

Articles A-Z (by band)

Arabrot Interview 27/10/2011

Norwegian necromantic/noise rockers Arabrot performed at the Shacklewell Arms on Halloween, as part of their European tour to promote their latest album, 'Solar Anus'.

Pennyblackmusic caught up with band members Kjetil Nernes and Vidar Evensen before the show.

PB: For anyone in the UK not familiar with what you do, can you introduce yourself and tell us a little about your music?

KN: We are called Arabrot and we are a Norwegian noise rock act. We've been going for ten years this year. We're a touring band and we've released five albums. We're touring at the moment to promote our latest, 'Solar Anus'. Critically it's gone down very well.

PB: Do you prefer touring or being in the studio?

KN: Those two worlds are so different – it's very hard to compare them. For me personally and artistically the most important thing is to produce something. Create some art, whatever. Your mission is to put stuff out there. I'm comfortable with touring – I enjoy it very much. But like I said before, it's very hard to compare the two aspects as they are the opposite of each other.

PB: Critics have claimed that 'Solar Anus' is your best album yet. Would you agree?

KN: Yes I do. Absolutely. All our albums so far have culminated towards what is 'Solar Anus'. We've properly found the soul and the shape of Arabrot now.

PB: 'Solar Anus' was produced by Steve Albini. How did you find working with him?

KN: He's an interesting fellow, a real character to be around. It was great working with him. It was hard at times and some people find him hard to work with, but we enjoyed it.

PB: Was he difficult at times?

VE: No, as long as you know what you have to do. He has a certain way of recording – as long as you know what you're supposed to be doing when you're in the studio he's great. We liked him.

PB: To what extent did he influence the influence the sound of the album?

KN: It's us making the music. We wrote it and played the music – the ideas were ours. He didn't shape the sound of the album but we had that already. We were there to make some music and he was there to record the album.

VE: He has his job. He is professional, like a mechanic. He captured it really well and he was fun to work with.

PB: The lyrics on 'Solar Anus' are really very intelligent. People might not be expecting that from a noise rock band. Can you tell us about some of the themes of the album?

KN: Well first of all, thank you. There are a lot of different themes in there, representing the high and the low. I'm really into the duality of the world – heaven at one extreme, and then the seedy filth at the bottom.

I was very influenced by the French writer and philosopher Georges Bataille. It's not a concept album by any means, but there are many themes and jokes in there. I picked up a lot of references from art and literature, and they're all in there to be found!

PB: Do you worry that people might be put off by the title of the album?

KN: To be honest, we're not worried about those kinds of people. In Germany occasionally people don't get it, but here in the UK people always do. It's almost like a little joke we're having. And usually people get it.

The first track is called 'Solar Anus' which is from Georges Bataille. The second track is called 'And The Ass Had Spoken' which is actually from the Bible, and so it goes on through the album.

VE: If anyone was offended by it, or thought we are some kind of joke act – that’s their problem, not ours.

PB: The music on 'Solar Anus' sounds very rich and densely layered. Is that sound difficult to reproduce on stage as a two-piece?

KN: No, not at all. It’s very simple what we do. It’s not hard to do live. That was the whole point of doing the album this way really. There is no bass on there, just baritone guitar and drums. We get other people in to help if we need them.

PB: Do you work better as a duo?

KN: We’ve been together for ten years now. We get on well together.

VE: Yeah, we get on well together, work well together – and that’s where the creativity comes from. Bouncing ideas off each other.

PB: Were you happy to be nominated for the Norwegian Grammy in 2009?

KN: I thought it was great! It felt like kind of a joke in a way. Very unexpected.

I never thought of myself as a “metal guy” before, but I was happy about it.

PB: How has the tour been going?

KN: It has been going fairly well, I'd say. We've had a great time with Dethscalator, who are supporting us. There've been ups and downs, but that's always how it goes. Turnout-wise it's been really good. It's really busy here tonight – I'm looking forward to the show.

PB: And finally, what's next for Arabrot?

KN: Right now, we're concentrating on the tour – working hard to promote the album that is out.

We've recorded a very special EP that will be coming out. It's very different from anything we've done before.

PB: Special in what way?

KN: It sounds a lot like Arabrot, without sounding like Arabrot at the same time. Or even the other way round!

PB: When is it coming out?

KN: Within the next half-year hopefully. For the next half-year we'll be touring, then bringing out the EP.

We'll probably start working on some new songs soon for another album. We like getting in the studio.

PB: Will you be working with Steve Albini again for the next album?

KN. Yes. This time round we've figured out how things work with him. We tried a few things out, played with ideas, and I'm pretty confident already how I want the next album to be, sound-wise. So we've got it all figured!

The last album 'Revenge' was very different. And then we made the latest album 'Solar Anus' and we're very proud of it!

PB: Thank you.

Arabrot Shacklewell Arms, London, 31/10/2011

Halloween 2011. The venue: Shacklewell Arms, East London. I'm here to see Norwegian noise rockers, Arabrot, play the only UK show of their European tour. This is the final show before they fly back to Norway to recuperate, before the touring continues.

The venue feels like the archetypal East End boozer; old-fashioned and a little bit seedy. Tonight the place is full of metallers.

There are three acts on the bill; along with Arabrot are Dethscalator, who have supported them across the whole tour, and Vile Imbeciles.

The night kicks off with Dethscalator, who produce some heavy grinding sounds and are very noisy indeed. Their set is short but pumped, and they manage to get the crowd moshing from the outset.

Next up are Vile Imbeciles, complete with trendy haircuts and tight jeans - my first reaction is that they are there to cater to the teenage girl section of the audience. I'm grateful to say that my assumptions are unfounded, as they make some heavy and energetic music and play a tight enthusiastic set, at times jumping from the stage and strutting through the audience. This feels like more than mere rock posturing or style over substance, however; the band appear to be really enjoying themselves and getting into their music. I'd definitely like to see both support acts play longer shows in the future.

The band everyone has come to see are Arabrot, however. They are on at 10:30 and by that time the small venue is packed and buzzing. Who would have thought that the hotbed of Norwegian Necromantic music would happen to be in Dalston?

Their stage presence is striking; aggressive and dominant. The show kicks off with 'Solar Anus' - the title track from their latest album. The guitars are heavy, the drums pound and front man, Kjetil Nernes, is snarling and charismatic in equal measure. Normally a duo, they have drafted in a bass player tonight, and he does his job well. The addition of bass (missing on the actual album) makes the music sound more layered and dense, and adds

to the brutal attack of the senses handed out by the band on stage. I can't think of a better sobriquet for this than "noise rock" - and I really do mean that in a positive way.

From here the songs blend together into a wall of ferocious, scary sound, and I lose track of how many they play, or indeed what they play. If Dethscalator have been a noisy opener, Arabrot certainly crank it up to 11.

A great gig to accompany a great new album. I can't think of a better way to spend Halloween.

Be Open Sound Portal London, 22/10/2012

From the 19th to the 23rd September 2012 Trafalgar Square played host to BE OPEN Sound Portal as part of the tenth anniversary of the London Design Festival. This sound installation's main focus was on "the design that you can't see - that of acoustics and sound - rather than visual spectacle, and featured musicians such as Jana Winderen, Tom Jenkinson (Squarepusher) and Ivan Pavlov.

I attended the event on the Thursday evening, where Nathaniel Robin Mann had been commissioned to exhibit, not really knowing what to expect...

Nathaniel Robin Mann is an artist, performer and composer,

specialising in ambisonic recording techniques. Currently artist in residence at The Pitt Rivers Museum and Oxford Contemporary Music and winner of the Grand Prix Award at the 11th Cairo Arts Biennial in 2008, Mann can be found playing with the avant-folk group Dead Rat Orchestra in addition to his solo work. He has also coordinated projects for many leading international artists such as Adam Lowe, Anish Kapoor, Dionisio Gonzalez and Marc Quinn.

Firstly, a confession - I wasn't there as a budding music journalist, eager to report on this exciting musical experiment; I was there on a date. Furthermore, I had no idea about the true nature of what I was about to experience. I had merely scoured through 'Time Out' looking for bands in central London that night. In short, I was expecting live music - for free!

As we approached "the venue" on a cold wet September evening my hopes of rocking out were quickly dashed. The place was tiny and appeared to be coated in shiny black rubber. Worryingly, it was also unnervingly silent. If we pressed our ears against the odd rubber-lined walls we could just about make out a tiny vibration from within. Unperturbed, we patiently waited in line in the lengthy queue - the length of which was no indicator to the popularity of this installation. It was after all only probably capable of holding twelve or so people at full capacity - and they were only allowing visitors in two at a time. There was absolutely no possibility that this place would hold a toilet - or more importantly - a bar! But if nothing else, we would at least have refuge from the cold night outside. Little did we know that our refuge from the cold dark night would itself prove to be a cold dark shed, albeit

wallpapered in rubber.

After what seemed like an age of queuing, we finally made it to the front and were shown inside by a doorman with a knowing smile.

"Is this going to be good?" I asked somewhat glibly.

"Depends what you call good..." came the reply as he showed us inside, his face barely concealing the enjoyment at the disappointment we were about to witness...

We were greeted by a scene reminiscent of 60s acid party, mixed in with a hint of all-out opium den and healthy dose of Shoreditch arthouse pretentiousness.

The walls were lined with cross-legged hippy types, nodding their heads, desperate to show the world that they knew exactly what this was all about. Some were even laid out on the floor, truly soaking up the ambience and could obviously understand and appreciate it all!

For our part, we were completely baffled. And we were not alone. There was at least one elderly man who sat with his shopping trolley and had probably only come inside to escape the rain - but was dearly regretting that decision now.

As for the music - at best it could be described as a cacophony of noise - a deluge of conflicting audio snippets overlaid on top of one another; traffic, shouting, aeroplanes, arguments, pub singsongs.

At worst, it could be described as noise pollution.

We sat down and ended up people-watching rather than soaking up in the vibe of the installation. We ended up with fits of giggles, which became increasing more hard to keep under control - probably much akin to how the doorman must have felt walking us in.

The stifled giggles did not go down well with some of the more intellectual members of the audience - clearly discerning musical critics. This was after all a highbrow event - this was important. And they understood it. This led me to think about the meaning of this music installation; if my natural response is to laugh at what I am experiencing - surely that is just as valid as someone who experiences an entirely more cerebral involvement?

Gripes aside, the experience was certainly interesting and highly memorable, even if for the wrong reasons. The installation was intimate and I believe a worthwhile endeavour.

And the date, incidentally, went really, really well. ¹

Buster Shuffle 100 Club, London, 12/6/2012

I first saw Buster Shuffle in 2011 on the bill supporting Chas & Dave at their farewell gig. This actually turned out to be a very

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short-lived farewell as the duo reformed just three months later. The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle Part 2, anyone? As for Buster Shuffle, although I had never heard of them before, they were very impressive and really shone out on the line-up. They are a four-piece from East London, fused with Cockney wide boy charm, and rousing ska-embellished melodies. Gaining acclaim from the likes of Radio 1 DJ Steve Lamacq, they were at The 100 Club to promote the launch of their second album, 'Do Nothing'.

I had never been to The 100 Club before, and had always wanted to. Buster Shuffle wrote a song to help save this legendary club in 2010. And I'm glad to say they did, as this was a brilliantly atmospheric place to hear music, steeped in history with iconic stars fighting for photo space on the walls.

The Regency were the supporting act, a "lad-rock" band, falling somewhere between the Ruts and Oasis. They played a short but punchy set, complete with coarse "mockney-esque" vocals - the highlight being a cover of Neneh Cherry's 'Buffalo Stance'. They were an appropriate opener to the night's proceedings.

Buster Shuffle came out to be greeted by a small but boozed-up, rowdy audience - all clearly up for it. Kicking off with a couple of songs from their new album that could easily have come from their first album, 'Our Night Out', the mood was high and the crowd were dancing from the first note.

They are a hard-working gigging band, which really showed through in their set. Buster Shuffle are a band to be enjoyed live

rather than from a home set up. Front man, Jet Baker, is a confident and charismatic performer with audience interaction and participation at a premium, often spending several minutes bantering with the fans.

In true Chas & Dave style, the songs are catchy and the lyrics humorous. Perhaps the best example of this is with 'The 38', a song from 'Our Night Out' about an eventful bus journey through Bethnal Green.

The new material on offer sat well with their old stuff and blended smoothly together. Indeed, Buster Shuffle's songs often sound similar, but they were so jaunty and performed with such gusto that it was hard not to be impressed and carried along with the tunes and audience.

Crowd pleasers through and through, they managed to find time to squeeze a couple of classic ska covers in as well, by the likes of the Specials and Toots and the Maytals.

Two encores later, and the audience were still buzzing and clearly had no intention of going home any time soon. Although I chose this moment to bow out, it was a fun night. Buster Shuffle are a great live act and, judging by the new songs and crowd reaction one to watch out for in the future. Highly recommended.

Cave Painting XOYO, London, 21/10/2012

Cave Painting played XOYO in the trendy Old Street area of London on 21st October, along with former Supergrass front man, Gaz Coombes.

Exuding a playful exuberance rarely seen these days, this young alternative rock band look set to be on the verge of something big in the music scene. Their confidence belies their humble origins, previously playing small venues in their hometown of Brighton and various student nightspots. The venue is packed from early on and the band do not disappoint, rising to the occasion and seem to be genuinely loving the experience of playing in front of a receptive audience.

The set consists of songs from their debut album 'Votive Life' and the drums are big and anthemic, while their sound is large. Although many may be here for Gaz Coombes tonight, Cave Painting instantly win over the crowd in a music arena that can be sometimes awkward with their charm and gusto. In fact, where their album falls flat and fails to impress at times, they more than make up for it on stage. Although they clearly have a musical ability for arrangement in abundance and the songwriting talent is head-and-shoulders above most bands out there, it is in their live performance where their music truly comes to life. At times it is hard to define if their sound enriches the atmosphere or vice versa, but does this really matter? Everyone here tonight is having fun, and that is the important part of any live performance.

It is not difficult to see that they are destined for big things in the

future, with the strong lead vocals of singer Adam Kane, slightly reminiscent of a joyful Morrissey or maybe an edgy Will Young. The songs are rhythmic and hypnotic, and this evidently carries the audience along - without getting raucous. And I don't mean that in a bad way. The band obviously have a close-knit chemistry between them, and there is much laughter and cheeky winks between themselves as they play their set.

The five-piece all take a turn at drumming at times, which enlivens the atmosphere and is the main reason for the euphoric music they make. Their sound is hard to describe without using terms such as "big" or "hypnotic".

Eschewing more mellow album tracks such as 'Rio' and 'Only Us', the band go straight for the jugular with the impressive 'Handle' and manage to keep the pace up from there. Tonight even their more subdued and melancholy moments sound optimistic and high-spirited in a naive but nonetheless endearing way.

The talent on display here deserves to take them far, and judging by the music this evening - and certainly by gauging the crowd reaction - this can surely only be a matter of time. A great live band - I thoroughly recommend you check out one of their gigs before trying to appreciate their debut album. A very promising and exciting new band on the scene.

Curtis Stigers Ronnie Scott's. London, 26/6/2012

I first saw Curtis Stigers four years ago by accident. I was dragged there under duress by my then-girlfriend. Remembering him from his early 90's heyday, I fully expected a dire evening. I'm glad to say all my apprehensions were wrong as he put on a truly brilliant performance that night. I've long since split up with the girlfriend, but I've returned to see Stigers at Ronnie Scott's jazz bar every year since, where he does a week-long stint each summer, as an unashamed fan and convert.

It may surprise some to learn that Stigers has re-invented himself as a true jazz musician, and is all the better for it. He is a truly talented performer and a real joy to watch, effortlessly blending a powerful rangy voice with cuttingly dry wit and self-deprecating humour.

I saw Stigers again at Ronnie Scott's, accompanied by his regular band. As soon as they appeared on stage the band were clearly in control, but in no way seemed arrogant. Although the majority of the crowd were there for Stigers, the band clicked incredibly well. From the outset it was obvious to see that they were really jamming, getting into the atmosphere and enjoying the music they were playing. Stigers has a good rapport between his band and the audience alike. There was particularly strong banter between him and trumpeter John 'Scrapper' Sneider. At one point he acknowledged his association with the dying mullet fad of 1992, but insisted it was really Bono who was truly to blame.

Although obviously a master of off-the-cuff comedy and never

short of something to say, Stigers favours sad, poignant songs, with plenty of dark moments and lots of sex (as he put it); which again, he pulled off with a great sense of irony, while still conveying the songs' original meanings.

Stigers and his band are well suited to Ronnie Scott's, a venue that is always dark and intimate, and without a bad seat in the house. The audience always feels drawn in, like they are part of the performance.

Previously I have only seen them perform on the last night (the late performance on Fridays), where Stigers would let his hair down. Pardon the pun. The long hair incidentally has also been discarded along with his old musical agenda. This time round, I saw Stigers play on the Tuesday night - the second show of his short stay - and I'm glad to report that it was just as electric as any of the Fridays I have attended before.

The band played two long sets, including two Bob Dylan covers, two by Nick Drake and one by the Beatles - all in the band's own inimitable style. Missing gems from the set include 'Rocking Down on 10th and Main' and 'Dirty Water'.

The highlight song of the night was undoubtedly his cover of Dylan's 'Something Changed', taken from the 'Wonder Boys' soundtrack. Appropriately enough, it was hugely popular in the mid 90s.

A true crowd pleaser at heart, he even played two of his classic

early hits for which he became famed. He knew many of those in the crowd were there to hear them, but couldn't resist the opportunity to turn them on their head... again with plenty of panache and humour.

Do not be put off by the name - Curtis Stigers is a class act.

Breaking Glass DVD Review

Originally released in 1980, 'Breaking Glass' is the story of a young ambitious punk band's rise to fame and ultimate demise. It also offers a glimpse into the late 70's/early 80's London punk scene, and gives a highly cynical (yet probably accurate) portrayal of the nature of the music industry as a whole.

Hazel O'Connor gives the performance of a lifetime in her debut, and even managed to persuade the producers to let her pen the soundtrack after blowing them away with her awesome live performances in the film.

She stars as Kate, a young and naive idealist who finds out about the dark side of fame and fortune. The soundtrack features punk/new-wave classics as 'Will You?', 'Eighth Day', 'Give Me an Inch' and 'Writing on the Wall'.

Phil Daniels (who seemed to feature in every British film at the time) stars as the enthusiastic young manager who finds himself

out of his depth, and Jon Finch plays the manipulative record producer who comes between him and Kate, and ultimately leads to the band's demise and Kate's downfall. Jonathan Pryce makes an early screen appearance as Kate's heroin addict saxophone player, in a role that is both cliched and inadvertently amusing in equal measure.

It's the kind of British film where you spot loads of famed actors in small bit-parts when they were younger. And this adds to the nostalgic feel of the film as a whole - in addition to the music on offer here. If you look closely you will spot Jim Broadbent, Rat Scabies of the Damned, Gary Holton of the Heavy Metal Kids, in addition to many faces you will undoubtedly recognise from 'The Bill'.

'Breaking Glass' is the cult movie that helped to define the post-punk era. It does not simply focus on punk music specifically, however, and covers a spectrum of underground scenes that were either emerging or dying at the time, such as new-wave and the skinhead and neo-nazi movements - youth rebellion being the common thread between them.

I am glad to see this film released after such a lengthy wait. It did have a brief DVD release then plus years ago but was quickly deleted and withdrawn for some bizarre reason and the film has remained in limbo ever since. Copies of the original DVD were selling for stupid prices on eBay, but, although I really wanted to see this film, I felt that £40 was somewhat steep.

This collector's edition features the digitally remastered film in its original British version, uncut and in widescreen - it looks clean and fresh and the audio is sharp. There are no extras to speak off, but to be honest I rarely watch those any way!

There are many unusual films such as this that were made during this era: 'Bloody Kids', 'Meantime', 'Made in Britain' etc. They were films that were radical and daring in their own way, and films that had something to say. In short, they were films that do not necessarily make any profit but are still important. This is the kind of film that doesn't get made in the UK anymore, and that makes me rather sad.

The Heavy Metal Kids – Kitsch

If you don't recognise the name Gary Holton, you will probably recognise the face. Holton, who sadly passed away in 1985, was famous for starring in the popular television series, 'Auf Weidersehen, Pet', in the early 80s. Fewer still will know that he used to be the front man of the Heavy Metal Kids, a 70's punk/glam combo. And they're probably one of the best bands you've never heard of.

The band always had a rocky relationship, and 'Kitsch', their third album, was originally released in 1977, two years after the band first split in 1975. It was recorded in France, and produced by Mickie Most released on his RAK Records label. 1977 was the

year that punk really began to take off in the UK, killing off the self-indulgent prog rock dinosaurs that had kept the scene stale for a couple of years before.

Although often cited as a band that bridged the gap between rock and punk, the Heavy Metal Kids steadfastly refused to sit in either camp. Although influences from both genres are plain to see on 'Kitsch', the album plays out more like a rock opera, something akin to the Who's 'Tommy'.

The opening instrumental track, 'Overture', starts the proceedings in a suitably grandiose manner, and from there in the rest of the album builds up in momentum; amazingly it's full running length is little over 30 minutes long! The album contains the singles 'Chelsea Kids' and 'She's No Angel' (which might be familiar to some), as well two bonus tracks, 'Delirious' and 'Hey Little Girl'. It's not hard to draw comparisons between them and other more popular bands of the time; Holton's mock cockney barrow-boy singing is at times very similar to Steve Marriott from the Small Faces, in particular in 'Jackie the Lad' and 'Hey Little Girl'. At other times there are hints of Queen in 'From Heaven to Hell and Back Again' and 'Cry for Me'. They were strongly influenced by the dying glam scene of the late 70s, but had a harder edge than, say, the Sweet or Sparks.

In many ways 'Kitsch' can be seen as an experimental album. The band are obviously having fun and exploring their sound - rather than follow the musical trends of the time, they are trying to carve out their own direction. Sadly it didn't really work at the time but I'm

glad they've been given a chance to be rediscovered here in this nicely remastered package.

When a few years later Simple Minds played with similar keyboard/chorus arrangements, they were hailed as one of the era's most exciting new bands, but somehow the Heavy Metal Kids seemed to miss the boat and were overlooked. Although given credit by Johnny Rotten of the Sex Pistols and small cult bands such as Cock Sparrer and Splodgenessabounds, the Heavy Metal Kids remain largely ignored by the music industry, so perhaps now is the time for them to gain some of the recognition they deserve.

I highly recommend you check out 'Kitsch' (and the rest of their back catalogue) - you'll be glad you did.

Idiot Bastard Band - Union Chapel, London, 2/12/2012

The Idiot Bastard Band are a comedy rock/folk band, composed of Ade Edmondson, Phill Jupitus, Rowland Rivron and Neil Innes, and are "dedicated to the comic song" according to their website. They are a sort of super group of irreverent comedians.

They are playing tonight at the Union Chapel and not being one who attends churches - least of all on a Sunday - this sets the scene for an interesting gig. A functional chapel that also serves as a venue for gigs and events; this adds a sense of the absurd to the

proceedings, and it suits the band well. The place is packed, and the pews are lined with audience members from early on (there will be no dancing here tonight - any boisterous antics will be strictly limited to those on stage). Having no bar, the venue is completely "dry" - although mugs of tea are served - further adding to the bizarre nature of the show. Being a completely sober gig is also oddly appropriate as the band play many obscure songs from 30's and 40's prohibition/depression era America.

The choice of songs overall is an eclectic mix - country and western, dixie, flamenco as well as covers by the likes of Ian Dury, Flight of The Conchords, Coldplay (yes, really!) and Flanagan and Allen. The band also play a few of their own self-penned ditties which largely fall flat with the exception of Rowland Rivron's, which is genuinely funny.

Although all the band members have been involved to some extent with music over the years, it is still surprising just how good they are. Although they have comedy as a fallback, which they rely on heavily throughout the two sets, there is a lot of real talent on display here tonight. Ade Edmondson in particular is exceptionally good; playing the guitar, ukelele, violin, mandolin and the trumpet, plus many more that I can't even name. He's a pretty good singer too. By the end of the show the stage is literally littered with instruments.

The band play well together and are obviously enjoying themselves, even if at times it is all a little self-indulgent. Everything has clearly been well-rehearsed, even down to many of

the ad-libs I suspect. This leads on to another interesting aspect of the show that might surprise many; the band aren't actually that funny. Although dressed ridiculously (at times donning massively oversized sombreros etc), there is a sense of aloofness about them. For example, at one point an audience member calls out a request, to which Phil Jupitus replies: "If you want to join in, you should have turned up to the fucking rehearsals".

Indeed, Jupitus is the only band member who begins to grate after a while, which is a shame.

Overall the night is not as funny as I'd hoped, but musically much better. In many ways it has been a thoroughly enjoyable evening out.

Joana and The Wolf Lexington, London, 15/8/2011

Joana and The Wolf played their "only London gig of the summer" at trendy North London haunt, the Lexington in August. It is an intimate, darkly-lit venue - providing an ideal setting for JATW's bemusing wailings and driving tempos.

So who are Joana and The Wolf? They are a London four piece fronted by Lithuanian singer-songwriter Joana Glaza (according to their office PR statement). But the sum of their parts is much more than that. Their lyrics have an eerie fairytale quality that tap into a rich history of gypsy folklore and mythology, tinged with power and

pathos in equal measure. Glaza's powerful wailing voice is something akin to Kate Bush, backed with an up-tempo driving drum beat, techno-esque keyboard and layered guitars. Comparisons could be drawn to Bjork or PJ Harvey and even the Stooges, but they are in no way derivative. Here lies a truly original band, imbued with much energy and symbolism.

Fastly becoming a firm London favourite, and hot on the heels of relentless UK summer touring this year (Kendal Calling, Secret Garden Party, Guilfest), the atmosphere among the crowd was electric before the gig. Anticipation for the band to perform was high, which can only lead to the question - when will they actually get round to releasing an album?

Kicking off the show with a new song, 'When I Run', the band played a short, punchy set which has become their trademark.

The remainder of the gig consisted of the usual material, including fan favourites such as 'Hide Me', 'Kingdom' and 'Entertainer', but they still managed to sound as fresh as ever.

Joana and The Wolf have become a confident, polished band over the last year - perhaps due to a schedule of heavy appearances recently - and they perform with a frenetic and energetic pace, hard to find elsewhere. And when seen in a suitable environment such as the Lexington, it is not hard to see why they have gained a small but dedicated following of fans. Joana and The Wolf have earned the reputation of never putting on a bad show.

A fun gig, but with so much recent touring under their belt, can we expect some more London gigs and an album soon please?

Kula Shaker Roundhouse, London, 16/2/2016

With a waft of incense and burst of psychedelic guitar, Kula Shaker take to the stage in front of a full house. The crowd goes wild. You might be forgiven for thinking this is 1996 when the band regularly graced the charts, but this is 20 years later, and Kula Shaker are on their fifth studio album: 'K 2.0'. Best known for their debut, the multi-platinum selling 'K', the band have had lengthy absences between releases, but they remain as endearing as ever to their loyal fans.

Despite having a new album to flog, tonight's show is more of a greatest hits event, with a few new tracks and a couple of covers thrown in for good measure. Old favourites such as 'Hush', 'Hey Dude' and 'Tattva' sit alongside new numbers from their latest album, skipping over much of the more sedately paced 'Strangefolk' and 'Pilgrims Progress'. Other firm crowd-pleasers include 'Sound of Drums', '303' and of course, 'Grateful When You're Dead'.

Remarkably, lead singer Crispian Mills does not appear to have aged at all. A mere fifteen years old at the height of the band's success in 1996. Today I clearly look my 35 years. Mills, on the other hand, appears much the same, despite being in his mid-40s.

Perhaps he's found the elixir of youth, or maybe there is something to Mills' new age mysticism after all.

It's hard to see why Kula Shaker have been on the outskirts for so long, and have never really recaptured their glory days ('K' was one of the fastest-selling UK debuts of all time). Perhaps it is because their pseudo-hippie musings confuse people, or maybe it is because their reputation will always be tarnished in some people's eyes because of some misjudged and controversial comments made to the music press that originally led to the band's downfall all those years ago.

Whatever the reason, it doesn't matter here. The band plays in earnest tonight and the excited audience certainly take it in the right spirit and a boisterous evening is had by all.

The gig is lots of fun and, although this may not be groundbreaking stuff, Kula Shaker make incredibly infectious rock and roll, and they do it very well indeed. If they never recapture the zeitgeist they embodied during their heyday in the Britpop era nearly 20 years ago, as long as they can put on a show like tonight and sell out the Roundhouse on a modest but successful tour, I'll be a happy fan.

L7 Electric Ballroom, London, 16/6/2015

Tuesday night in London's Camden Town and the area outside the Electric Ballroom is buzzing. The small venue is sold out tonight and although it's still early, the place is already packed out and the atmosphere is highly charged with excited anticipation. I, for one, am particularly delighted, as tonight L7 will be performing after an absence of nearly 20 years. The recently reformed grunge band are playing a handful of gigs across Europe and the states this year and everyone here has clearly been waiting for this for a long time following a successful Kickstarter campaign to get the band back in action again.

Formed in the mid 80s, the feisty four-piece came to notoriety in the early 90s, causing much controversy by stripping off on Channel 4's music show, *The Word*, and famously throwing a used tampon into the baying crowd at Reading festival. Despite these attention grabbing antics, it was always their music that was important however, with their upbeat, fast-paced and humorous songs - the complete antithesis to Nirvana's dreary, over-serious brand of grunge music. And for this reason 'Bricks Are Heavy' will always beat 'Nevermind' in the nostalgia stakes.

So how will their music and stage chemistry hold up tonight after such a lengthy hiatus? The answer is very well indeed. When the band take to the stage the place erupts and it is obvious from the outset that this evening will be fun and extremely loud.

Starting with 'Deathwish', the band play a best-of set, which is everything the audience could have hope for. The group's passion and onstage chemistry is plain to see and a joy to witness. Up next

is 'Fuel My Fire', which featured as a cover on Prodigy's 'Fat of The Land' album. They also play the high-octane 'Right On Thru', and crowd-pleaser 'Shitlist', originally made famous by featuring on the carefully selected soundtrack to 'Natural Born Killers'. They follow suit with 'Fast and Frightening', and the best tracks from 'Bricks Are Heavy'; 'Monster', 'Shove' and 'Pretend We're Dead' - and even play a couple of unheard tunes as a bonus.

The show is a resounding success and they could easily have filled a much larger venue – both with their stage presence and fan attendance. L7 have stated online that they are not planning to record any new studio material, but seeing them tonight has made me very eager to see the upcoming retrospective documentary about the group, due for release later in the year. I'm very happy to have finally seen the band tonight, and I truly hope we don't have to wait so long for the next tour.

Layabouts Interview 25/05/2013

Layabouts are a no-nonsense heavy rock/punk four-piece, hailing from Madrid, who adhere to a strict rock and roll code of conduct when they play. The rock genre is not heavily rooted in Spain, so the band play against the grain in their home country - but are striving to change the music scene there.

The band consists of lead singer and guitarist Javi C, Roberto S on guitar and backing vocals, Victor "Vito" A on drums and Jon A on

bass and vocal duties.

Layabouts have released three solid albums independently and tour relentlessly, having recently finished their international tour promoting their last album - the critically acclaimed 'Savage Behaviour'.

The band opened at Benicassim in 2012, where they played alongside the likes of Queens of the Stone Age and the Strokes and have previously supported the Subways on tour. The band love all things rock, but count Queens of the Stone Age, the Hives, the Cure, Joy Division and the Who among their many influences.

Back in London ahead of the release of their next EP, Layabouts performed at the Lexington in London on 1st June in a one-off show, dubbed 'We Are The Amigos'. Pennyblackmusic spoke to lead singer, Javi C, before the show to get his thoughts on touring, the music industry, Layabouts' music ethos and their future plans.

PB: Can you tell us a bit about the show tonight?

JC: Well, the show tonight is our third time here in London. It's going to be a mix between our 3 albums. We finished the tour for our last album, 'Savage Behaviour', last Christmas so we're doing a few shows now while recording new material.

We're looking forward to it because it's another gig here in the UK. We're also going to play some new songs tonight – it will be the second or third time we've played them live – so that's pretty much

what's most exciting for us, playing our new tunes tonight in the UK... and giving the people here tonight, who maybe don't know who we are, a pallet of what we do; a small selection of our career from 2007 until today.

PB: Excellent. Well, you've actually just already answered my next question, which was going to be are you playing any new songs tonight? So can you tell us about the new album – when is it coming out?

JC: Well, it's going to be an EP. We're planning on finishing the recording during the first week of July, and it will probably be out in the beginning of 2014. We'll keep on doing some shows around summer and stuff, and we're thinking of releasing a single with a video around Christmas – before releasing the EP.

It's going to be around five or six songs, and we know there's going to be a cover in it... we're also going to play two covers tonight. As a rock and roll band, I feel it's quite a tradition to play some covers. As a genre, it's about short, sharp effective songs. Even Chuck Berry and the Ramones, they used to play lots of covers. People thought they were actually their songs, so it's a thing that most rock bands should do; play the old songs and keep those songs alive. When young people come to see the shows, those old songs should never die – they should keep on getting to the ears of young people.

So, I think we'll do four of our own songs and then a cover...but we still haven't decided which ones! But maybe 'California Sun' by the

Ramones and then 'New Rose' by the Damned. We haven't played that one for a while but we thought – we're coming to the UK so we have to play the Damned.

PB: So, you've mentioned the Damned, the Ramones and Chuck Berry – who else are your main influences?

JC: Well every time someone asks us, "You're a band, what do you play?" - we like to keep it pure rock. Our influences go from Chuck Berry, Howling Wolf – people like that – to the Ramones, Sonics, the Who, Queens of the Stone Age, Black Rebel Motorcycle Club. Even stronger acts like Pulled Apart By Horses – we personally love. Most of us come from a background of playing in hardcore bands so anyone who has those codes of ethics that I mentioned before – key riffs, great vocals, 2/3 minutes – and just play to the edge that's good for us.

PB: Brilliant. So is your EP going to be released in the UK?

JC: We're hoping so. It will be digitally available through iTunes worldwide but we'd love to have it out there in physical format in the UK. But the music industry – especially in Spain – is so tough. We'd love to get a record label to do the distribution or maybe we could come with a bagful of EPs and go round the shops. We don't want to get some money from it, but we just want people to get to hear it and know us.

PB: Sounds great. So do you prefer making albums or playing live?

JC: Playing live! I think that most rock and roll bands would give the same answer. Bands learn to play music – to play shows. It's really what Layabouts is about. It's about the gigs. It's about seeing us on stage. If you hear an album you can like a band, but seeing the show – it's such an extra style you get to see that's missing on an album. You get a real connection. We're concerned about giving a good show – that's the extra.

I hate those bands that just hold their guitars, look down and just stand there for the whole show. Sometimes I think, "I've paid money to see their show and really I could have the record on, turned it up double and got the same experience at home." So when we do shows, we like to throw the guitars around, do some walls of death, get some moshpit stuff going – create an atmosphere. It adds value to our shows.

Recording for us at the beginning was a big deal. For every day in the recording studio, we go back to a real do-it-yourself spirit. This EP, instead of spending 11,000 euros recording it – it makes more sense to us to lay down some guitars and some base at our sound engineer's studio. He's got a place in the mountains in Madrid. We are near neighbours, so we're just going to plug in the amps and that's good enough for us.

We think of recording more as going to the office kind of stuff – not boring – but you lay down the track, release it – but all our passion, all our rehearsing, goes into the gig.

PB: So how has the tour gone?

JC: The tour was great. We owned that tour and we got to go to the UK. We weren't on the road constantly, but just at weekends. We played every Thursday to Sunday for one year and eight months in Spain. It's quite hard for us – we've done some great festivals like Benicassim. We did a Spanish tour with the Subways, and we've played in Portugal. We have an audience that follows us in Spain, but it's hard because we're like this rock band that sings in English.

Spanish is such a powerful language – it's like a rule that people like their bands to sing in Spanish. They don't value that they have a band that can sing in English and write decent lyrics in English – and do a show that has international standards – so we fight against that attitude with every single record, and I'm very satisfied because I think we're pushing that roof up and every time the following gets bigger and bigger.

I don't want to be disrespectful here, but you have some really shitty Spanish pop bands. We are really small compared to them, but we're really hopeful and we're not going to change what we do. I think it's our truth. And I'm happy to say each show we get more kids to the show.

I think there's a generation in Spain going from 12-years old to 16 who are starting to go back to the classics – the Ramones, Guns 'n' Roses, the Who – and those kids are from the 21st century. They have Twitter, Facebook and they don't care if it's in Spanish,

English, French – they just care about the connection with the band. I think every day we're getting closer to where I think we deserve to be in our country.

PB: Where else have you played besides Spain and the UK?

JC: We did a tour in Portugal and we did some little shows in France, but that's about it. We don't have such a big following in Spain, so it's really difficult to get an alliance overseas. We're our own record label. We could have a record deal in Spain – but the terms are “just give us your music and don't ask anything back”, so we decided to do our own record label. Not just for us – but in the future we'd love to be able to be a home for bands that in a few years will be going through what we're going right now. We're such an independent band – we do everything ourselves – our management, communications, everything – so it can be quite hard.

Whenever we get a chance, it mainly comes from big festivals in Spain, alongside big bands. Last year we played with the Strokes, Queens of the Stone Age, Subways. Any time we get those kinds of opportunities, we show up and try to be lucky, on the spot – maybe someone will turn up at the right time, who really wants to give us a bigger chance abroad.

PB: Have you ever thought about doing any UK festivals?

JC: We would love to do some UK festivals. We were thinking a few years ago of moving here and starting from scratch, but it

never came through in the end. We like to play as many gigs as we can – sort of to earn the merit to get an opportunity – like the show tonight. We're really hoping that someone will turn up to see the show and like us, or maybe after reading this interview go on Spotify, Facebook, Bandcamp and check out these Spanish guys, hear us rock and give us a chance. We're going to do as many shows abroad as we can. Mainly I think we're much more understood by people like you and the media than people in our own country.

PB: How does it compare playing in the UK to back home?

JC: Back home it depends on the city. We have our fan base. At some shows people know the lyrics and wait for us at the doors, whereas here it's almost like starting again. But I do get a sense, starting from the sound check, that people here are very understanding – they get what we're doing and they like the music we grew up listening to.

In Spain we're like weird music. For you it's like A-B-C that a kid picks up a guitar at 12-years old and learns to play 'Hey Ho, Let's Go!' In Spain we are the weirdoes in our school.

PB: Do you like it that way?

JC: Yeah, we do like to be the outcasts. That's how people meet – people that share the same interests. Here I get a sense of belonging musically. It makes us feel super comfortable.

PB: OK, one last question – it might be a tough one to answer – but do you have a favourite gig that you’ve played?

JC: Ha, ha, that’s hard – it’s like choosing between your kids! I think there are three for different reasons.

The Benicassim gig was a special one. It was massive and we were main stage, but it was a difficult one as we were the first act on and we thought no one would turn up but then 80,000 people arrived. They’d been camping and they were desperate to hear some rock. Benicassim is more indie/electronic. We decided to do a massive wall of death with the people, and everyone was so thankful we played our hardest and fastest music – so it was very cool to be at a pop/indie festival and get that kind of response. It was a very special moment for us.

But then last year we did this gig at a smaller festival in Spain that’s growing really fast, and we played on Sunday at 2 a.m. in front of 35,000 people and they were just bouncing, bouncing, bouncing.

There was a millisecond where we all just stopped and we thought, “We did it!” Even if we don’t get anywhere with this music at this moment, we’re going to value this moment and tell it to our grandchildren, and this is worth everything – the suffering, all the playing.

There was also another gig last year in Spain. Only thirty people turned up, but it was probably crazier than the 35,000! People

were standing on the bar, and people were getting on stage with us. We got our foot pedals and took them down to the pit, and we were playing with the people. No one cared that it was empty – we were all involved with the show and there to have a good time. We just valued the experience. It was just the band and thirty people, and they were playing with us - because they were part of it. There were times I was just sitting on the stage, and they were the show. I was just putting on the music to what they were doing. They were the show.

They were the gigs that were so authentic – I have the best memories of them.

PB: Awesome. And finally, is there anything you would like to say at the end – to the fans, the music press?

JC: Even though it's strange that some Spanish kids can do some hard rock and roll in proper English – if anyone can give us just a minor chance to do anything – we're in a great opportunity to do stuff now. We'd love to do more stuff here.

Secondly, I'd like to thank you and Pennyblack and anyone who did a review of our records, or took five minutes of their time to listen to us. It makes a big difference to us and we really value it. It's part of our dream to be some guys from Madrid, to be sitting here in London doing an interview. Thank you, I hope you enjoy the show.

PB: Thank you.

Layabouts Lexington, London, 1/6/2013

Spanish band Layabouts played in London's trendy Lexington music venue on 1st June, headlining a small one-night-only event called 'We Are The Amigos', aiming to bring city natives together with Spaniards and Catalans in London. The band also have a new EP coming soon and are raring to get a chance to demo some of their new material in front of a UK crowd.

The Layabouts' hometown is Madrid, where by their own admission – this brand of rock music is not the norm. Unperturbed, they gig relentlessly and produce and release their own albums, and are probably due their first big break pretty soon.

Having spent some time before the gig interviewing Layabouts frontman, Javi C, I know that putting on a good show is of utmost importance to the band and is the key to their success to date. And tonight proves to be no exception; the Layabouts do not disappoint. Rock and roll throwbacks to a time when the scene was vibrant and thriving, the band play with an infectious frenetic energy that is a joy to be a part of. Their songs are short, sharp and snappy and they play their music to the edge. Let there be no mistake! Layabouts gigs are good fun.

The band play with a true rock and roll swagger that is confident and just short of cocky – they have a true stage presence without

ever appearing to take themselves too seriously. This is by no means style over substance. Layabouts have a strong work ethic and play by a strict code of rock and roll conduct. They genuinely believe in what they do. It is also clear that they dearly enjoy to perform, and that spirit comes across in their show.

As billed, the show is played to an audience who are a mixture of Spanish and English faces - and although the crowd may be small they are certainly boisterous and know how to have a good time, pogoing up and down with the band and moshing around excitedly. Tonight the band play a mixture of songs from their previous three albums, along with some from their upcoming EP and a few classic covers thrown in for good measure!

The band like to play covers as they see it as something of rock and roll tradition. Following in the footsteps of the Ramones and Chuck Berry before them, Layabouts try to reinvent old songs that have inspired them; partly to play homage and also in order to keep these songs alive and introduce them to the next wave of young music lovers. Tonight the boys play 'California Sun' by the Ramones and 'New Rose' by the Damned, highly appropriate for a lively rock gig in London.

The boys play a great set and hopefully it will not be long before Layabouts are back in London, maybe on a full UK tour. If hard work and attitude are anything to judge by – it will surely happen soon –Layabouts deserve a slice of success. After listening to their last album, 'Savage Behaviour', I wrote in a review that "I couldn't

wait to see them play live”. And after a year’s wait, I’m very glad to say that I finally have.

Misfits Islington Academy, London, 4/4/2013

The Misfits took to the stage at London’s O2 Islington Academy on the 4th of April. Support was provided by In Evil Hour and Generation Graveyard. True New York punks from the late 70s (hailing from across the Hudson in New Jersey, where the scene was grimy – as opposed to the art house trendy punks from the East Side such as the likes of Television and Blondie), the Misfits have always been something of an acquired taste. Heavily employing a horror gimmick, they have always remained in a niche bracket; like Marmite they are a “love them or hate them” kind of band. Their fans tend to be a bit obsessive; to them they mean everything and are the most important band in the world. To everyone else, they barely even register on the radar or as merely a cartoon act. Being a die-hard horror fanatic and a life-long B-movie connoisseur, I fit firmly in the former group and have always wanted to see them play.

The venue is small and, although it is part of a branded chain, it is one of London’s less well-known music arenas. And this perfectly suits the Misfits’ roots. Although they have attracted a fanatical bunch since the mid-80s, they were never a big band. While they were highly regarded in some circles – they were a cult item – which is part of their enduring charm, this is also why a smaller

venue such as this suits their style.

When the band appear they try very hard to be edgy, but are actually very reminiscent of the BDO darts players that you see on the telly at Christmas; truly believing their own podgy hype, draped in 90s WWF wrestlers Legion of Doom's pantomime clobber. I don't write these words disparagingly – this is everything I could ever have hoped for and I truly love the show. Jokey as they may be, the Misfits are the real deal in many ways.

They thunder through their set at a blistering pace. They have a new album to flog tonight but no one cares. One tune is not discernible from the next but that is not important – that is not the point of tonight. The Misfits are here to show us that they still have it; and as stated before, to those who love them, this is a very important occasion. Lead singer Gerald Caiafa (looking much akin to the character played by darts player “The Count” Ted Hankey), announces every song, but this makes no difference as nobody can tell them apart but enjoy them all the same.

I feel I should mention the support acts at this point. The love in the room may be for the Misfits but the support is seriously good. In truth they outshine the headliners in every way, In Evil Hour especially. Generation Graveyard are clearly genre specialists and are a sturdy act, their tunes are earnest and rock-steady. They deserve to be bigger. It is In Evil Hour, however, who steals the night for me. Raucous and rampant, their music is visceral and loud. I hope the dedicated Misfits here tonight will take notice of this band, with their blistering pace and guttural, very heavy

sound.

In summary the gig was frantic, frenetic and shambolic. But this is totally appropriate for these aging rockers and totally in keeping with their heritage. Their reputation is still intact; they are still a rubbish band with a lot of raw energy and the power to thrill. I am glad I can say I've finally seen them and I still love them.

Molotov Jukebox Borderline, London, 6/12/2012

I have a confession to make. Molotov Jukebox are my current favourite band, after Joana and The Wolf split up back in 2011. I first saw them playing in the Badger tent at Secret Garden Party last year, and have been a staunch fan ever since. They were actually due to play there again this year, but sadly had to pull out at the last minute - so it was with great excitement that I was able to see them at The Borderline, a mere ten minute walk from where I work.

Molotov Jukebox are a London-based six-piece who are rapidly building up a hardcore following. They tour relentlessly round the UK festival scene, as well in places such as Italy and a recent stint in Brazil. Their music is upbeat, catchy and above all else, infectious. I have yet to see an audience that was unreceptive to their flamboyant Spanish-enthused musical medleys.

Much of their popularity comes from their beautiful and charismatic

lead singer, Natalia Tena (star of 'Harry Potter' and 'Game of Thrones') , who also plays the accordion in a lively and beguiling manner on stage. This is not to detract from the other band members, however, who play with a real enthusiastic gusto - giving the impression that they are jamming - when really they are a very talented and tidy outfit. In addition to the accordion, there are horns, trumpets, violins and harmonies aplenty, and there is a fun vibe that enthuses their sets. It is not hard to see why they are quickly becoming popular.

Their music blends many sources of inspiration - such as Espanic, Latino, calypso, dub and pop - and their sounds has been coined "Gyp-step" by their fans and the press.

They played the second night of their current UK tour at The Borderline and the fans were clearly not disappointed. It is also plain to see that Molotov Jukebox are relishing the experience and revel in the performance they put on. It is strange that they didn't decide to play this hometown shown for the finale of their tour? They start with the highly addictive and captivating 'I Need It' and the small but keen crowd are dancing instantly.

They follow up with the fan-favourite, 'Give It a Go' (featuring the jingle from the Super Mario Brothers computer game), which never fails to raise a smile. They follow suit, playing all the popular songs from their back catalogue, including 'Double Dare', 'Gypsy Funeral' and 'Don't Panic'.

Although, a fantastic live band to see - it seems a shame that they

have not yet released a full album (having previously only released an EP to date) - so it would be great to see a studio release from them in 2013. In the meantime, check them out – it is only a matter of time before they play a gig near you!

Nine Below Zero in Profile

Nine Below Zero are a band you've probably never heard of. Unless you're a fan of 80's anarcho-comedy 'The Young Ones', in which case you may have seen them performing in the guest slot on the show's debut back in 1982. Even so, you most likely couldn't name more than one of their songs - the highly catchy '11+11'. Which is a shame, as they're actually very good and highly underrated.

So what is the reason for Nine Below Zero being so sorely overlooked over the years? They can certainly play, but the same could be said for many unsung heroes through music history, so maybe the truth lies in the fact that they never really fitted into any niche bracket; they wore sharp suits but were never really Mods in the true Paul Weller/Jam mould. They played punchy energetic three-minute songs with fast riffs and staccato vocals but they were by no means punk rock. And at times they imbued the sound of the blues without being pretentious, but yet they were not critically acclaimed, or heralded as underdogs by the musical press. They have, however, supported the likes of the Who and the Kinks along the way and have always performed blistering live

shows, so perhaps they are more of a band's band, esteemed by their musical peers but highly unnoticed by anyone else. They have shown a remarkable amount of longevity – one of those bands that never reached the heights of the big time – but have always seemed to be around. Recently they supported the Stranglers on their 40th anniversary tour, no less. Another highlight is a fiery performance on 'The Old Grey Whistle Test', which still impresses and stands up to scrutiny, even today.

And so with this in mind, it is only fair that the band's first two albums should be given a long overdue re-release in 2014, remastered and repackaged each as a 2-disc set with extra live material included for good measure!

The first of these albums is 'Don't Point Your Finger,' and, as they have such a strong reputation as a live band, it seems fitting (if highly unusual) that their first release should be from a live show. Originally recorded and released live in 1981 for 'BBC1 in Concert', 'Don't Point Your Finger' is a strong first release (and that is coming from a reviewer who is not usually a massive fan of listening to live albums). The band has always excelled in their live performances, so what better way to announce your first album on the music scene?

Right from the opening song, 'Don't Point Your Finger at the Guitar Man', the crowd are eating out of Nine Below Zero's hands and the crisp, punchy pace doesn't slow down throughout. The band displays quite a variety of musical dexterity and draws inspiration from a wide assortment of sources. 'One Way Street' is in the

trademark style of the group, quick, stompy and anthemic in its delivery, whereas 'One Way Street' is more of a traditional R&B number (albeit with a London pub twist enthused through its heart). Main vocalist Dennis Greaves demonstrates a wicked wit and there is real sense of humour running through many of the songs, 'Liquor Lover' in particular.

The band throw in a few cover versions for good measure, including the 50's hit, 'Rockin' Robin', which sits nicely amid the rest of the set, but it is their dirty blues moments that the band shine the brightest – 'Ain't Comin' Back' and 'Sugar Mama' being two of the album's highlights in this vein. The album draws to a close on familiar ground with another crowd-pleaser, 'You Can't Please All the People All the Time', leaving me wondering how the band didn't go on to become a lot bigger.

The second live set on CD 2 includes more of the same – including a few tracks that were to be included on later albums, '11+11' among them, and is also highly recommended.

'Third Degree' is the band's second album, recorded in a studio this time, and is undoubtedly sharper and more polished as a result, although the tunes remain just as short and punchy. It is clear though that the band have improved their song writing and honed their skills somewhat.

The opening track, the previously mentioned '11+11' is a strong highlight, as is 'Wipe Away Your Kiss' – and these were probably intended to be the band's breakthrough songs, although somehow

they just didn't make it.

Although recorded some 20+ years ago, the songs here do not sound dated; the opening riff from 'Why Can't We Be What We Want To Be?' could easily be mistaken for anything from the Darkness, for example.

The album is not without its wobbles however; 'Sugarbeat' sounds completely out of place among the other tracks and its disco-styled rhythms don't really fit in. Another number that appears slightly amiss is 'Egg On My Face', where the band has opted for an acoustic ballad that doesn't really work. But on the whole, the album remains solid and is well worth checking out.

The second CD contains some early demo recordings, studio outtakes/alternative versions and some live recording which has always been the band's strong suit – but although the collection of tracks assembled here are interesting enough and show much talent, it is only the completists who will go mad for it.

To summarise, both these albums are definitely worth listening to and you will find some forgotten gems you've never heard of. If nothing else, it might inspire you to go and see them play live while you still can!

Nix Nugent AAA Bar, London, 17/1/2013

Nix Nugent performed at The AAA Bar in South Kensington High Street on the 17th January. She was accompanied by her regular keyboard player, Rupert Piano Talent, and they played a really riveting set.

Nix has been gigging for the last couple of years and has slowly been building up a repertoire of impressive songs and a small but dedicated fanbase, often playing pubs and small music venues around trendy London haunts in and around Islington and Shoreditch. Tonight was her first foray into South London to date. Unlike many new artists trying to make a name for themselves in the music scene, Nugent chooses to eschew cover versions, and writes all her own material in association with Rupert Piano Talent.

Together they make a commanding and melodic duo, with an eclectic (not to mention eccentric) assortment of tunes at their disposal.

I went on a very cold, dark night with impending snow on the cards – yet the atmosphere at the gig could not be more different; the AAA Bar is warm, cosy and vibrant, and would be a great place to spend a Friday night. Nix suits this kind of venue perfectly with her larger-than-life personality, exuding confidence and charm in equal measure. By contrast, Rupert Piano Talent is a more laid back and methodical performer, completely attuned to the direction Nix is taking the songs. “Improv” is the order of the day but you’d never know from the panache they display on stage.

Nix has a strong voice and a real knack for writing catchy and thought-provoking music. But there is also much humour in this music too. You wouldn't necessarily expect to find a performance as captivating as this in a small music venue on a freezing cold Thursday night in January - but that only goes to show the wealth of talent that can be found out there (going largely unrecognised). All you have to do is hunt it out.

The opening number was the soulful (and aptly named) 'Soul Song'. There were some onstage technical difficulties with the pedals and monitors, but rather than detract from the performance - if anything it broke the ice and enhanced the fun ambience of the night. This was followed by the quirky and blues-esque 'Devil's Tambourine' and the mournful 'Desert Desire'; these songs counterposing each other well when played back-to-back. 'Horses That Are Gifts' is the surprise song tonight - a new track with a strong reggae vibe - that is played tonight with a guest drummer to get the audience's feet moving. 'Mother Earth' takes another change of pace. It is quite reminiscent of 'Adagio for Strings', and is a strong indicator of the variety of music and vocal ability at Nix's disposal. Nugent finishes the set with 'Ophelia', which is a dark tune with powerful and intense harmonies, and is the ideal way to end her stint on stage. The set was short, but just long enough to get the audience going and leave them wanting more.

Hopefully Nix Nugent will get to play some bigger venues in the near future.

Shakespears Sister in Profile

Four albums have just been released by the much-maligned (but much better than you probably remember) art-rock act Shakespears Sister, the project of former Bananarama singer, Siobhan Fahey. These include one reissue, two previously unreleased albums and one collection of remixes.

'The MGA Sessions'

'The MGA Sessions', which is being released as a Siobhan Fahey solo album, is often regarded to be her darkest work (which is certainly saying something when you consider much of her output). Shakespears Sister's breakthrough single and number one hit, 'Stay', springs to mind in particular. Written in collaboration with Fahey's "muse" at the time, Sophie Muller in 1993, the album charts the rollercoaster rise and fall of a young female in the music industry. Not necessarily autobiographical, the intent of the album was to create a character from which a script and eventually a film would emerge. Sadly a film did not come to fruition, but the album remains her strongest and most interesting work to date in my opinion. An interesting aside is that most of the album was recorded across the span of twelve months in various sheds and church halls in north London.

Standout tracks are 'The Attic Song', 'Where's the Party' and 'Suddenly'.

Although really an experimental collection, 'The MGA Sessions' shows Fahey at her best, no doubt inspired by her director friend, Muller and is something that will appeal to old fans and newcomers alike. The album also includes two alternate versions of 'Was it Something I Said?' and 'A Christmas Number One', and is tailed by a short interview with Fahey, which is articulate, lucid and insightful about her thought processes as a musician and the creative process in general.

'#3'

The 2004 third album from Shakespears Sister, created purely by Fahey after the bitter break-up with former band member Marcella Detroit, is the one that is often thought to be her strongest album. Dave Stewart certainly thinks so anyway (although he did co-produce it and was also previously married to Fahey).

The album features Fahey's trademark edgy lyrics, often to the accompaniment of upbeat backing music. At times fast paced and punchy, at other times mournful and sombre - this is Shakespears Sister's most accomplished and consistent offering thus far.

'I Can Drive', 'Can You Wait That Long' and 'Excuse Me, John' would be the high points on most other albums, but serve as excellent fillers here. The album is that good. The only disappointment is closing track 'Never Could Sing', which lacks any real oomph or sense of purpose and feels completely out of place here.

A very welcome re-release and nicely remastered to boot! Highly recommended.

'Cosmic Dancer'

Something of a radical departure for Shakespears Sister, 'Cosmic Dancer' is their fifth and latest studio album and features tracks spread across the last decade. Fahey's great strength was always in writing eerie ballads and catchy pop tracks (a remnant from her Bananarama days?), imbued with dark haunting lyrics. And to some extent this is why 'Cosmic Dancer' stands out as an anomaly in their oeuvre as many of the tracks featured here are acoustic. Do not let this deter you, however, as this is a strong body of work and a welcome release. There are still electro-tunes aplenty, and there is much here to be discovered and enjoyed.

Another peculiarity is that the album features several covers, such as Patti Smith's 'Dancing Barefoot' and Marc Bolan's 'Cosmic Dancer'. Again another of Fahey's strongest abilities was in the power and quality of her songwriting. This is only a small gripe; this is a fine collection again, and features some of her best work to date.

'Remixes'

'Remixes' is a compilation featuring mixes of three Shakespears Sister singles, 'Pulsation', 'Bad Blood' and 'Bitter Pill'. Although the tracks are lively enough and the high production values are plain to

see, this is probably more for the hardcore fans and avid Fahey aficionados.

A timely release, given the relative success as a download-only release previously, this still remains a collection for the completists out there, and is unlikely to draw in many new fans on it's own. The main appeal of the band after all, was the uniqueness and individuality of their sound; remixes of this kind of band do not bring anything new to the table (unless of course, you were not a fan of the music to begin with).

In order of preference I recommend you check out '#3' and 'The MGA Sessions' first, then if you are impressed have a listen to 'Cosmic Dancer'. 'Remixes' is really for completists only.

Halloween II and III Soundtracks

Last month saw the release of two of horror maestro John Carpenter's iconic film scores, 'Halloween II' and 'Halloween III: Season of the Witch'. Lovingly packaged, featuring exclusive artwork, sleevenotes and A2 posters - limited to just 1000 vinyl copies each - these are certainly collectors' items.

These soundtracks are being released by Death Waltz Recordings, who are UK cult genre specialists and have previously put out other John Carpenter tracks such as 'Escape from New York' and 'Prince of Darkness', as well as horror films such as

‘Zombie Flesh Eaters’ and ‘The Living Dead at Manchester Morgue’.

From the outset, ‘Halloween II’ is dark and menacing, slowly building up the tense atmosphere until the point where you feel like there is someone (or something) looming in the shadows behind you. At this point I feel I should suggest for best effects, this album should be played at night and turned up loud, preferably in a dark room and on your own.

Heavily synth and keyboard-based, as was the trend of the time, the score is richly layered and mainly consists of different variations of the same tune - at times slow-paced and methodical, at others frantic and erratic. Both compliment each other well and add a true sense of gloom and tension to the proceedings. Not a fully-fledged horror album in the sense that Goblin's ‘Susperia’ soundtrack is, but this works more as a selection of set-pieces that gradually pick up pace and momentum. Just like you would expect a horror film to be in fact. The album ends with an upbeat happy track (as is so often the case with horror films in general), ‘Mr Sandman’, but this does not detract from the album's effect at all. If anything it offers a welcome release from the buildup of anxiety you will probably have been feeling.

‘Halloween II’ is a genuinely unnerving piece of music, to the extent where I thought twice about going out into the garden to have my bedtime cigarette. Maybe not the right soundtrack to play at a fancy dress-themed Halloween party, but is certainly the kind of album to play if you want to get a ouija board out and scare

yourself in the wee small hours. And as a horror soundtrack, it probably can't get any better endorsement than that.

Much like the film itself, musically 'Halloween III' is a mixed bag and something of an acquired taste. Although dramatic and fast-paced, it does not have any really creepy moments as 'Halloween II' does. Indeed, if you did not know which film this score accompanied - although bearing the mark of John Carpenter - you could easily imagine it being the soundtrack to any of the action films he made around the same period such as 'Escape from New York' and 'Big Trouble in Little China'

The album's most memorable moment is provided by 'Halloween Montage' - the annoyingly catchy Silver Shamrock TV jingle of the film - and will probably stay in your head for most of the day/night after listening to the album

Although maybe not a bona fide classic like 'Halloween II', this is still a score that collectors will want - whether they are cult film aficionados or fans of unusual albums.

Rubber Bandits - Soho Theatre, London, 24/1/2012

Fresh off the back of a cult TV series on Channel 4 by the same name, the Rubberbandits played Soho Theatre on 24th January 2013. Hailing from Limerick Ireland, how would the zany and irreverent duo fair in front of a London crowd?

Best known for the online hit, 'Horse Outside', which became a viral phenomenon in 2010 and almost kept X-Factor Winner Matt Cardle off the top spot for Christmas Number One in Ireland, the Rubberbandits are something of an anomaly. Are they a comedy act or a band in their own right?

The answer is both. The pair perform stripped to the waist with plastic bags wrapped tightly round their faces - overtly creepy and reminiscent of a terrorist outfit. And this is exactly the point - the Rubberbandits aim to confound and perplex with their cynical absurdities. In addition to making you laugh and dance, they will also make you think. The lyrics are laugh out loud funny and yet at times surprisingly sublime. Some of the songs are genuinely moving, while others unashamedly groovy.

The comedy is dark in tone and very sinister, much like League of Gentlemen before them, but, whereas League of Gentlemen relied on shock horror tactics for their laughs, the Rubberbandits have a bona fide political agenda to advocate here. Avoiding obvious gags, the songs on display will often take you in a direction you never expected.

A case in point is 'Spoiling Ivan'; a song about an adult befriending a six-year old boy. Everything about the tone of this addictive tune leads you to believe it will have a macabre and gruesome ending, but the outcome is happy and positive and will make you question your own jaded thoughts. It is simply a refreshingly nice song.

Also worth mentioning in the lineup is Willie O'DJ; although not a fully-fledged member of the band, his silent onstage shenanigans left-of-stage will keep you entertained throughout.

The most shocking song is 'Up The RA', which charts the plights of the IRA over the last century. Although this eventually degenerates into farce, listing out supposed members of the IRA (including Freddie Starr and Bob Marley among others), it is still very unnerving to see men clad in ski masks, waving Irish Nationalist flags on stage in a menacing fashion. So are the Rubberbandits a subversive band then?

Perhaps, but their true talent is skillfully hiding their true intent behind a surprisingly impressive vocal ability and much gymnastic dancing dexterity on stage. They have breached the transition from online skits to television and through to live performance with apparent ease.

Don't be fooled by the silly antics and faux-bravado macho posturing on display - there is a wealth of intelligence in The Rubberbandits' lyrics - covering Irish history, politics and injustices over the last couple of centuries. So much so in fact, that it is hard to imagine it striking any resonance with a young English crowd.

Luckily the duo have the knack for writing incredibly catchy hooks and melodies, and mask their intellectualism within foot-stomping beats and deliciously soulful music. Highly recommended (if you can get past the masks).

Sheep on Drugs - New Cross Inn, London, 13/10/2012

Sheep on Drugs are a dark electro punk duo from the mid-90s. Never mainstream, but, with a small hardcore and dedicated legion of fans, they became notorious for their extreme stage performances. Their sound can only be described as brutal.

I only discovered them because - as an avid tattoo fan and collector - I knew of original founding member, Duncan X, who is one of the most famous tattooists currently working in London. Long since having left the band, he has now been replaced by Caitlin McKenna, who has breathed a fresh lease of life into the act.

They seldom play anymore, so when I heard they were playing at a gig at the New Cross Inn, a mere 20 minutes from where I live in Camberwell, it was an opportunity too good to miss.

They were playing on the same night as the also newly reformed Terrorvision, another 90's band that I have a soft spot for (albeit they are playing at a different venue). Still I've seen Terrorvision before, so tonight Sheep on Drugs win.

When I walk in, the support act, Spucktute, are well into their lively set. The small venue is already pretty full, and there is a lot of expressive dance going on. The place is full of middle-aged punks who really should know better. "Middle aged" is giving them the benefit of the doubt in all honesty; I'm rapidly approaching middle

age - some of this lot are old. I'm clearly the youngest face in the room, and that doesn't happen that often anymore. It's an oddly refreshing experience.

In front of the stage a woman throws herself around wildly, a bit like Stacia from Hawkwind. It could actually be her. A rough mathematical calculation estimates that she would probably be around the same age. She's not naked, and not so well-endowed up top, but her armpits are on display and they are exceptionally hairy. Aggressively so. I try to ignore her and hope she sits down soon before this monstrous sight spoils my whole evening.

The band are playing a good set, and the singer begins a rant about electro disco beats, long black coats and people who listen to the Human League. Ironic, given the music and the clientele on display here tonight.

A man pogo frantically in the audience while a Charles Manson look-a-like stares out into space vacantly. Everyone else looks like refugees from Slimelight and seem to be having a good time, despite the ghostly makeup (mainly worn by the men). The lead singer looks a bit like how I imagined my old headmaster to look in his private life. It's something of an understatement to say I feel slightly out of place here; leather trousers and Sid Vicious superglue hair abound. Individuality is clearly the order of the day – they are all varieties of hair colour on display, all of them jet-black. Surrounded by men in leather vests, I am the only member of the audience prudent enough to be wearing a sensible autumn

jumper.

This is nothing however, compared to the pandemonium when Sheep on Drugs take to the stage. As they stride through the bar and up onto the stage, for a brief moment I think that hell is about to open. A grizzled old man, who looks like a lifetime methadone addict, wildly smacks his crutch against the pillar at the front of the stage. This does not bode well.

“We are Sheep on Drugs and we are here to do you over...,” they shout, before diving into a high-paced, energetic and above all else – noisy – set. Original member, Lee Fraser, casts an imposing figure as indeed does new member, McKenna. This is the kind of environment and atmosphere that Sheep on Drugs thrive on.

They play all the hits – ‘Motorcycle’, ‘A-H and Back Again’, ‘Sex Drive’ and ‘15 Minutes of Fame’. They play many more that I don’t recognize and this makes me think I should revisit the back catalogue – there is some really strong material here. The highlight track of the show comes mid-set when they play a cover of the Velvet Underground’s ‘Waiting for My Man’, accompanied by a frantic Drum ‘n’ Bass backing track. A moment of sublime genius.

A young bloke staggers into the toilet and emerges moments later with a four-letter swear word scrawled on his forehead in felt tip pen, and I know the end is nigh. This has been a great event – funny and thrilling in equal measure – and I hope to see Sheep on Drugs touring more often in the future.

For the last track of the night, the band strip topless and spray paint their torsos with black, and I know it really is the end. And then a drunken man falls over.

I can't think of a better way to end the night than that.

Soho Hobo - Soho Theatre, London, 30/7/2013

Back in January, Tim Arnold aka The Soho Hobo played an exclusive gig at The Groucho in the heart of London's trendy Soho area. The one-off show was to promote a collection of material about this historic location that he hoped would grow into an album. Although an invite-only event – the gig was a great success and his songs were well received and very promising indeed.

This show was a follow-up show and took place a few doors down from The Groucho at The Soho Theatre. The doors were open to the public this time around – paying customers –, and it was, to my knowledge, the first time the Soho Hobo has demoed his latest songs to members of the public at a large venue.

The good news is that Arnold's hard work has paid off and his album has come to fruition, and is due to be released towards the end of 2013 and I personally cannot wait to hear it.

Although this was an open gig that anyone could attend, Arnold's celebrity supporters were out in force for the show once again and

there were famous faces aplenty in the audience; ranging from stars of the British film and music industry and fashion designers, as well as many popular television actors. The night was by no means a “lovey-fest”, however; the venue was packed by a range of characters – which attests to Arnold’s popularity both as a poetic songwriter and a performer.

Musical support for the evening was provided by Darling Boy, a young new talent who has been acclaimed by the likes of DJ Steve Lamacq among others. A solo artist who is charming and affable on stage, Darling Boy played an acoustic set with the occasional burst on the harmonica thrown in for good measure. His songs are emotional yet uplifting, and he struck up an instant rapport with the crowd. He was also very comedic without having to try too hard, and he definitely gained many new fans on the night including me. One slight criticism would be that the name “Darling Boy” does not seem to suit his act, but, minor quibbles aside, he provided the perfect appetiser for the rest of the night’s performance.

The Soho Hobo was introduced by his regular MC Jud Charlton who roused the audience with a humorous and insightful ode to Soho, which promptly lead into the opening number, 'Manners on The Manor'. Lively and with punchy – this song is a real belter and was a great way to start the set. By the time the second song, 'The King of Soho', was underway, the crowd were dancing around in their seats and the show was clearly in full swing. It was clearly going to be a fun night out. 'Soho Heroes' dropped the pace slightly and listed many of Soho's notable inhabitants – past and present. As always, Arnold’s delivery was spot on. He is clearly a

man who loves this part of London dearly. 'Ain't Made to Measure' features a turn on the mic by Phil Daniels in full-on country house cockney swing. It was definitely a crowd pleaser and was another standout track.

'The Windmill Girls' is a poignant ode to Arnold's mother who performed as a dancer at the legendary Windmill Club just down the road. The song is accompanied by live re-enactment of an original Windmill Girls striptease, performed by Miss Giddy Heights.

Other highlights include 'Marina', which is mellow and lyrically beautiful, as is 'Little London Lou' and 'Soho Sunset' (which was accompanied by Arnold's girlfriend, Jessie Wallace).

The evening closed with 'Inside Out', a truly epic song that builds momentum with searing guitars and blistering saxophone. Arnold also treated the audience to his party trick – a full headstand as the song drew to an end. This was true show boater with an impressive repertoire of songs at his command, and a great backing band to match!

Tim Arnold is a tender and honest songwriter and engaged with his audience with ease. His music is a mixture of old fashioned rock and roll, enthused with elements of jazz, blues and rockabilly, while his songs are touching and meaningful but still manage to be catchy and funny. They will definitely strike a chord with you – whether or not you have experienced Soho life or not. His music rightly deserves the attention it he is receiving from his small but

hardcore following of Soho devotees, but also merits a larger audience I believe. His songs paint a vivid picture – like a snapshot in time he is in effect recording history through his music and real London life.

There is much to be discovered here – see him if you can and check out his album come November.

Soho Hobo - Groucho Club, London, 17/2/2013

On the 17th February Tim Arnold aka the Soho Hobo, played at The Groucho, debuting material from an as-yet unreleased album. The project started out as a book that Arnold was writing, which eventually progressed into a collection of songs - enough to fill a full album - with every track about Soho. Although the album currently has no record deal behind it, it is hoped that it will get a proper release later this year.

I was excited to see this show as I have long been a fan of Soho – I work there and I even have a tattoo dedicated to this small but exciting central London location. I have also wanted to go to The Groucho for as long as I can remember; a place long steeped in mystery; a members only club sitting in the very heart of Soho, and which is famed for being a hangout of celebrities, artists and media moguls. But that's enough about the venue, what about the artist himself?

Tim Arnold has long been a Soho local and is a regular stalwart of the seedy bars and music venues in the area. Indeed, he is the son of one of the original Windmills Girls lineup, Polly Perkins - who also played Dot Cotton's sister in the popular television soap 'EastEnders' no less. It is rumoured that the actress who plays Dot - June Brown - will also have a cameo on the album when it is released, although she does not make an appearance at the show tonight. Another absentee from the album is Gary Kemp, who is a longtime friend of Arnold's.

According to the press release, the music is "a mixture of Vintage London, Ian Dury nods, Tony Newley winks and just a touch of West End Swagger, bubbling from the Britpop roots of this much loved local entertainer" - which it is, and a lot more besides.

Tim is a confident performer and imbues a cocky (yet likeable) charm - much as the press release attests - and is quick to banter with the crowd. He creates a quirky and enigmatic onstage persona, at one point carrying out an ad-hoc handstand during a musical segment.

The evening's proceedings are compered by Jud Charlton, who also duets on a track - 'Soho Heroes' - highlighting some of the areas notable (and often notorious) characters over the years. Phil Daniels also makes an appearance on the bill, demonstrating his Britpop credentials once more on the track 'Ain't Made to Measure'; an infectious number and a performance that is boisterous and more rousing than his duet with Blur on 'Parklife' (all of whose members are members of The Groucho incidentally).

'EastEnders' cast members are also something of a theme it seems as the final duet of the night is with Arnold's partner, Jessie Wallace. They sing together on 'Soho Sunset', which, although is no match for Ray Davies 'Waterloo Sunset', is tender and poignant nonetheless.

Intriguingly (although probably not surprising given the location and Soho's reputation), tonight's show also features a nude fan dance/striptease - which is an original enactment from The Windmill in 1964 and is performed by burlesque entertainer, Miss Giddy Heights. But rather than appearing lewd, this interlude comes across as naive - innocent even - and is highly appropriate to tonight's show, especially given Arnold's Soho heritage. It is also worth mentioning that Arnold's granddad was also regular performer of Soho – although not as a striptease artist. He was a comedian.

The venue is small and very busy with the audience packed in tightly together. Even so, the ambience of this intimate gig is warm-hearted and there is a lively, friendly vibe - due in no small part to Tim Arnold's sparkling onstage charisma. In total Arnold plays 11 songs, the standout tracks being 'Manners on the Manner', 'Ain't Made to Measure' and the sublime 'King of Soho'. Each track stands out in its own way though, and Arnold has created a unique collection of songs that truly embody the atmosphere and history of Soho. And while there is one central theme that runs through these tracks - it is in no way a concept album - although in essence it could be viewed as such.

Tim Arnold has previously showcased some of his album in 2012 at The Soho Theatre but where better to reveal it in full than at The Groucho - a mere stone's throw from The Windmill Theatre where his mum performed and in the very centre of the area on which the album material is based? I, for one, can not wait for this to be released and hope it is only a matter of time before a savvy London label picks it up. If tonight's performance is anything to go by, it won't be long.

Reviews A-Z (by band)

Arabrot : Solar Anus - CD

'Solar Anus' is the fifth studio album from Norwegian "noise rock" band Arabrot (who take their name from a rubbish dump near Oslo).

Following on from 2010's 'Revenge' album, which was heralded "as the end of an era and the beginning of something new", Arabrot have moved forward, both musically and lyrically.

The main problem with having a scatological title like 'Solar Anus' is that 'Arabrot' are inviting scatological writers (like myself), to give scatological reviews. Before even hearing one bar, I was tempted to give a 2-word review. Simply, "Complete anus".

Despite conjuring up images akin to "Lick my love pump" scene from 'This is Spinal Tap', the album's title is actually a reference to

the philosophy of George Bataille, and the band's love of mixing highbrow and lowbrow art forms and concepts. It is still hard to take seriously though when you read through the track listing or look at the cover.

Arabrot have certainly picked up the pace with their latest offering, creating heavy thunderous tunes, much like grindcore. Although to some extent this album has a pared down, back to basics approach - most songs consisting of only guitar, drum and synthesizer - the music here sounds dense and layered. This could possibly be due to Steve Albini's mixing (who has previously worked with the Pixies and Nirvana). In fact some songs do sound very reminiscent of Shellac, in particular the title track and 'Valkyrie'.

Even so, it is clear that Arabrot have matured as a band and have made a well-crafted and intelligent album, far more than would probably be expected from a noise rock act.

Lyricaly, they draw on themes of alchemy, sorcery, magic, religion and philosophy - but in no way sounds cliched like so many Scandinavian death metal acts do, using similar imagery.

Eight songs is just the right number for Arabrot's style and genre; any more would start to feel "samey"; fewer would seem unfinished.

Standout songs are the title track, along with 'Valkyrie', and the album closer, 'The Wheel is Coming Full Circle'.

In summary then, Arobrot have made a solid, strong album that leaves you wanting more. If only they hadn't decided to call it 'Solar Anus'...

Track Listing:

- 01) Solar Anus
 - 02) And The Ass Had Spoken
 - 03) Madonna Was A Whore
 - 04) Valyrie
 - 05) Nubile
 - 06) Auto Da Fe
 - 07) Odine
 - 08) The Wheel Is Turning Full Circle
 - 09) Circle
-

Bis : data Panik etcetera - CD

Bis first appeared on the music scene in the mid-90s during the Britpop era, and although their music was feisty and upbeat the public's reaction was underwhelming in the most part and the band remained a highly niche act.

Emerging in 1995 with 'The Secret Vampire Soundtrack' EP, the band's sound was a mixture of camp fanzine-inspired punk pop, drum machines and high-pitched vocals. They quickly appeared on 'Top of the Pops' playing kitsch punk anthem, 'Kandy Pop', before

they'd even managed to secure a record deal and received some acclaim from the 'NME', being listed in their Top 20 Cult Heroes rundown. They are, however, undoubtedly known most for penning the equally entertaining and annoying theme tune to the huge Hanna-Barbera Cartoon Network show, 'The Powerpuff Girls', fixing their status as cult icons for a good many years to come into the bargain.

Hailing from Glasgow, the trio have played under several different names, and incarnations over the years and after originally inking to the Beastie Boys' label Grand Royal, they went on to release three albums – 'The New Transistor Heroes', 'Social Dancing' and 'Return to Central', before splitting up in 2003. Although they have played a few one-off reunion shows in between, they have stayed firmly out of the limelight to all intents and purposes since then.

The band's two male members, Sci-Fi Stephen and John Disco, went on to form the electronic-enthused side project band Dirty Hospital, but disbanded once more after releasing just two vinyl only singles. Singer Manda Rin mainly kept herself busy during this period as a DJ, for which she received a fair amount of acclaim and kudos. The trio subsequently re-formed yet again in 2005 under the name Data Panik and recorded some tracks, which was hoped would form a definitive fourth Bis album although this turned into in effect more of an experimental series of jam sessions. This album never came to fruition although the accumulation of much of the music they made during this time is presented here, along with other unreleased Bis tracks from back-in-the-day and other assorted rarities. Released by the Do Yourself

In record label, it has been given 5-star treatment - including a 180-gram white vinyl version on Record Store Day, as well as the standard CD and download editions.

The naive punkish charm and rough edges have been replaced by a darker electronic sound more akin to Depeche Mode this time around; most evident in 'Control the Radical', 'Minimum Wage', and 'Retail of the Details'. Gothic New Wave Trance is the order of the day in 'Sense Not Sense' and 'Flesh Remover'. Bis do manage to prove again their knack for writing catchy toe-tapping tunes yet again, as seen in 'Rulers and the States' - a track that has already appeared on heavy rotation on Scottish television in the STV cities app advert, ahead of the album's release.

This collection of songs will certainly please Bis aficionados and is definitely worth a listen, but aside from the catchy numbers will probably not set the music world alight. It will also surely appeal to hipsters everywhere. It is a good reminder of what the band can do and certainly shows what their music is about and could be heading towards. And if this is the direction they are taking their music in, I would like to hear more from them in the future. Hopefully it won't take them so long next time around!

Track Listing:

- 01) Control the Radical
- 02) Minimum Wage
- 03) Rulers and the States
- 04) Cubis (I Love You)

- 05) Sense Not Sense
 - 06) Mechanical Love
 - 07) Too Much Not Enough
 - 08) Retail of the Details
 - 09) Music Lovers
 - 10) The Young Mothers
 - 11) Flesh Remover
 - 12) (That Love Ain't) Justified
 - 13) Insider
 - 14) Thrill Is Yours
 - 15) Caller Id
-

Brian James : The Guitar That Dripped Blood - CD

With a career spanning nearly fifty years, what can we expect from elder statesman of punk, Brian James? He has made some notable achievements during his lengthy career; as the founding member of British punk pioneers the Damned in 1976, and as part of the super group the Lords of The New Church alongside Stiv Bators of the Dead Boys fame. He has also recorded with seminal artists such as Iggy Pop, as well as being a member of the London SS and guesting on the Saints' 1982 album, 'Out in the Jungle', all of which which has kept him incredibly busy through the passing years – if often somewhat under the radar of popular culture. Indeed, James has been quoted prior to release as saying, “I didn't do this to be rich and famous. I started off because it's the only thing I wanted to do in life, and it still is.”

Luckily for us, this is no idle boast that disguises an overblown or deliberately obscure effort. His latest album 'The Guitar That Dripped Blood' is a very strong body of work and has far more impact than his last effort, 2013's 'Damned... If I Do'.

The music harks back to the early days of the Damned (James wrote the majority of the band's first two albums, 1977's 'Damned Damned Damned' and 'Music for Pleasure'). It could also be compared to a young Motorhead or maybe the Stooges. Despite the length of his music career it is clear that this longevity has not dampened his enthusiasm in any way; the guitar playing is raw and sounds completely fresh.

Another Dead Boys stalwart – Cheetah Chrome – helps proceedings on the album's opener, 'Becoming a Nuisance', which is a raucous and raunchy number that sets the tone for what is to follow. 'Regulator' continues this energy, while 'Walkin' Round Naked' takes a slightly slower, grungy approach.

There's a change of pace during 'Till The Rains Come', which is the album's only disappointing tune - and is the weakest link in the songs on offer here, breaking the momentum of the album somewhat. James' 2012 album, 'Chateau Brian', was an acoustic collection of self-reflective ditties in a similar vein to this, but fortunately the other tunes from 'The Guitar That Dripped Blood' do not follow suit and the rhythm picks up again after this interlude.

The last three songs ('Baby She Crazy', 'Hail Mary' and 'Mean

Streak') are reminiscent of Detroit-style American rock and are less edgy but more polished as a result.

Despite the apparent care, frenzied energy of this album, real care has been taken with the production values; the album's title references an old horror film from Amicus studios, while the album artwork is a tongue-in-cheek parody of the lurid film posters of the same era, courtesy of Graham Humphreys (who also painted the original Lords of The New Church covers as well).

I've not yet seen 'Don't You Wish That We Were Dead', the recent documentary about the Damned, but listening to this album has certainly made me want to find out more and rediscover the band who owe so much of their success to Brian James. It has not been announced yet if James will be taking part in the 40th anniversary reunion shows at the Royal Albert Hall in 2016, but the Damned will certainly be a much-strengthened force if he is.

Track Listing:

- 01) Becoming A Nuisance
- 02) The Regulator
- 03) Walkin' Round Naked
- 04) Not Invited
- 05) Till The Rains Come
- 06) Hindsight
- 07) Insaning
- 08) Baby She Crazy
- 09) Hail Mary

10) Mean Streak

Buster Shuffle : Naked - CD

I first discovered Buster Shuffle when they were supporting Chas & Dave on the final show of their farewell tour at the O2 Indigo in London. They were promoting their first album, 'Our Night Out', at the time and they were on fine form. Although I'd never heard of them before I was really impressed and they quickly won over the crowd; the band were not intimidated by the boisterous audience at the sold out show, and rose to the occasion triumphantly. I then had the pleasure of seeing them headlining at the historic 100 Club after the release of their second album, 'Do Nothing', and once again they blew the place apart.

The boys are now back with their third studio album, 'Naked' - but will it live up to the success and critical acclaim of their previous work?

Album opener, 'South', is as energetic and upbeat as you'd expect from Buster Shuffle and is a strong way to kick things off.

'New Money' is another example of lead singer Jet Baker's sharp sense of humour and song writing ability. The song is also the first indicator that the band are heading in a slightly darker direction this time. New themes are explored, showing that the lads have grown up a lot since their last offering. Although still playful, their

sound is more mature - both lyrically and musically, which probably testifies to their heavy touring schedule and time in the studio since 2007. Topics such as class, money and relationship break-ups feature predominately this time around, and is a far cry from the chirpy ska-enthused ditties that they have previously released.

'Naked' continues in a similar vein, only with marriage, family and mortgages on the agenda. "Yeah, yeah, yeah - I want it all," sings Jet, then goes on to mock wine lists, labradors, organic vegetables, posh holidays, shares in Apple (not Microsoft), among other things. Next up is 'Devon', which is a return to more familiar Buster Shuffle territory; a light-hearted, fast-paced foot stomper, detailing a funny account of a disastrous holiday to the English coast.

'Take Him Down' is quite downbeat lyrically (as the title would suggest), but is wrapped up in a catchy and misleading tune which draws you in before you've even realised what's going on.

'I Wrote This Song because My Girlfriend Told Me I was Lonely' is not as depressing as it sounds - like Sparks when they were on good form in the 70s; whereas 'It's OK because the Kids are Fashionable' is reminiscent of 'Grey Day'-era Madness, and despite it's gloominess is really good.

'Girls' is short, sharp and sweet - but could be any album filler track from Blur's back catalogue - in contrast with 'Believe It', which is classic Buster Shuffle and could fit in easily on either of their previous albums.

'Put Up' has a wistful tone, tinged with sadness and reminds me of Supergrass (which is no bad thing), and this would be a strong number to finish the album with but two bonus tracks are included for good measure - 'Hound' and 'On Our Way' - although personally I feel the album does not need these tracks.

Despite their newfound maturity and sense of direction, 'Naked' lacks the punch and cockney wide boy charm of their debut and follow-up albums. But that is not to say that this is a bad album - far from it. It's more of a slow burner and improves with repeated listens. It's a shame that they could not recapture the same level of cheeky charm from the band's early days, but Buster Shuffle are no longer naive newcomers with three albums and so much touring on their belt, and it is only to be expected that a certain amount of cynicism creeps in with age.

Buster Shuffle's main strength has always been in their live performances, onstage swagger and sense of humour, and I for one cannot wait to see them incorporate this new material into their exciting shows.

Track Listing:

- 01) South
- 02) New Money
- 03) Naked
- 04) Devon
- 05) Take Him Down

- 06) I Wrote This Song Because My Girlf
 - 07) It's OK Because the Kids Are Fashio
 - 08) Girls
 - 09) Believe It
 - 10) Home
 - 11) Put Up
-

Corridor : Real Life - CD

Corridor is the solo project of Michael Quinn, a man who makes impressive music sounding much like it was melded by a complete ensemble (In many ways something akin to Matt Johnson of The The fame).

'Real Late' is the second album release from Corridor and features seven tracks of darkly manufactured guitar music and relentless beats.

Track one, 'Objective Lens', could have been ripped straight from a Stone Roses album, complete with incessant droning vocals, and repetitive (though not strictly “dancey”) drumbeats. That said, this track does set the tone for the rest of the album, and you sort of know the vibe you are going to get throughout.

The second number - 'Pieces of Work' - is reminiscent of 'Exciter'-era Depeche Mode, and really just builds upon the album's opener.

Three tracks in, and 'Roam Roo'm is where the music starts to get exciting. Starting with flamenco guitars, working up to classic heavy guitar riffs accompanied by thumping beats. It is definitely the best tune of the album.

The rest of the album continues in a similar vein, with one song blending skilfully into the next, but with no real highlights from here onward. It is clear that Quinn is extremely talented; a musical craftsman, but it's a shame that he is never truly experimental on 'Real Late'.

The music is heavily guitar-driven with hypnotic drumming, and enthused with a variety of other instruments including piano, synth and cello. The effect is a richly layered wall of sound. Impressive when you consider this is a solo effort.

I feel that the music – good as it is – is not quite strong enough to stand alone as an instrumental album. At times Quinn's vocals distract from the music on 'Real Late'. Vocally sounding much like Ian Brown (not a bad thing per se), many of the tracks here would benefit from less singing.

Drawing a comparison to The The again, perhaps Quinn's music might be helped if he were to hire in singers from time to time. Or simply to focus more on making instrumental material.

Measured, precise and near-clinical, it wouldn't be hard to imagine Michael Quinn as something of a control freak in the studio, rather

than a musical genius.

Self-indulgent for sure, but not in a completely ego-maniacal way – there is much to appreciate here that would definitely warrant future listens. Indeed 'Real Late' would probably profit greatly from repeated listening. Don't write Corridor off - I would be keen to hear what Quinn does with his next effort. There is a lot of promise here and it could be something truly special.

Track Listing:

- 01) Objective Lens
- 02) Pieces Of Work
- 03) Roam Room
- 04) C/I/T/M
- 05) Rebuilding My Internal World
- 06) Willful
- 07) Acclaim

Gilbert Linley : Wahoola! - CD

'Wahoola!' is the second album from Gilbert, composed by Matthew Gilbert Linley, a London-based musician and drummer with Engineers.

I first discovered Gilbert in 2010 when they were supporting Joana and The Wolf at Club Ugly near Oxford Street. They had a striking

stage presence, with an assortment of unusual instruments to hand, but their music was by no means a pretentious art school sham; they played a brilliant set.

Given this, I was very keen to hear Gilbert's latest album, and eager to discover how their quirky onstage persona would translate into album material.

Whereas onstage, Gilbert project a lively jocularly with plenty of comedic voiceovers, their album has a far more laid-back approach. The art school background is still plain to see, but the vibe here is very mellow and beautifully crafted.

Although really a solo artist, Linley has always brought in several musicians onstage to recreate his sound in a live environment. 'Wahoola!' is an extension of this, Linley saying after it's release "I wanted 'Wahoola!' to more obviously feature the talents of the people who have been performing the first album live... especially Maud Waret's vocals and Brian Lee's violin-playing and zany spoken word monologues".

There is no better example of this statement than in opening track, 'It's All So Bright' - which features Waret's soft vocals like a lullaby over a delicate but catchy electronic backing track. The song flows smoothly in 'Snow Snow Snow Snow Snow', where we can see Linley's background in classical music and composition coming to the fore, using violins and harp to great effect.

The album's title track 'Wahoola!' takes a drastic departure and

change of pace, complete with drum 'n' bass effects and rambling spoken voiceovers. This track is the most reminiscent for me of seeing them play live.

'Red Leaves Floating on the Water' resumes where track two left off, and makes for an off kilter change of pace, although the song itself is very strong and one of the album's highlights.

On the whole, the album flows together sublimely, and Linley gets to demonstrate his vast musical repertoire, at times building tracks around ambitious string arrangements, as in 'Where (Are You)?', while at other times focusing on drums, or simply soft gentle melodic singing.

Linley is a great talent, and this album comes highly recommended.

Track Listing:

- 01) It's all so bright
- 02) Snow snow snow snow snow
- 03) Wahoola!
- 04) Red leaves floating on the water
- 05) Blow the trumpet
- 06) Where (are you)?
- 07) So far away
- 08) Let's go away

Kula Shaker : K2.0 - CD

Kula Shaker never trouble the charts or make big waves these days, but back in the 1990s – at the height of Britpop – they were a very big proposition indeed. Best known for their multi-platinum selling album, 'K', which actually became one of the fastest selling debuts of all time by a UK band, they have produced three other previous studio albums, although to much quieter recognition since then. After the band's second album, 'Peasants, Pigs and Astronauts', the band took a six-year hiatus, due in small measure to the reaction of the media after lead singer Crispian Mills gave an inflammatory and albeit very naïve interview to the music press.

'Infinite Sun' is the opening track on their fifth album 'K2.0' and we are immediately in familiar Kula Shaker territory here, complete with sitars; chanting, driving drumbeat and classic rock guitars. True to form, the song is catchy and instantly infectious – and this is what the band is really good at delivering.

Second up is 'Holy Flame', which does not have the same psychedelic vibe but is happy and upbeat - and keeps the momentum flowing at a steady pace. 'Death of Democracy' could be the band's only stab at a protest song to date, but don't let that put you off because the next track, 'Let Love B (With You)', is one of the highlights and is somewhat raw by Crispian Mills' standards.

'Here Come My Demons' is uncharacteristically dark and

depressing, but manages to sound sentimental, rather than dreary – as much of their previous album 'Pilgrims Progress' did. In fact this could easily fit in amongst the tracks of 'Road to Rouen'- era Supergrass, another 90's Britpop force, who went on to produce some very high quality music long after the flame of Oasis had burnt itself out.

The only real blip is 'Oh Mary' which is an earnest effort but comes across mawkish and even pretentious, rather than sincere. To counterbalance this, another stand out track is '33 Crows', which at first may sound like a clichéd Bob Dylan rip-off but belies a sardonic sense of dry wit. And this probably epitomises the problems that the band have had over the years; maybe the reason that a lot of people don't get Kula Shaker is that at times it can be hard to tell if Kula Shaker are having a laugh or taking it all far too seriously.

My advice would be not to think about it too much and just enjoy what they have to offer. What can't be denied is that they have an ear for writing some incredibly catchy and uplifting music. And whilst this album may not change the world or reach the heights that their debut achieved nearly twenty years ago, you will tap your feet and enjoy listening to it - so what other reason do you need to listen to an album?

Track Listing:

01) Infinite Sun

02) Holy Flame

- 03) Death of Democracy
 - 04) Love B with U
 - 05) Here come my Demons
 - 06) 33 Crows
 - 07) Oh Mary
 - 08) High Noon
 - 09) Hari Bol (the sweetest sweet)
 - 10) Get Right Get Ready
 - 11) Mountain Lifter
-

Layabouts : Savage Behavior - CD

I've always been a sucker for a good opening track. You can often tell what you're going to get from an album from the first few bars alone, and so it is with 'Savage Behavior' – the latest album from Madrid rockers, the Layabouts.

I was hooked from the opening guitar riff of track one, 'Rock's Dead'. Thumping beat, driving guitars, the influence of Guns 'n' Roses is clear to see here. And I mean the era when Guns 'n' Roses were actually good, and considered a real force to be reckoned with. Although trite, the lyrics manage to sound earnest enough and might even make you smile.

The rest of the album doesn't disappoint either.

The second song, 'Fire', feels a little bit like Placebo (albeit without

Brian Molko's annoying whiney voice), or could even be an early Joy Division number.

Although this is clearly a rock album, the Layabouts seem to draw influences from many sources of inspiration: at times sounding like modern rock giants, Queens of The Stone Age, at other times, 50's teddy-boy doo-wop, skiffle, or 70's UK ska.

Even so 'Savage Behavior' never sounds like stolen material or a tribute album but instead manages to remain modern and fresh, despite the eclectic range of source material.

Although there are no bad tracks on here, other highlights include 'To the End' (reminiscent of garage era Clash), 'It's All Dead', 'Rollercoaster' and 'Numbers Figures' (with a doth of the cap to the Melvins, perhaps).

What shines out throughout is that the Layabouts obviously love all aspects of good rock music, and love what they do.

'Savage Behavior' is a short album (barely 30 minutes long) but doesn't leave you feeling short-changed. As soon as I'd finished listening I immediately wanted to play it over again. And I did, several times. And that can only be good thing.

It's fair to say the Layabouts have had a good year in 2011; a successful tour – including a slot on the main stage in their hometown for Benicassim. On the evidence of this album, I can't wait to see them play.

Track Listing:

- 01) Rocks Dead
 - 02) Fire
 - 03) Falling Over (The Man Who Broke the Law)
 - 04) Chevy
 - 05) To the End
 - 06) River of the Moon
 - 07) Rollercoaster
 - 08) Numbers Figures
 - 09) On My Side
 - 10) It's All Dead
-

Maison Neuve : Joan - CD

'Joan' is the debut album from Maison Neuve, a French act who love guitars, drums, organ, sax, paid jobs, insomnia and Paris.

Brought up on the folk music of places like Rodez, Stockholm, Toulouse and the Landes, whilst dreaming of Bossa Nova and Rock 'n' Roll, they have a feeling of sentimental excitement and wildlife, big cities and true love.

The press release that accompanied this release drew comparisons with Leonard Cohen. They were, however, more reminiscent to me of the Velvet Underground - which is certainly

no bad thing.

The opening track in particular - 'You are My Prophet'- sounds eerily similar to 'All Tomorrow's Parties'; sombre heavy drumbeat that builds up into something truly majestic in tone and scope and portends toward what is to come.

The melodies have a strong sense of longing and regret, that somehow manage to convey these emotions far more aptly than lyrics could. Still, this is not really a sombre or sad album. This is the kind of album that will cheer you up in the winter and make you remember warm summer evenings and past dalliances fondly.

The band show a lot of restraint with the subject matter, and much of the power in the music stems from this. They are not as joyful and exuberant as another French band currently making (small) waves on the London music scene, We Were Evergreen, but still stand up to the task rather well.

To some extent this is an album of two halves; starting out in English, before switching mainly to French in the second half. Interestingly they sound much better in French - and I say that as someone who cannot speak a word of the language. An extra air of mystery is added, along with another level of complexity to the music.

Although the album certainly creates a certain vibe, it is not monotone or repetitive. The only single from the album (so far) 'Under Skies of Fire' is charged with roaring guitars and staccato

piano playing, utilizing skilful transitions and goes from rapid acceleration to gentle wind down with seeming ease and grace.

'Humble Hearts' is another standout track, brimming with haunting vocals and winsome charm.

'Victor' has a slow momentum to it, that draws you in and picks up pace before you have time to notice. Starting with simple bass, the music builds, creating tension until a deep, densely layered melody is achieved, and abruptly abates.

'Joan' manages to sound jaded and fresh all at once, but is above all incredibly wistful. To use a rather apt cliché - it has a certain *je ne sais quoi* about it.

Vive la France!

Track Listing:

- 01) Prophet
- 02) The Wrong Class
- 03) Under Skies of Fire
- 04) Victor
- 05) Sweet Soul
- 06) Au large de la ville
- 07) Jojo
- 08) Humble Hearts
- 09) Touch In the Heart

10) Lizzy In the Sea

11) L'attraction terrestre

Souvaris : Souvaris Souvaris - CD

Not the typical type of band that you'd expect to find in Nottingham, Souvaris are an instrumental five-piece who make inspired and thought-provoking music.

Unlike many instrumental bands, Souvaris don't use an extensive range of instruments, sticking to two guitarists, bass, synth, and drums; and yet still manage to create a wide variety of audio effects. Listening to a Souvaris album is a truly sonic experience.

With ten years of experience, they sound like they have really found their form, and possibly – brimming with confidence – have chosen an eponymous title for their latest offering.

They know what they are good at and they stick to this formula. To some extent the music could be described as experimental – but not in a pretentious and difficult sense. Self-titled eponym aside, they never sound cocky, but rather intelligent (in a non-condescending way).

A subtle follow-up to 2007's highly sublime 'A Hat', this time round the band have not tried to repeat or compete with their previous record, and have made an album on their own terms. Fresh, slick

and inventive.

What Souvaris make is some exceptional “mood music”. I can imagine putting this on after a long day to wind down. Or better still, as the soundtrack to a small mellow party, or a late night conversation with a friend. And I really don't mean that in a derogatory way. This album could not feasibly be considered wallpaper.

The album consists of only six tracks, each of about seven minutes duration.

The opener, 'El Puto Amo', starts modestly but manages to draw you in, and flows seamlessly into the second track, 'Pibno'.

The third track is a change of pace, and catches you off-guard with cutting guitars. For me this is the highlight of the album. From here on out, the album follows this tempo, and the last three tracks peak and trough but flow well from one to another.

Closing number, 'Irrereversible', in some ways comes full circle and could meld back into track one if played in a loop. This spiralling nature works extremely well, and is a clear example of the talent on display here.

Although this won't be to everyone's taste, 'Souvaris Souvaris' is well worth having a listen to. There is something here for everyone.

Track Listing:

- 01) El Puto Amo
 - 02) Pibno
 - 03) Millions
 - 04) Pleasing
 - 05) Mooky
 - 06) Irrereversible
-

Twilight Singers : Dynamite Steps - CD

'Dynamite Steps' is the fifth album from the Twilight Singers, who are fronted by Greg Dulli and were formed after the demise of his 90's soul-rock act, the Afghan Whigs. The album also marks the end of a five year hiatus, their last album being 2006's 'Powder Burns'.

The first thing that strikes you about this album is the packaging. Great care has gone into creating something attractive, and is the first hint as to what is the intention of 'Dynamite Steps'. Dulli has undoubtedly made an effort to impress here, but does the music stand up to this?

Lyricaly dark, and not sounding too dissimilar to Soundgarden, Dulli has created an album that is both energetic and hungry, yet somehow displays an element of restraint. The guitars drift from soulful blues (as he did in the 90s and beyond) into near punk-like

frenzy.

Now in his mid 40's, and despite the gap between albums, Dulli is something of a veteran of the scene, and this can be heard to some extent in 'Dynamite Steps'. The music here is reliable – not experimental – but that is no bad thing. Dulli sticks to what he is good at, but you never get the feeling that he is simply going through the motions here.

So, musically and lyrically sound, 'Twilight Burns' is sturdy enough. Dulli is a confident musician and clearly comfortable doing what he does, even if the content is at times thematically dark. Even so, after such a lengthy wait for an album, you can't help expecting something slightly more.

Dulli treads familiar ground in the very angry sounding 'Never Seen No Devil' and duets with Ani DiFranco on 'Fox and The Blackbird'. For me, the album's highlight is the combination of 'Gunshots/She was Stolen', running together well, almost like an 'Abbey Road' sequence of musical narrative.

Fans will love this for sure, which is a far superior album to 'Powder Burns', but newcomers may be left wondering what all the fuss in the 1990s was about.

Track Listing:

01) Last Night In Town

02) Be Invited

- 03) Waves
 - 04) Get Lucky
 - 05) On The Corner
 - 06) Gunshots
 - 07) She Was Stolen
 - 08) Blackbrid And The Fox
 - 09) Never Seen No Devil
 - 10) The Beginning Of The End
 - 11) Dynamite Steps
-

Wild Mercury Sound : Miss Frost - CD

'Miss Frost' is the debut single from the Wild Mercury Sound. I'd never heard of this band before – probably not surprising as it's their first single – although sometimes you hear online rumours of dynamite shows from unknown, unsigned acts, destined to be the next big thing. Not so with the Wild Mercury Sound.

This should put a reviewer in a good position – a chance to be completely objective – and listen with an unbiased, fresh perspective. I have to admit this was not case with this band; as I put this CD in my player, I half expected to hear another bland indie band spinning out a dirge, or perhaps some nondescript rockers thrashing about a bit.

I'm very pleased to say that I was proved wrong. After just a few bars I knew that this was going to be a band that I liked a lot.

Their sound is big and confident, with confident guitar riffs and exciting drumming. What makes this all the more impressive is that the Wild Mercury Sound are all still teenagers. To say that they have a massive potential would be something of an understatement – as they already sound like a polished and well-established act, making serious music.

Unsurprisingly for young people, the themes of their lyrics are concerned with break-ups and drugs, but not in “trying-to-be-cool” kind of way – you really get the sense that they have lived through their songs. They are creating music from experience.

They remind me slightly of the Music – who came out a few years back to rapturous applause, but then didn’t do very much really. Hopefully this will not be the case here. A bold start to their career, I’m already looking forward to an album and some live shows.

After listening to this single (but not before) – I had to look them up on the internet to find out more. There are some songs featured on YouTube that are well worth checking out, as well as the usual MySpace shenanigans. But for once, actually worth visiting:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sfy-hT76LCg>

<http://www.myspace.com/thewildmercurysound>

Track Listing:

- 01) Miss Frost
- 02) Itchy Skin
- 03) Miss Frost (Radio Edit)