/Artisan Blues Trio /Mojo Demon/Delta Hardware/Cat Shakers - 3pm 29th Nov - Fire Gazers 30th Nov - Closing Party with Osprey & Co. + Special Guests - 8:30pm until late!	The Bullingdon 21th Nov - Aikens/The Pink Diamond Review/Make Friends/Starbelly - 7pm 26th Nov - Flintlock Rifles/Earinade/Waterfools/Sprung From Cages - 7pm 15th Dec - Xmas Special John Otway & The Big Band Celebrating 50 years of performance
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DAVID FORD

The Bullingdon

On the brink of Brexit, how better to cure our woes than to listen to David Ford sing about how shit it all is. Sadly, Ford doesn't deliver.

Perhaps equally sick of the ongoing debate the vast majority of his set sidesteps politics, which is an impressive feat given that's a large

part of his collection. Instead he draws largely from his latest album 'Animal Spirits' and whilst this explores issues of economics it does

PIP BLOM / PERSONAL TRAINER
The Bullingdon

We love it when we find a band who seem, to all intents and purposes, to be made up of spare parts of other bands and who probably shouldn't work as a unit but somehow do.

On the one hand Amsterdam's seven-strong Personal Trainer are all over the place: Mark E Smith leading a slightly wayward lounge jazz band? The Sugarcubes without Björk going krautrock? dEUS on a meltdown trip? Yes, yes and yes again. They hit a peak with some cheery chant-along cheerleader punk-pop but generally they're great, messy fun and the lanky keyboard player and trombonist is a spectacle all by himself.

Neighbours Pip Blom aren't nearly so off the wall, but manage to throw enough curveballs into their short, sharp, spiky set to keep everyone on their toes. The band is very much a family affair: singer/guitarist Pip is joined by brother Tender on guitar and occasional vocal sparring, while mum Leonieke is tour manager and minds the merch stall. Dad Erwin, meanwhile, runs Pip's social media and plays in The Eton Crop, whose gig in Oxford last year lead to tonight's visit to Divine Shism. All of which adds to the cheery, cosy vibe of Pip Blom's set, which piles on the indie-pop exuberance, just occasionally lacing it with razor blades. Songs like 'Daddy Issues' are fresh-air, off-the-leash fun: simple and just the right kind of ragged round the edges. Bassist Darek Mercks' perma-grin sums up the enjoyment the quartet seem to be having

onstage and Pip herself seems genuinely chuffed that people in a packed crowd are dancing along. There's more than a little bit of Tanya Donnelley in her sunbeam vocals, while the influence of Sleater Kinney brings a spikier edge to the band's effervescent jangle on tracks like 'Babies Are a Lie' and Pip Blom are just the latest in a line of bands bringing the simplicity, innocence and attitude back to classic indie pop.

Sue Foreman

TORD GUSTAVSEN
St John the Evangelist

Norwegian pianist Tord Gustavsen has said that Norwegian hymns are his jazz standards. This might not sound too promising but from the moment the church lights dim and he and his trio walk unobtrusively on stage and begin playing we're enveloped in ninety minutes of compelling, beautifully played, multi-layered music. Tord and his band are here thanks to adventurous programming by Oxford Chamber Music Festival, a gem of an event that regularly punches above its weight.

Much of what the trio play is based on 'The Other Side', Gustavsen's 2018 album, marking his return, after an eleven year gap, to the trio format with which he earned an international reputation and, amazingly for someone catalogued as jazz, a Number 1 in his national charts.

Like the recent album, the concert is part jazz, part hymns and chorales, part classical and part folk. On one level it's a dialogue between the chorales and Norwegian hymns that are in Gustavsen's DNA, and his other influences and his original compositions.

He starts with a probing flamenco-infused solo as a prelude to the trio's re-imagining the Bach's

so with a lot less punch than his odes to Maggie Thatcher.

While 'Why Don't You Answer Your Telephone?' shows off his skills on the loop pedal, and his cover of Don Henley's 'Boys of Summer' highlights his capacity to reimagine old songs, it all feels a bit lacklustre, as if the rage and fire of his previous work has subsided into a depressing acceptance of the state of the world. Though his closing rendition of 'State of the Union' brings back a taste of the anger and pure emotion that normally carries a Ford show, even this feels somewhat less than normal, as if he has simply given up the fight.

Elsewhere 'O'Sullivan's Jukebox' shows off Ford's talent on the ivories and in writing rhyming couplets and 'Ballad of Miss Lily' shows why, in my opinion, he's one of the finest guitar players this country has produced. Nevertheless it still seems to all hang in the air, lacking any decisive direction. At a point then when it feels like there is to be comfort from the current state of political unrest in a stranger and a song, instead we're left wanting and longing for a decision which never seems to come.

Lisa Ford

chorale 'O Traurigkeit' that becomes a rolling gospel blues driven on by Gustavsen's left hand. It's music of longing and despair in startling juxtaposition with another music of longing and despair

This is only one of many twists. When Gustavsen plays loud he is surprisingly loud; when he feeds in electronics it's high pitched distortion not discreet background; when he plays Rachmaninov-style chords, somehow he's playing those blues as well, and also he leads the trio off briefly into free jazz territory. This adds an edginess and struggle that both contrasts with and enhances the recurring, often pensive Nordic lyricism, one passage of which is the most tender piece of music we've heard all year. Gustavsen's pianism constantly merges intellect and superb technique with heart and soul; the other members of the trio are cut from the similar cloth. The soft power of long-time collaborator Jarle Vesperstand's bass drum and the textures he creates with soft mallets on cymbals are intrinsic to Gustav's sound. Double bassist Ellen Brekken, a substitute for the ill Sigurd Hole, joins in with haunting drones and echoes of Norway's national instrument, the hardanger fiddle, and as she gains in confidence the trio's ensemble playing becomes ever more intense.

In between Bach chorales they play mainly Gustavsen originals without break and with one number merging into the next this becomes a single rich mosaic of melodies, textures, dynamics, and atmosphere that seem to leave even Gustavsen a little disorientated.

For a final encore he plays a solo lullaby, which is just what is needed. It's been an immensely intimate and profound show in which Gustavsen has dazzled in a self effacing Scandi way while exposing his musical soul. Magnificent.

Colin May

JOHN / MILO'S PLANES

The Wheatsheaf

Why have one drumkit when you can have one and a half? Bristolian four-piece Milo's Plane fly out of the gate with jagged staccato riffs, jumpy time changes and relentless hardcore energy. As the set progresses what becomes striking is the endless variation of style, tone, and even genre within every song. Classic walking bass lines shift to bursts of grindcore and then on to intricate math guitar lines. The highlight of the set is when everything drops out to mournful ambient emptiness punctuated with tortured prepared guitar, only for the band to explode with noise and throw us through the back wall like an old Maxell tape advert.

Headliners tonight are two blokes called John who make up a band called John, and John and John who together are John make a sublime noise. The riffs are catchy but without trying too hard and John's drums are powerful and energetic in just the right way. John's aggressive *sprechgesang* vocals evoke Jamie Lehman in his Reuben days and the humongous riffing takes on a Pigs x7-like powerhouse feel; it's just an incredibly dense sound to be made by just two people (named John).

It would be all too easy for this kind of noise punk to feel chaotic but every song is finely honed and trimmed of everything extraneous and despite the barked vocals and recent touring with Idles, it doesn't feel aggressive; instead they are welcoming and enthusiastic. The audience aren't tearing the place apart as John and John might be used to – this is Oxford on a Wednesday after all – but there's an unavoidable positivity in the air. Rebellious music doesn't need to be angry, apparently.

Matt Chapman Jones

GRACE PETRIE

St. John the Evangelist

When themes of welfare, workfare, and walls nestle within your setlist, it would be easy for the night to become a sombre affair, but in the space of 90 minutes Grace Petrie manages to take us on a journey that contains rage, mourning, laughter and hope in equal measures.

For most, it's probably hard to think up a song about zero hours contracts but it's apparently not that hard for Petrie, who also manages to take it a step further, ensuring the crowd are hollering "monkeys" and "nowt" at the tops of their voices in the chorus of 'You Pay Peanuts You Get Monkeys (You Pay Nothing You Get Nowt)'. Elsewhere she ensures the snowflakes are causing an avalanche and adds in a few pops at Trump for good measure.

While it's easy, then, to fathom Petrie's political leanings she manages to deliver them in a way that creates a sense of urgency and humour in equal measures. Suffice to say if Petrie is leading the next protest march it's will be done with a degree of wry irony and laughter. Nevertheless it's not all politics and 'Ivy' is a touching ode to her niece and 'Nobody Knows That I'm A Fraud' speaks to the imposter syndrome that I expect many in Oxford feel is all too familiar.

It's 'Black Tie', however, that unsurprisingly captures the crowd, with almost every single person here singing along. The song, which speaks of the issues facing those of us from LGBTQ+ communities, has clearly increased her fanbase ten-fold, moving her from the much smaller Old Fires Station to a sold out St John the Evangelist in the space of a year, and rightly so. Anyone who can wrap the line "and the images that fucked ya, were a patriarchal structure" into a song about how it feels to grow up as a lesbian women deserves every ounce of success she's gained.

Lisa Ford

RICHARD HAWLEY

O2 Academy

"Dumbo could only fly if he was holding his feather," deadpans Richard Hawley a couple of songs into tonight's sold out show, "and I need to see my lyrics, cos I took a fuck load of acid in the 80s and can't remember anything now, so can we have the fans turned off onstage please."

Hawley's been slightly derailed by those fans blowing his lyric sheets away and is dealing with it in the dry, droll humour that infuses his show and is as much a part of the man as his wonderfully rich, rough-hewn croon, one that brings a dashing sense of romance to even the most down at heel backstreet soap opera.

Hawley's last visit to Oxford was in the more elegant setting of The New Theatre but tonight's show reflects the rather more rock and roll spirit of his recent songs, like set opener 'Off My Mind', a driving slab of gothic rock that's could be a prime Mark Lanegan cut. Similarly 'Standing At the Sky's Edge', slower, more considered, almost a ballad, but infused with desert blues rawness.

A lightness of touch comes with the sprightly 'I'm Looking For Someone To Find Me', Hawley channelling his young Elvis, but even by his high standards he takes things to another level with 'Tonight, The Streets Are Ours', just glorious in its sweep and scope, but matched by the sweet, symphonic 'Cole's Corner', the pavements and streets of Sheffield never sounding more beautiful.

There are odd moments across the ninety minutes where he dips into slightly too cosy balladry, but mostly this is a reminder of one of the finest voices in modern music, an heir to Scott Walker and Sinatra but with a bit of Yorkshire grit rubbed into its skin. "I hope the lyrics to this next song come true," announces Hawley at one point. "It's called 'I won a million pounds'". Of course it isn't and Hawley doesn't need to win that sum of money: he's already worth his weight in gold.

Sue Foreman

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CURSE OF LONO

The Jericho Tavern

Like support act John Murry, Curse of Lono are very much at the gravelly, gothic end of country's broad spectrum. Maybe it's the British weather, but while the quintet are rooted in American roots music, they're less wide open highways, more the dark streets of their native London.

Frontman Felix Bechtolsheimer has a weather-beaten growl of a voice that betrays issues from an earlier musical life and this brings a rawness to his band's mix of bluesy country rock, r'n'b and barroom honky tonk. Early on there's a heavy hint of The Doors' 'Riders on the Storm' in the mood of the appropriately titled 'London Rain' and even the heartier boogie numbers only let a certain amount of light in, with lyrics about red wine and popping pills. "This is a happy song about murderous jealousy," Felix announces at one point. 'I'd Start a War For You' is another early highlight, a rumbling, bluesy road trip that's a love song to his wife, and for all the darkness in the music and lyrics – with Bechtolsheimer touching on the addiction in his past while introducing the band's oldest number – there's a warmth about

his writing that brings comfort even in the murk and the mire.

This certainly isn't a downbeat show. Roger Daltry lookalike guitarist Joe Hazell is happy to fly off on wild rock solos that lift songs to almost stadium level, while bassist and occasional singer Charis Anderson ("she could drink everyone here under the table," announces Felix cheerily) is smiling way too much for her not to be having fun up there, but Curse of Lono are at their best when they're at their most reflective, as on 'Don't Look Down'. A cover of The Rolling Stones' 'Dead Flowers' ups the mood, at least musically, a roustabout honky tonk finale where they're joined by Murry, and the band prove the old adage that you can be happy when you're sad. "Going out West where they appreciate me" chant the band in unison at one point, a nod to the fact they fit in better on the other side of the Atlantic, but their steadily rising popularity in the UK, confirmed with winning the Bob Harris Emerging Talent prize at the UK Americana Awards, suggests Curse of Lono are going to have plenty more to smile about in the future.

Dale Kattack

ACID MOTHER'S TEMPLE AND THE MELTING PARAIISO UFO / FLIGHTS OF HELIOS

The Bullingdon

Acid Mother's Temple are an established Japanese psychedelic band stopping through Oxford for their European Tour. Before they were due to perform, the five-piece are scattered about the venue with an noticeably out-of-town presence – probably all those vibrant jumpsuits and kaftans – wading through the audience like patchouli.

Flights of Helios set the mood with their thumping and rolling beats, softly guiding us through slippery, double-time grooves. Melodic, approachable and dressed to the nines with guitar effects, we couldn't help but notice the obsession of the lo-fi megaphone aesthetic within the psychedelic scene. Then, Acid Mother's Temple fully make their presence known. The room is suddenly cut with screeches of synthetic wails that suspend us within discomfort and intrigue. Out of this wall of sound, the recognisable tones of guitar emerge into a slow trance that echoes with the babbling of high-pitched alien conversations.

At first, their approach to psychedelia appears decidedly old-school, the mid-century charm with sound effects reminiscent of *Star Trek*, but the tone soon takes a darker route as lead singer Jyonson

Tsu belts out beautiful tongues that mirror the lyrical techniques of Kikagaku Moyo. They break into intense, impressive drum patterns, courtesy of Satoshima Nani, the energy of which sends the gig into orbit.

What makes Acid Mothers Temple stand out is their stretch into accessible genres which prevents them from being trapped within the same audience, a fate many psychedelic bands suffer and tonight's set borders on a house club night at times. The band's control over the audience and transitions seam together the chaotic soundscape, clearly displaying their experience and skill amassed since their conception in 1995. Soon though, the intervals between high and low energy became scarce and any sign of change is shown to be a ruse. It becomes clear that they might have run out of tricks too soon, leaving us with high expectations that can't be delivered toward the end.

For all that, this is an exciting and energetic event from seasoned musicians. Will it evolve further? Considering their 24-year history, probably not if this is what is consistently delivered.
Ziggy Jinda

VANISHING TWIN / DESPICABLE ZEE

Deaf & Hard of Hearing Centre

Zahra Tehrani's Despicable Zee project increasingly proves she's one of the most inventive beatmakers around, mixing live drumming with loops, samples and electronics, all with a queasily lopsided vibe that marks her out as Oxford's very own Gazelle Twin. Although Vanishing Twin are clearly influenced by the likes of Stereolab, Silver Apples and The United States of America (the 60s band, not the shit show across the Atlantic), there is an important difference that sets them apart. While the aforementioned bands wear their electronica on their sleeves, Vanishing Twin's sound is more organic. The technological aspects of their music merge with a distinctly human element.

The above is apparent from tonight's setting: at the back of the stage hangs a wide image of canopies of trees, and singer Cathy Lucas herself is dressed in a black-

and-white panther jumpsuit. But the music, too, sounds as nature: synthesiser notes emulate the trickle of rain; the ticking of the drums feels like the brushing of bushes; guitar chords are shrieking birds, and Lucas' voice itself is a human being finding its way through this jungle.

It is easy to get lost in Vanishing Twin's music. Some of the longer tracks they play tonight seem to lead nowhere in particular, urging us to enjoy them in the present. As a result, the band occasionally verges into the more boring territory; they're at their best with their more melodious songs, such as 'Choose Your Own Adventure'.

Vanishing Twin have carved out a unique sound for themselves, both experimental-electronic and appealing to the ear. It is a pleasure to witness their magic tonight and escape into their self-created forests.

Caspar Jacobs

THYLA / OCEAN RUINS / APHRA TAYLOR

The Jericho Tavern

Just 17 years old, if Aphra Taylor's nerves are occasionally evident tonight, she's very much an emerging talent: from her opening drum-machine-driven number, 'I Thought You Wouldn't Be There', she mixes the intimacy and melody of folk with the slacker scuzz of grunge. Her emotive confessional lyrics work even better on the more introspective 'Red' with its neat "I want to go back to those days" sense of longing, and if a couple of numbers feel hesitant and unfinished, set closer 'It Doesn't Slow Down' is a wonderfully sparse piece that recalls kd lang or Cat Power's earliest outings. A few days later she enchants a packed Library as part of Ritual Union, already sounding more confident.

Nothing sparse or intimate about Berkshire's Ocean Ruins: theirs is a powerful bridge between shoegaze and stadium rock, the centrepiece of which is singer Kate Herridge's piledriving voice; Cher's strident soul laced with a Tanya Donnelly-like quaver that lifts songs like 'Jenny's Ghost' and 'Broken Toys' to almost stately

heights and has seen her guesting with Tiger Mendoza recently. They ride a tight line between almost gothic moodiness and outright rock bombast, but for the most part keep their focus and sound like they're born to perform on bigger stages than this.

Brighton's Thyla have a similarly stratospheric sound about them, kicking out a driving powerhouse spangle where epic meets ethereal and achieving an almost elegant musical turbulence. Millie Duthie has a voice that can switch from mellifluous and delicate to intense and questing but always cut-glass clear and combined with the band's sky-searching shimmer and occasional delve into something almost dancey, reminds us of Pumarosa or even early-90s John Peel faves Bang Bang Machine. Perhaps some of the subtleties that have seen them compared to Cocteau Twins are lost in a live setting, but The Jericho Tavern's new PA brings out Thyla's sheer power and it's all too easy to be swept away in its onward rush.
Ian Chesterton

DUMB

The Wheatsheaf

Post-punk is having a moment; it's easy to drown in the relentless wave of new bands popping up in the genre. Oxford has seen many of the more high-profile names pass through its venues in the past year: Shame, Fontaines DC, The Murder Capital. Dumb represent the other side of the pond, hailing from the rainy streets of Vancouver.

At the Wheatsheaf, they show that they belong up there with the big dogs. In some ways, they mirror their North Atlantic contemporaries Parquet Courts and Pavement, with the scrappy, DIY ethos and dry humour. In others, they channel the angularity of A Certain Ratio. Whatever the influences, they manage to reconcile blistering punk energy with an extensive musical education (contrary to what their name might suggest), seamlessly incorporating elements of noise rock and shoegaze into their own distinctive sound.

Tonight marks the penultimate stop of a UK tour in support of their latest album 'Club Nites', released in June of this year, the latest offering in an unstoppable onslaught of releases since they formed in the mid-10s. The

creative energy is matched in their live performance. They hurtle through their repertoire, never slowing down, never staying in one place longer than they need to. They're a band that work hard and play hard, with a dogged work ethic balanced by a mischievous flare. Dumb's lyrics show its subjects no mercy: "Why are you talking so much? Put your head in a bag, dude," Rossino shouts on 'My Condolences', like a 90s movie high-school jock.

In this sense, the Wheatsheaf is made for them, although they deserve to fill out larger venues. With no-frills staging, beers on tap and a casual atmosphere, their character is displayed: snarky, but undeniably likeable.

Charlotte Banks

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TRACKS

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TOP TRACKS

EB

Pronounced Ee-bee rather than Ebb we think, EB (real name Emily Beth) is an artists who lives in Oxford and California (we nearly said between Oxford and California, though that would place her in the middle of the Atlantic and there's not much of a music scene there so far as we know) and has been picked up by the good people at Beanie Tapes. This debut offering is a peach. A strange, slightly misshaped peach but indisputably sweet. From its alarm clock and whistling intro, through to the vocal loops and synth hums and strange, almost childlike musical tinketry, it's a somnambulating, slightly trippy slice of inventive home-baked electronica over which EB half speaks, half raps stuff about "quitting my job" and "drinking la criox with my boy" that could be a playful kid sister to Kate Nash or Kate Tempest. With any luck she'll be spending more time on this side of the Pond: this is exactly the kind of quirky musical invention we can always do with more of in Oxford.

ELOQUENT YOUTH

Much as we've learned not to leave a football match until the final whistle, because you just never know what your team might pull out of the bag, we've learned that a bad start to a demo doesn't necessarily mean all is lost. Obviously if you're 5-0 down in injury time you'd be excused for making a quick getaway to avoid the post-match traffic and if you've just sat through twenty minutes of cliché-riddled sub-Arctic Monkeys bilge, that off switch is all too tempting, but Eloquent Youth here are evidence that good things are worth waiting for. Early offerings like 'Ordinary Dreams' aren't so bad really, but tend towards the Wet Wet Wet school of polished soulful pop, or, with the sparse arrangements and slightly yearning vocals, The Beautiful South: all well crafted but slightly stuck in a Radio 2-friendly rut where safety is key. But as the EP progresses, you hear snatches of hope and a desire to stretch barriers a little appears – marching snares, whistling, handclaps, close harmony singing, a folkier edge creeping and by the end they've fully

Track of the Month wins a free remix from Soundworks studio in Oxford, courtesy of Umair Chaudhry. Visit www.umairchaudhry.co.uk/nightshift

blossomed into a hushed, breathless Low Anthem-like reverie with 'The More I Know'. 2-0 down at half time, Eloquent Youth quietly change formation and net a last-minute winner. It's not over til the skinny guys sing, or something.

OUTER BLUE

From sedate, polished sweetness with Eloquent to rather scrappier sounds from Witney's no less sweet Outer Blue, whose slightly messy indie punk totters rather than rampages along, held aloft by a determination to stay upright and on the straight and narrow and in doing so sounding a bit like Self Help's baby brother wearing a pair of shoes three sizes too big on 'Hurricane Lorraine'. You kind of wish they'd pick up a bit of speed but 'Whites Of Her Eyes' lacks its predecessor's scrappy belligerent charm, a bit of a plod despite a neat strung-out lead guitar line. Thankfully they beef things up significantly for their final push, 'China Rose', whose big, hook-laden stadium rock sound is only slightly tempered by the feeling it's just crash landed from 1986. Bit of a mixed bag all things considered, but if we're going to advise Outer Blue which bits to pick out of the bag and use in future, we'd say scrappy punk fun every time.

JEREMY JOHNSON

Talking of big stadium sounds with a vaguely 80s vibe, Jeremy Johnson here sounds a bit like he's trying to be a one-man U2 at times on his song 'Runaway Train'. If the title has more than a hint of Springsteen about it, that's not too far off the mark either, though vocally Jeremy's more of a crooner, with a limpid, questing voice that adds a soft-hearted warmth to his epic ballad. If the kitchen-sink production makes the song feel a tad over-egged towards the end, it can't detract too much from its innate charm. A quick glance at the singer's bio sees him claiming "My earliest memories of music are of being sung to sleep by my mum. I don't remember the songs, I just remember feeling warm, content and loved." And with no little skill, Jeremy seems to have captured that soothing warmth in his own songs.

RAT FACE LEWEY

Rat Face Lewey love Nirvana and Blink 182. We know this because... well because it's completely fucking obvious. To the point they might as well have

called themselves Blink Faced Cobain or something. Still, nowt wrong with wearing your influences stapled to your sleeves, chest, face and backside, so long as you've got the chops to carry them off. We guess this ticks a fair few people's boxes as to what constitutes a good time, as the trio thrash and chunder through a chest-beating grunge/pop-punk anthem alongside a video of them cutting shapes in a suitably cramped gig space intercut with some skateboarding acrobatics and it sounds exactly like you imagine it will. Like every other middle-of-the-bill band at Reading Festival between the mid 90s and mid Noughties. Or possibly, dunno, Stiltskin? An alt.rock ready meal for mass consumption. Can we go and listen to EB again please?

BE STILL

If Rat Face Lewey want some tips on taking standard American alt.rock influences and bringing them to life, they'd do worse than drop Be Still a line. Their 'Fairground' alone has more individuality and life about it than many notionally grunge bands manage in a lifetime, a rambunctious mosh-starter that touches on bases as unexpected as New Model Army and Dead Kennedys while at its core staying true to its Weezer/Green Day/Nirvana roots. If the band fair less well on the more restrained 'No Sacrifices', with its slightly formulaic quiet bits/loud bits dynamic, 'Five Stop Drop' is bolshy and angular while 'Radio Silence' is sneerily, snottily cheery as it bashes and thrashes through its succinct three minutes. It's not rocket science this noisy bastard band stuff, but still some bands get it far righter than others.

MEGASLOTH

With a name like Megasloth and a strapline about coming back from the Pleistocene era, we really thought this lot would be some ageless, granite-carved stoner-blues band. We certainly never expected some wafy, slightly drama-laden synth-pop that sounds like it's apparated in from sometime around 1982, possibly riding piggyback on a New Romantic showpony, but there you go: even after all these years we continue to be surprised. And pleasantly so. The early 80s might as well be the Pleistocene as far as people born in the 1990s go, but there's something a bit debonair about flouncy pirate shirts, too much eyeliner and self-consciously longing vocals. So we're not going to be shoving them back whence they came for now, though the name will have to go. How about something more appropriate, like Future Unicorns, or

Lufthansa Terminal. Anyone who gets that latter reference will hopefully enjoy this demo.

CHRIS KEYS

Chris Keys' solitary song here is called 'Rest Your Head' and by the time it's finished *Nightshift* is resting its head on the desk and sobbing gently, contemplating what we might have done with the four and a half minutes we will never, ever get back. Make a cup of weak, sugary tea perhaps, which would at least be in keeping with the song in hand. It's a strained, overly earnest acoustic ballad that takes an awful long time to say virtually nothing beyond a few trite inspirational/romantic clichés, each line stretched like a slightly perished elastic band and delivered in a cracked voice somewhere between a mumble and a croak. It's described as "a mix of folk, Americana and blues with a groovy upbeat feelgood vibe." In reality it sounds like Stereophonics' Kelly Jones with a hangover and writers block.

TOILET TRACKS

JAPOR

Occasionally the only response we can offer to someone's music is, WTF? Japor claims to be a band but seems to be one bloke who has obviously spent about ten thousand more hours constructing his website than he has creating what he's attempting pass off as music. Music he describes as "amazing" but which would be more accurately described as "not music". There is experimentation and then there is arsing about without a shadow of a hint of a semblance of any idea of what you're doing. Three tracks here described as "guitar instrumental" or "guitar and drum instrumental" that are nothing more, nothing less than haphazard idle noodling on a detuned instrument and recorded on the cheapest cassette deck available on ebay. Seriously, we like odd. We like weird. We love odd and weird. But this isn't anything. It's the sound of a confused, slightly addled alien picking up a guitar and working out what the hell it might be, like the invading Martian in *War of the Worlds* puzzling over a bicycle wheel in Tom Cruise's basement. The only thing preventing us from thinking this is a joke is that the guy's obviously spent some time making his website and all the videos on it. We can only imagine what else he could have spent doing with that time. Repeatedly punching himself in the face perhaps. It would at least have been a bit more musical.

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Fri 18th Oct • 6.30pm
Amber Run
 + Stereo Honey

Fri 18th Oct • 11pm
The Abba Party | Live Tribute

Fri 18th Oct • 6.30pm
Ferocious Dog
 + Jess Silk + Paul Henshaw

Sat 19th Oct • 12pm
Ritual Union
 ft She Drew The Gun, Psychedelic Porn Crumpets, Bo Ningen, Another Sky, Do Nothing, Febueder, Candy Says, Max Blansjaar, Julia Meijer, Knobblehead, Lee Riley

Tue 22nd Oct
Barns Courtney

Tue 22nd Oct
Striking Matches
 + Tenille Townes + Dolly Mavies

Wed 23rd Oct • 6.30pm
The Fallen State
 + The Cruel Knives + Broken Empire + New Depth

Thur 24th Oct
Headie One

Fri 25th Oct • 6.30pm
Jake Clemons
 + Ben McKelvey + Danny Mellin

Sat 26th Oct • 4pm
Oxtoberfest

Sat 26th Oct • 6.30pm
Guns 2 Roses
 + MOTLEY CRUED

Sat 26th Oct • 11pm
Switch presents: Dimension

Mon 28th Oct
Inglorious
 + Mercutio

Tue 29th Oct
Friendly Fires

Thur 31th Oct • 10pm
Halloween Special ft Skepsis

Fri 1st Nov • 11pm
NOCHE DE TRAVESURAS - DIA DE LOS MUERTOS

Sat 2nd Nov • 6.30pm
The Dualers
 + Kioko + Count Skylarkin + Tony Nanton

Sun 3rd Nov
Bear's Den

Sun 3rd Nov
Everyone You Know
 + Shortwave + T.J Flint & The Backbone

Mon 4th Nov • SOLD OUT
Feeder
 + Nova Club

Tue 5th Nov
Reel Big Fish
 + [spunge] + Lightyear

Tue 5th Nov
Hang Massive

Thur 7th Nov
Deaf Havana
 + Anavae + Howard Kaye

Thur 7th Nov
Little Comets
 + Stay Lunar + Kiama

Fri 8th Nov • 9pm
The Roaring 2.0s
 + The Electro Swing Circus + Dutty Moonshine Dj Set + The Jack Calloway dance band

Sat 9th Nov • 6.30pm • SOLD OUT
Snarky Puppy
 + Charlie Hunter + Lucy Woodward

Sat 9th Nov • 6.30pm
Dr Syntax & Pete Cannon

Sat 9th Nov • 11pm
Switch presents: Sammy Virji - Like A Virjin Tour

Mon 11th Nov
Elder Island

Tue 12th Nov
Yonaka

Wed 13th Nov • 6.30pm
Mystery Skulls

Thur 14th Nov
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Fri 15th Nov • 6.30pm
The Treatment
 + Airrace + Lake Acacia

Fri 15th Nov • 11pm
Silent Disco Oxford - Bigger & Bolder!

Fri 15th Nov • 11pm
Black Parade - 00's Emo Anthems

Sat 16th Nov • 6.30pm
Dub Pistols
 + ZAIA + Zen Lewis

Sat 16th Nov • 6.30pm
Professor Green

Sat 16th Nov • 11pm
Switch presents: Hybrid Minds

Sun 17th Nov
Black Water County
 + The Lagan

Mon 18th Nov
Scouting for Girls
 + The Dunwells

Tue 19th Nov
Primal Scream

Thur 21st Nov
A
 + '68 + False Heads

Fri 22nd Nov • 6.30pm
Half Man Half Biscuit

Fri 22nd Nov • 11pm
The Craig Charles Funk & Soul Club
 + Brasc0 + Tony Nanton + Count Skylarkin

Sat 23rd Nov • 6.30pm
Bingo Lingo

Sat 23rd Nov • 6.30pm
Biffy McClyro (Tribute)

Sat 23rd Nov • 11pm
Switch presents: Jungle Cakes

Tue 26th Nov • SOLD OUT
Fontaines D.C.

Wed 27th Nov • 6pm
Ally Pally Oxford Uni Darts

Wed 27th Nov • 6.30pm
Electric Six

Thur 28th Nov
Happy Mondays - Greatest Hits Tour
 + Jon Dasilva

Thur 28th Nov
Rhys Lewis

Fri 29th Nov • 6pm
Ally Pally Oxford Brookes Uni Darts

Fri 29th Nov • 6.30pm
Mad Dog Mcrea
 + Flats & Sharps

Sat 30th Nov • 6.30pm
Definitely Mightbe (Oasis tribute)

Sat 30th Nov • 6.30pm
Airbourne
 + Tyler Bryant & The Shakedown

Satu 30th Nov • 11pm
Switch presents: Kanine / Darkzy / Window Kid / Indika / Lazcru

Sun 1st Dec
The Chats

Thur 5th Dec
Carols at O2 Academy Oxford

Thur 5th Dec
The High Contrast Band

Fri 6th Dec • 6.30pm
Pearl Jam UK
 + Eddie Vedder Solo Tribute

Fri 6th Dec • 6.30pm
Gentleman's Dub Club

Sat 7th Dec • 6.30pm
Absolute Bowie - Legacy Tour

Wed 11th Dec • 6.30pm
The Quireboys

Fri 13th Dec • 6.30pm
Razorlight

Sat 14th Dec • 6.30pm
Little Simz

Sat 14th Dec
Rhymeskeemz Live - The Christmas Party

Sun 15th Dec
A Gospel Christmas With John Fisher & IDMC Gospel Choir

Sat 21st Dec • 6.30pm
Little Brother Eli - Christmas Party

Tue 11th Feb 2020
Miz Cracker's American Woman

Fri 28th Feb 2020 • 6.30pm
Vex Red

Thur 5th Mar 2020
The Aristocrats

Wed 11th Mar 2020 • 6.30pm
The Calling

Fri 13th Mar 2020 • 6.30pm
The SUPERSONIC 70s SHOW

Thur 19th Mar 2020
Lee Scratch Perry

Fri 20th Mar 2020 • 6.30pm
The Cat Empire

Wed 25th Mar 2020 • 6.30pm
Plain White T's
 + Harry Marshall

Fri 17th Apr 2020 • 6.30pm
Goldie Lookin Chain

Sat 18th Apr 2020 • 6.30pm
Fell Out Boy & The Black Charade
 + We Aren't Paramore

Sat 25th Apr 2020 • 11pm
King Shine Vs Empire

Fri 11th Sep 2020 • 6.30pm
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