DORK

DOWN WITH BORING.

ISSUE 81 · OCTOBER 2023 · READDORK.COM





ALEX LAHEY ALFIE JUKES ANOTHER SKY
ANTONY SZMIEREK AUTOMOTION AZIYA
BEDROOM HIGH CLUB BENEFITS BIG SPECIAL
BRAD HEIDI CARTWRIGHT CASSIA CATHY KIO
CHIEDU ORAKA CHILLI JESSON CLARENCE
CORELLA COUSIN TONY'S BRAND NEW FIREBIRD
COWBOYY CRYSTAL TIDES DEKI ALEM
DJANGO JONES AND THE MYSTERY MEN DRELLA
EYELAR FAT DOG FEET FIG BY FOUR
FIONA LEE FROZEMODE GRETEL HÄNLYN
HAMISH HAWK HOTWAX IRAINA MANCINI
JACK VALERO JO HILL JOHNNY JURASSIC
JUNODREAM KAI BOSCH KATIE GREGSON MACLEOD
KATIE MALCO KAYLA GRACE KEG LEXIE CARROLL
LIME GARDEN LIP FILLER LYNKS
MACKENZY MACKAY MANTA MARUJA
MARY IN THE JUNKYARD MATILDA MANN
MICKEY CALLISTO MINAS MORGAN HARPER-JONES
NELL MESCAL OLIVER ASADI
PARIS PALOMA PICTURE PARLOUR
PIGS PIGS PIGS PIGS PIGS PIGS PIGS
PIP BLOM PORCHLIGHT PORIJ QUIET HOUSES
RAINBOWFROGBISCUITS REALLY GOOD TIME
REIGNMAKER ROSIE MILES RY-GUY SAFII KOII
SHAME SHANGHAI BABY SHAUN FARRUGIA
SIIGHTS SIOBHAN WINIFRED SLANEY BAY
SNAYX SONNI MILLS SOUTH ARCADE
STERLING PRESS T.M/O TERRA KIN THE 113
THE BUG CLUB THE CHASE
THE DREAM MACHINE THE FLORENTINAS
THE JOY HOTEL THE LAST DINNER PARTY
THE MYSTERINES THE RILLS
TINYUMBRELLAS TUMMYACHE WUNDERHORSE

MANY MORE TO BE ANNOUNCED

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BACK ISSUES!
Want to complete your collection and grab Dork covers with all your faves? Get 'online' and head on over to **shop.readdork.com** and find our complete back catalogue, available while they last.



Issue 81 | October 2023 | readdork.com | Down With Boring

Hiya, Dear Reader.

It's a changing of season at Dork this month – not just as summer gives way to the less sweltering conditions of autumn, but also as some not-insignificant changes are afoot.

Many of you will know that the editorial team behind this very magazine also make another publication – our sister title, Upset. Focused on the louder end of the music spectrum, for over seven years now, we've been putting out both each month. But now, we think it's time for a change.

Starting from this issue, we're delighted to welcome Upset as a new, fully integrated part of Dork. As this magazine – and music as a whole – has become more and more flexible with genre, it began to feel more and more reductive to keep one part of the spectrum walled off in its own publication. We'll be publishing regular digital Upset cover features on readdork.com, with the best of the acts that Upset covers making their way into the pages of Dork, giving them the widest possible audience.

That starts now, with one of this month's three cover stars. KennyHoopla has been an Upset favourite for years now. One of the most vital acts in heavy music today, we're delighted to welcome him to the front of Dork this month. He's joined by one of the breakout acts of the last 12 months or so, the brilliant Jockstrap – who by now will either have won the Mercury Prize or... not – and the magnificent Holly Humberstone, finally here with her debut album.

Quite possibly our most packed issue yet, there's so much to get your teeth into this month, you'll still be going by the time the next issue drops. Enjoy!



'Editor'
@stephenackroyd



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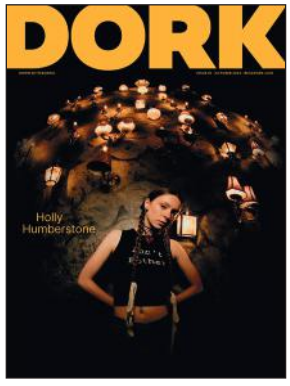
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INTRO.

THE BEATING HEART OF POP NONSENSE.

A BIG DAY OUT

Mosh-pits, singalongs, on-stage drinking games, a birthday cake, posters that are mysteriously missing come the end of the day (cheers for the clean-up help, guys) – and even a pop quiz thrown in for good measure. Turns out we can organise a piss-up in a brewery.

Words: Alex Cabré, Jamie Muir.

Photos: Patrick Gunning.



'QUESTION FOUR. WHAT - TO THE NEAREST 10 'GSM' - IS THE WEIGHT OF PAPER STOCK USED FOR THE INNER PAGES OF DORK?"

→ Dork's Day Out 2023 is an unmissable day stacked with favourites; the Signature Brew Brewery in London embracing pop nonsense and kicking boring to the kerb for our biggest live party to date. Mosh-pits, singalongs, on-stage drinking games, a birthday cake, posters that are mysteriously missing come the end of the day (cheers for the clean-up help, guys) - there's even a pop quiz thrown in for good measure.

Laughing in the face of morning downpours, Jo Hill takes to the stage to open Dork's Day Out with the sort of blue-sky hooks that make her Very Exciting Indeed. Immediately pulling the packed room even closer, she blends the feel-good and vulnerable together into one joyful summer cocktail. The likes of 'Off The 45', 'Stay At Home Girl' and a triumphant cover of Caroline Polachek's 'So Hot You're Hurting My Feelings' set a marker for everything Jo Hill is about, but it's the combination of a mid-set drinking game to 'The Falcon' and a soaring 'Glastonbury' that capture perfectly the balance of pop fun and bangers alike.

With Pixey, unfortunately, having to pull out of her set due to illness (get well soon, Pixey!), a hyperactive SOFY takes to the DJ decks for a sun-soaked set of top pop bops that David Guetta could only dream of dropping on a day like this - perfectly setting the stage for Talk Show, who rattle the cobwebs out of place with their intense brand of barbed-wire garage rock. It's not even 5pm by the time frontman Harrison is top off, squaring up to Signature Brew like a madman with a thousand-yard stare. "What's up, Dork! It feels a bit weird saying that..." he laughs before the foursome launch into 'party-starter' Cold House'. They amp the energy up by a mile, airing some unreleased material that's all clubby basslines and dance breaks appearing fast enough to give you whiplash. It's a kick up the arse that gets Dork's Day Out well and truly underway, with indie royalty Cav from Swim Deep swiftly following with a DJ set that sees him tower across Signature Brew with an eclectic ride that has shuffling



and swinging hips alike. The perfect mix.

Honeyglaze take the room to more ethereal places as they showcase their self-titled debut album from last year and some new cuts too. The outfit are a mesmerising stage presence, moving as one unit through the emotionally-charged set. When lead singer/guitarist Anouska forgets the lyrics at one point, it couldn't matter less. Their lilting melodies and experimental instrumentation - bassist Tim plays using a bow in a few spots - offer the perfect space for an early-evening chill-out, and the crowd is firmly on their side.

Arriving with pure, unfiltered momentum, Swim School have become a punchy force of nature - the likes of 'delirious' and 'BORED' lighting up pogoing responses and ripping across Signature Brew with a crunchy oomph that can't be stopped. Fans sing along (even taking on vocal duties at one point) as the trio light up the room with charm. The swooning 'don't leave me behind' and 'kill you' add even more sprinkles of brilliance to everything Swim School are about - the sort of band ready-made to fall in love with. You'll be seeing a lot more of them; that's a guarantee.

With Picture Parlour making an unforgettable DJ debut and celebrating lead singer Katherine's birthday too, they set the energy high for what to come: pandemonium. That may be the only way to describe Courting at Dork's Day Out. From the first note, there's a sweaty eruption of mosh-pits, swaying crowds and arms-aloft screams - showcasing just how far Courting have come since those early scrappy shows. 'Tennis', a mash-up of 'Crass' and Icona Pop's 'I Love It', and 'Jumper' ring out with feverish fun. A sugar-rush tour-de-force in seizing their moment, as Courting enter their next chapter, it's clear they're becoming an essential band.

Taking to the stage adorned in a Signature Brew high-vis, it's nice of Dork cover star Thomas Headon to take time out from brewing to serve up the sort of glorious pop celebration that finds him sharper and brighter than ever before. 'How Do I Know?' sees him climbing brewing platforms, 'Georgia' has devoted fans bellowing lyrics back and '2009 Toyota' - one of many tracks dropped tonight from latest EP 'six songs Thomas Headon likes and thinks you would like too' - lands with a fizzing edge that packs an almighty punch backed by his band.

There's unabashed freedom and joy when it comes to Thomas Headon live, especially on a Saturday night. With covers of Taylor Swift's 'We Are Never Ever Getting Back Together' and Hannah Montana SMASH 'The Best Of Both Worlds' thrown in for good measure, there's no stopping a set bounding with superstar swagger. The spiky 'wet tongue' and hypnotic 'i loved a boy' perfectly mix with the celebratory one-two of 'Nobody Has To Know' and 'UrbanAngel1999' to close out a set that showcases everything right about thriving new music. Bursting with personality and overflowing with ambition, it's an intimate night from a sensation who's bringing fun to the front. Cheers, Thomas.

As Chris from The Amazons spins proceedings into the early hours, it perfectly brings to a close a popping box of everything Dork for another Day Out. See you in 2024; we'll get the stage ready now. ■









THE NEWS 'FYI'



OMAR APOLLO HAS A NEW EP

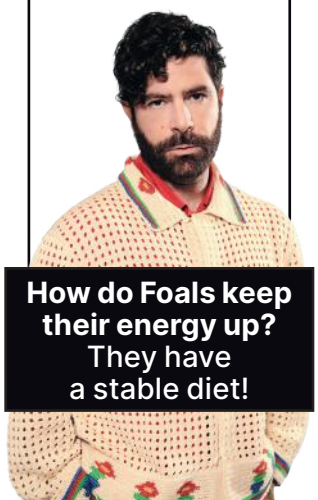
→ **Omar Apollo** has announced a new EP. 'Live for Me' will be released on 6th October, preceded by single 'Ice Slippin''. Omar explains: "'Ice Slippin is about reliving the thoughts I had passing through my mind the winter I came out to my family. Receiving cold judgment as opposed to the acceptance I felt I deserved. This song is a reflection and reaction of all the emotions I had to face before and after I decided to leave the icy streets of Indiana."



BRING ME PUSH IT BACK

→ **Bring Me The Horizon** have delayed the release of their upcoming album, 'POST HUMAN: NEX GEN'. Frontman Oli Sykes explained: "So I got some bad news... nex gen won't be coming September 15th. unforeseen circumstances rendered us unable to complete the record to the standard we'd be happy with. I was hoping despite the setbacks we could pull it off in time for you guys but there's still so many little details I want to be perfect and until it's nailed I'm just not willing to give it to you guys."

BAD JOKES HOME



How do Foals keep their energy up? They have a stable diet!

MAX COOPER

3D/AV

29.09.23	BRIGHTON Chalk	08.10.23	CARDIFF Tramshed
30.09.23	BIRMINGHAM The Mill	SOLD OUT	GLASGOW St Lukes
06.10.23	MANCHESTER New Century Hall	14.10.23	NEWCASTLE Boilershop

BY ARRANGEMENT WITH THE WILD SEEDS & LITTLE BIG AGENCY

PEACE



UK 2023
LIVE

NOVEMBER

03 BATH KOMEDIA
04 BIRMINGHAM TOWN HALL
05 SOUTHAMPTON ENGINE ROOMS
07 LEEDS STYLUS
08 GLASGOW ORAN MOR
09 NEWCASTLE WYLAM BREWERY
10 SHEFFIELD FOUNDRY
11 MANCHESTER NEW CENTURY HALL
14 LONDON HEAVEN

A CROSSTOWN CONCERTS, FKP SCORPIO & FRIENDS PRESENTATION
BY ARRANGEMENT WITH PURE

THE HOOSIERS

plus special guests
CRYSTAL TIDES ✖
ƎƎVAH ▲

PLAYING SONGS OFF THE NEW ALBUM & ALL THE HITS



SOLD OUT **BRISTOL**, Thekla ▲
SOLD OUT **LEEDS**, Brudenell Social Club ▲
30 Sep **SHEFFIELD**, Leadmill ✖
01 Oct **NEWCASTLE**, Boilershop ✖
02 Oct **GLASGOW**, St Lukes ▲
03 Oct **MANCHESTER**, Gorilla ✖
05 Oct **LONDON**, Koko ✖

A **CROSSTOWN CONCERTS** & **DF** PRESENTATION BY ARRANGEMENT WITH **X-RAY**

pale blue eyes

plus special guests
CIEL

uk tour **november 2023**

02 Hertford Corn Exchange
03 Southampton Joiners
04 Leeds Belgrave Music Hall
05 Penrith Brunswick Yard
07 Newcastle The Cluny
09 Edinburgh Mash House
10 Glasgow Broadcast
11 Nottingham Bodega
12 Sheffield Foundry
13 Oxford Bullingdon
15 Birmingham Hare & Hounds
16 London Village Underground
17 Bristol Strange Brew
18 Manchester Deaf Institute
19 Brighton Patterns

a **Crosstown Concerts & Friends** presentation by arrangement with **ATC Live**



the new album **This House** out 01 Sep on Full Time Hobby

GIRLS

War Child UK is putting on a bunch of shows in support of their Day of the Girl series, and Dork is coming along for the ride with some of our fave acts. Here's the lowdown...

WAR child

MONDAY 9TH OCTOBER

CAITY BASER

CHARLOTTE PLANK
BELLAH MAE
LAFAYETTE, LONDON

Hi Caity! How's it going, what are you up to today?
Heya all good thank you! Just on my way to Belgium for a show. Feeling good!

You're playing War Child UK's Day Of The Girl, how did you get involved with the event?
War Child is obviously such an important charity and DOTG is doing exactly many of the things that are really important to me - namely putting women first! So when they reached out to me and asked me to take part and help create a line up I said: absolutely. It's going to be a great night, I can't wait.

Day Of The Girl is about inspiring the next generation. Who inspired you growing up?
The song I remember that first inspired me was 'At Last' by the one and only Etta James. The way she sings it just changed everything for me when I first heard it - so I think she has to be up there. Also Katy Perry - I really looked up to her growing up and still do now!

How important is it to you to get involved with causes you're passionate about?
It's really important. If I can influence even just one person - or make a difference in some small way - then it's a job well done and I wanna be a part of it. Things like equality and equal opportunities have always been important to me. If we all just sit back and do nothing then nothing will change! So I take this stuff very seriously.

If you could put three people down on the guest list and they had to attend, who would you pick?
Elton John just cuz he's amazing and I believe he feels the same way about making a difference. Freddie Mercury because he's another one that inspired me, just because he was so fabulously himself and never changed for anyone and I think I've learnt a lot from him. And then my dad cuz he's my best friend and I love him so.

We're more than half way through the year now - what've been your highlights so far? Has it been a good one for you?
This year has been a dream for me! A summer full of festivals and lots of travelling and meeting people, it's really been great. I couldn't even tell u a highlight cuz there are so many. I'm just so grateful that I get to sing in front of people for a job. It's the best thing ever.

What else are you working on at the moment?
This show for War Child will be my last of the year, so it'll be a biggy. Aside from that: I am sworn to secrecy!! But there is something coming... [Spoiler alert: Skip ahead to p74 to find out more - Ed]

→ **Caity Baser, Nilüfer Yanya and The Mysterines** are all set to perform intimate live shows in venues across London and Manchester throughout the week commencing 9th October, in support of the Day of the Girl event series from War Child UK - the specialist charity to protect, educate, and stand up for the rights of children living in war zones.

Caity Baser will kick off the series of events on 9th October at Lafayette, London, followed by Nilüfer Yanya at Bush Hall, London on 11th October, and finallyThe Mysterines, who will be playing at Gorilla, Manchester on 12th October.

Tickets to the shows are on sale now, priced at £25.

It's all part of the charity's Day of The Girl event series, coinciding with the UN's International Day of the Girl Child. Through a celebration of young, woman-identifying talent, the series aims to create a moment that highlights the specific challenges girls and young women face around the world, and to raise vital funding to help War Child protect, educate, and stand up for the rights of children affected by conflict.

The event series' headline sponsor is YouTube Music, and your friendly neighbourhood Dork (*Hi - Ed*) is on board as media partner. As part of the event series, War Child and the YouTube Music Studios will also be hosting a music industry day in celebration of Day of the Girl on Tuesday 10th October. More details on that will be announced soon.

Charlotte Nimmo, Head of Fundraising Engagement at War Child said: "We are thrilled to launch Day of The Girl 2023. We are grateful for the support of all the musicians who will help us in amplifying the importance of the issues spotlighted by this event series. This collaborative effort will also raise vital funds to support War Child's work. Girls and young women living in conflict zones endure impossible circumstances. Through provisions such as aid, education, and psychosocial support, War Child empowers young women who refuse to be defined by the horrors of war."



TO THE F



LOUD + PROUD

→ It's debut album time for everyone's favourite straight-talking punk up-and-comers, SPRINTS. The Dublin four-piece are opening 2024 as they mean to go on, kicking down the door with their first full statement of intent, 'Letter To Self', arriving on 5th January via City Slang. Billed as "an exploration of pain, passion and perseverance", it's going to be an explosive start to the new year. Karla Chubb tells us more.

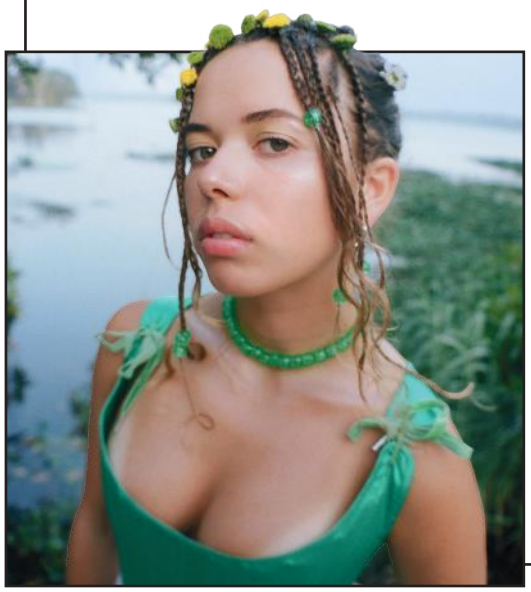
Tell us about your debut album, then. Is it completely done and dusted now? What's left to do?
The album is done, dusted, and on its way to print, so it's extremely exciting. It's pretty terrifying to think that in a matter of months, our debut album will be out, but we've really poured everything into this record, so hopefully, the response is good.

What was your process like for pulling it together? Was it an easy birth?
I think the process was painless enough? I feel like we've got such a natural chemistry and understanding with each other that we kind of knew what songs we wanted to use and what we wanted to say. There was definitely a bit of unspoken pressure we were putting ourselves under for it to be great - looking at iconic debuts like [PJ Harvey's] 'Dry', [Pixies'] 'Surfer Rosa', [The Strokes'] 'Is This It'... that's the level you want to be at but is obviously incredibly hard to reach. So we definitely pushed ourselves a lot, explored a lot of new sounds and textures, but eventually, we just trusted each other and put forward what we think is our best work yet.

What's the record about, is there a general theme or vibe?
It's definitely our most honest and autobiographical work to date. Lyrically it is very open, blunt and raw. I've really kind of poured myself, my experiences onto a page and laid it all bare. I feel like there are parts of my life, things I've experienced that I've not fully processed or healed from, so now, after writing them and putting them out, it's almost like I can close that chapter and move forward.
Sonically, it's pretty classic SPRINTS - loud, fast and heavy-hitting. We drew a lot of inspiration from the early 80s gothic of Bauhaus, the 90s guitar-driven fuzz of Pixies, PJ Harvey, and there's definitely a modern LCD Soundsystem, BRMC, IDLES edge to some of the tracks, too. So basically, noise.

What else have you lot got going on at the moment?
Besides the album, upcoming European, US and UK tours, as well as Irish dates and potential in-stores...

WEDNESDAY 11TH OCTOBER
NILÜFER YANYA
LÉA TROUT and BOBBI BUSH
JAZZI SEN
HALL, LONDON



Hi Nilüfer! How's it going, what are you up to today?
Hey! It's good, yesterday was Notting Hill Carnival so I'm a bit tired.

You're playing War Child UK's Day Of The Girl, how did you get involved with the event?
I met War Child at a similar event I played at - a fundraiser for the earthquakes in Turkey and Syria, we played at the Royal Albert Hall amongst lots of other acts.
They asked me if I wanted to curate a line up for the next Day Of The Girl and I said yes!

Day Of The Girl is about inspiring the next generation. Who inspired you growing up?
My sister was six years older than me so I think she naturally inspired me a lot, especially when it came to music. Her CDs were kind of a gateway into guitar music and songwriting for me.

How important is it to you to get involved with causes you're passionate about?
It's really important I think if you're in a position where you can get involved and help others in some way it means that you kind of should.... It's really important to me to not let the feeling of like you can't make a big enough impact to stop you from doing something. Smaller sustainable actions as long as they are actions will still make a positive impact.

We're more than half way through the year now - what've been your highlights so far? Has it been a good one for you?
It's been an amazing one for me so far. I made the decision to not tour this year and just focus on writing my next record. It's been a real luxury to just focus on that.

Hi! How's it going, what are you up to today?
It's going good. Today we've been at a knife throwing assistance 100th birthday party...There were cows.

You're playing War Child UK's Day Of The Girl, how did you get involved with the event?
They approached our management about us being involved and when we were asked naturally we said yes; we've heard of the charity over the years so it's a pleasure to contribute.

Day Of The Girl is about inspiring the next generation. Who inspired you growing up?
All of our amazing and beautiful mothers.

How important is it to you to get involved with causes you're passionate about?
Very important, and supporting women and girls this way is something we all wanted to commit to for that reason.

If you could put three people down on the guest list and they had to attend, who would you pick?
Katy Price, Matt Berry and Joan of Arc. Imagine the after show!!!

We're more than half way through the year now - what've been your highlights so far?
This year has been great heading out with the Arctic Monkeys was certainly the main highlight and a lifetime goal that we all wanted to achieve (and meeting Danny Dyer was up there too).

What else are you working on at the moment?
Stop press, we're heading to LA later this year to record LP two. We can't wait.



THURSDAY 12TH OCTOBER
THE MYSTERINES
LIME HANNAH GORILLA,
GARDEN GRAE
MANCHESTER

RONT

FESTIVAL PREVIEW

Live At Leeds In The City

Saturday 14th October 2023

MUST SEE...



LIME GARDEN
→ Brighton's next big things are on the road to their debut album now. That means they're an essential catch at Live at Leeds In The City this year.

NELL MESCAL
→ Nell has been dropping a string of 5-star singles all year. Along with supporting Haim at their recent Shepherd's Bush show, and ringing up all the right co-signs, she's fast becoming one of the hottest names around.

FAT DOG
→ We've been waiting long enough for actual recorded material from Fat Dog - and now it's here. 'King of the Slugs' is exactly the mad-as-a-box-of-err-slugs(?), three part epic we hoped. Most bands would have kept it to the first two minutes. Not this lot.

→ Once upon a time, Live At Leeds' inner city, new music extravaganza kicked off festival season. Now with its sibling park based counterpart taking that May slot, Live At Leeds In The City is set firm in mid-October - but the commitment to discovering the next big thing remains as strong as ever.

Held across a variety of Leeds' best and most storied venues, 2023 promises a long list of current faves and buzzy talent. From the rampant mayhem of Shame and fast rising indie of Wunderhorse, there's also buzziest new bands in the country The Last Dinner Party and Picture Parlour, 2024's future heroes HotWax, Nell Mescal and Lime Garden, and must-see newcomers like Lip Filler, Fat Dog, Slaney Bay and more.

Taking place on Saturday, 14th October, you can grab tickets right now from **liveatleeds.com.**









GET A HOBBY THIS MONTH...

MAC WETHA

What does Mac do with his spare time?

I'm very very into chess. I play chess every day.

It's actually not good really to be honest. The way I play it is intense. I play online, I go to these chess clubs in London and I play bots sometimes. I've got a lot of close friends who are quite good so I'm just challenging them.

The frustrating thing is it's actually quite simple. As long as when you make a move you think about what your opponent could do, obviously you've got to get a few games in before you can start thinking that way but all you've got to do is think why am I doing this move. When you're in the game it's like oh that move looks good.

Lewis Culture is into chess. We took Tendai to chess club the other day. He played his first game and he was really into it. I feel like he's going to be really good. Dora Jar plays chess.



SOFT PLAY ARE BACK... AND WE'VE GOT BLUR TO THANK FOR IT

With a new single, a poptastic guest star and a secret return at Reading 2023, Isaac and Laurie are back! Back!! Back!!!

→ A long hiatus, a name change, and a big, bold statement of a single to return. Soft Play are back, and they've been missed. Fresh off wrangling Robbie Williams for their latest track, 'Punk's Dead' – a song that kicks back against the pricks that had an issue with them dropping their previous moniker – they were back at Reading & Leeds last month for two last-minute, smaller-than-you'd-expect sets. Before they turned the Festival Republic Tent into a jumping sweatbox, we caught up with Laurie and Isaac for a quick welcome back catch-up.

How does it feel to be back at a festival as Soft Play?

Isaac: A mixture of nice and very anxiety-inducing.

Laurie: We're like the little computer logo that's just loading. There's a lot of loading at the moment.

What sparked you guys writing together and playing together again?

Isaac: blur at Wembley asking us if we're available – and then us not getting the gig! But it made us get our arses into gear and have something to aim towards.

Laurie: Everything needs a spark. And that was our spark, to pull our fingers out and go, 'Do you know what? We've got something amazing here that's not being used'. I think we just started to appreciate each other again.

Have your solo projects influenced the new Soft Play material?

Laurie: We're always gonna sound like us. But there are definitely two tracks on the new record which have clear influence. One is essentially a song I wrote, and Isaac told me should be on the record, and one is a song Isaac wrote, which was the reverse. It felt like playing each other our demos and picking the best out of the bunch.

Isaac: Having the other outlet definitely allowed us to exorcise bits of ourselves as well. I feel more comfortable writing lyrics than I have previously because I've been writing loads while we've been away.

Laurie: Those projects were more about writing than they were about performing. So we've spent a lot more time working out how to write and produce. I think we're both better at the production process. Whereas before, it was just a vessel to get back to the stage. So yeah, the headline is: the new album slaps. ■

Words: Jake Hawkes. Photo: Patrick Gunning.


A CROSSTOWN CONCERTS & FRIENDS PRESENTATION BY ARRANGEMENT WITH WASSERMAN MUSIC
STORNOWAY
UK/IE TOUR 2023
PLUS SPECIAL GUEST
YIJIA
October
Fri 20 EXETER Phoenix
Sat 21 OXFORD Town Hall
Sun 22 BRISTOL O2 Academy
Tue 24 DUBLIN Whelan's
Thu 26 GLASGOW SWG3 Galvanizers
Fri 27 LEEDS Irish Centre
Sat 28 MANCHESTER O2 Ritz
Sat 28 MANCHESTER O2 Ritz
Sun 29 NOTTINGHAM Rescue Rooms
Tue 31 CARDIFF Tramshed
November
Wed 01 CAMBRIDGE Junction
Thu 02 BEXHILL De La Warr Pavilion
Fri 03 LONDON O2 Forum Kentish Town


THE MENZINGERS
FEBRUARY 2024
02 LONDON ELECTRIC BALLROOM
03 LONDON ELECTRIC BALLROOM
04 BRISTOL MARBLE FACTORY
06 BIRMINGHAM O2 INSTITUTE
08 NEWCASTLE NORTHUMBRIA UNI
09 GLASGOW BARROWLANDS
10 MANCHESTER ACADEMY
THEMENZINGERS.COM
BY ARRANGEMENT WITH WASSERMAN MUSIC


HALINA RICE
IMMERSIVE LIVESET & AV
12/10/23 NOTTINGHAM RESCUE ROOMS
17/11/23 EDINBURGH SUMMERHALL
12/04/24 BRISTOL TRINITY
13/04/24 BRIGHTON CHALK
19/04/24 NEWCASTLE BOILER SHOP
20/04/24 GLASGOW ST LUKES
26/04/24 LEEDS BRUDENELL SOCIAL CLUB
27/04/24 MANCHESTER GORILLA


RÖYKSOPP
TROUBLEGUM
EU Tour 2023
Saturday 21st October
O2 Forum Kentish Town
by arrangement with Primary Talent

FLOWER POWER

Rising bedroom pop star **FLOWEROVLOVE** is all about the posi-vibes, offering hope and reassurance that things can get better with her new single, 'Next Best Exit'.



→ Flowerovlove knows exactly what she's doing. Brilliant, dreamy EP, 'A Mosh Pit In The Clouds', came out last year after a string of buzzy tracks, while her subsequent live shows have become glorious celebrations of self-love. She's already released two singles this year, the epic sway of 'Love You' and the skipping summertime anthem 'Coffee Shop', while the past few months have seen her welcome more people into her feel-good universe via glorious appearances at festivals like Latitude, Primavera and Barn On The Farm. Her plans for the rest of the year? "Lots of smiles, lots of fun and taking more steps towards world domination."

That next step starts with 'Next Best Exit', a giddy indie-rock song that preaches positivity at every turn.

The song was inspired by her time at secondary school, where Flowerovlove was part of a "really popular friend group that turned out to be the most toxic thing ever. It took me the longest time to realise that," she explains. "The song is about trying to navigate your way out of that and finding the next best exit from toxic friend groups, people or moments that no longer serve you."

confidence in the studio.

Growing up wanting to be the next Justin Bieber, Flowerovlove was drawn to the radio-friendly pop of One Direction until she discovered The Strokes and Tame Impala alongside the retro bedroom pop of Strawberry Guy. She eventually teamed up with her brother and released debut single 'Kiss & Chase' in 2020. "There were no ambitions behind that song; we just did it because it sounded cool."

"I really wanted to start making music because I was feeling all these different things, and music can make you feel so powerful," she says. "Music can shift your mood from absolute sadness to over-the-moon joy."

There are nods to all those different influences in her music, with Flowerovlove already comfortable hopping between genres. "Maybe subconsciously, I'm influenced by every single piece of music I've listened to, but I couldn't know for sure since it's not intentional," she says.

Flowerovlove confirms she's sat on loads of music that she can't wait to release, but it has to be the right song for the right moment. "I say I'm just having fun, but everything is also intentional. I'm not just releasing music for the sake of it; everything is well thought out," she says, with each new track adding to that Flowerovlove universe.

> **"EVEN IF IT FEELS LIKE YOU'RE STUCK IN THE DARKEST OF TIMES, THERE'S ALWAYS A LIGHT"**
> **FLOWEROVLOVE**

As you might expect, there's a touch of venom to 'Next Best Exit', but the track is an empowering one. "The message is that there's always a way out. Even if it feels like you're stuck in the darkest of times, there's always a light," she says.

That sunny-side-up attitude can be found throughout Flowerovlove's back catalogue. "If you can make a song from something, that's a positive thing," she explains. There's no angst or desire for revenge. "I got a song out of that experience, and it's a great song, so to me, it was worth it."

She does turn to music when she's feeling sad or angry, but it's the ones that chase happiness that get released. "I want my music to sound bubbly and happy so that feeling can be spread to the listener," Flowerovlove says. "Whenever I'm writing, it's always joyful."

Like a lot of Flowerovlove songs, 'Next Best Exit' was written in the moment with the artist not overthinking the lyrics or the aching guitar licks. "It was a 'let's have fun and figure it out later' song," she says, with that attitude driven by a fearless

There's always that pressure that comes with releasing new music, but I'm never worried. I know it's going to work out for me," she adds, her eyes still on world domination. She's not started working on a debut album just yet, but she's thought about titles, vibes and what songs are going to be on it.

Still, despite those big pop star dreams, Flowerovlove clearly gives a shit about each person supporting her. Playing live has made her music feel "more universal," and seeing people resonate with her art is "incredibly satisfying and makes me feel really warm," says Flowerovlove. "I want to represent comfort for people. I want to represent self-love, and I want to be able to make people feel love for themselves," she adds.

As well as hyping up future releases, her TikTok is full of videos of her surprising fans at big life events or providing them studio sessions. Live, there's a focus on togetherness. "I want people to feel like they can do this." ■

Words: Ali Shutler. Photo: Frances Beach.

PARALLEL LINES

FAT WHITE FAMILY
SAT 9 SEP
ELECTRIC BRIXTON

TIRZAH
THUR 14 SEP
COLOUR FACTORY

THE NATIONAL
TUE 26 SEP
WED 27 SEP SOLD OUT
ALEXANDRA PALACE

DREAMER ISIOMA
THU 5 OCT
CORSICA STUDIOS

LSDXOXO
THU 5 OCT
ICA

RAPTURE DAY EVENT
SAT 7 OCT
HACKNEY EARTH

MITSKI
WED 11 OCT
UNION CHAPEL

SKINNY PELEMBE
WED 11 OCT
SCALA

WTRGRL
WED 11 OCT
THE WAITING ROOM

HAND HABITS
MON 16 OCT
OMEARA

DESIRE MAREA
TUE 17 OCT
HOXTON HALL

BONNY DOON
TUE 24 OCT
THE LEXINGTON

MANSUR BROWN
SAT 28 OCT
LAFAYETTE

COUCOU CHLOE
MON 30 OCT
VILLAGE UNDERGROUND

BLONDSHELL
WED 1 NOV
LAFAYETTE

ART SCHOOL GIRLFRIEND
THU 2 NOV SOLD OUT
ICA

LUCRECIA DALT
TUE 7 NOV
STUDIO 9294

DOG RACE
THU 9 NOV
THE WAITING ROOM

EGYPTIAN BLUE
THU 9 NOV
100 CLUB

DEVENDRA BANHART
WED 15 NOV
TROXY

FRANCIS OF DELIRIUM
WED 15 NOV
THE LEXINGTON

SODA BLONDE
WED 22 NOV
THE LEXINGTON

BC CAMPLIGHT
THU 23 NOV
O2 SHEPHERD'S BUSH EMPIRE

MOIN
WED 29 NOV
STUDIO 9294

YVES TUMOR
WED 29 NOV
O2 FORUM KENTISH TOWN

GEORGIA
THU 30 NOV
THE COLOUR FACTORY

GILLA BAND
MON 4 DEC
FABRIC

YEULE
MON 11 DEC
OUTERNET

LAURA MISCH
TU 12 DEC
HACKNEY EARTH

LANKUM
WED 13 DEC
ROUNDHOUSE

JOCKSTRAP
WED 13 DEC
THU 14 DEC SOLD OUT
BARBICAN

A. SAVAGE
WED 14 FEB
THE GARAGE

PARALLELLINESPROMOTIONS.COM



Chart Attack



THIS MONTH...

ARCTIC MONKEYS

I BET YOU LOOK GOOD ON THE DANCEFLOOR

What makes a number 1? That's what we're exploring on our podcast **Chart Attack**, where we jump in our big pop time machine and revisit number ones from the turn of the millennium onwards.

THE INFO

→ Released on 17th October 2005 by Domino records. 'I Bet You Look Good On The Dancefloor' is certified 3x platinum with sales of 1,800,000 according to Official Charts Company data. It's taken from their masterpiece debut album 'Whatever People Say I Am That's What I'm Not' which hit number 1 in January 2006.

THE LYRICS

→ "Your name isn't Rio, but I don't care for sand"

A reference to the song 'Rio' by Duran Duran (ask your parents - Ed), which includes the lyric "Her name is Rio, and she dances on the sand." Alex probably doesn't like the sand because it gets everywhere. Even in his sandwiches. Disaster.

→ "And lighting the fuse might result in a bang, b-b-bang-oh"

Alex is using the fuse as a metaphor for a relationship which is about to explode. As for the bang - we're sure you can work that out. Ooo-errr, the saucy little tyke.

→ "Dancin' to electro-pop like a robot from 1984"

1984 was the name of a band fronted by Jon McClure - later of Reverend and the Makers - that was active at the time this song was written. Alex Turner was a friend of Jon's, and had been in a band with him and Matt Helders before Arctic Monkeys. Jon's brother Chris is the one smoking a cigarette on the cover of 'Whatever People Say I Am, That's What I'm Not'. The name of McClure's band was taken from Nineteen Eighty-Four, the dystopian novel by George Orwell.

DID YOU KNOW?

1 This was Arctic Monkeys' first official single but everyone and their dog knew that they were going to be something very big indeed. Their early demos had been circulating for months on MySpace, and the collection 'Beneath The Boardwalk' swiftly became legendary.

2 The early tracks were passed around the early lawless state of pre-streaming era internet when file-sharing sites were king. The collection was named after the Sheffield venue in which the first person to send it on received a mysterious ripped CD of 18 songs.

3 With the excitement and buzz at fever pitch in an indie landscape that was already thriving with Franz Ferdinand, Kaiser Chiefs and Bloc Party ruling both the charts and the indie underground, the scene was set for Arctic Monkeys to make an explosion. 'I Bet You Look Good On The Dancefloor' right from its rocket-fuelled intro and breathless rush became their instant calling card. They bust firmly into the mainstream, where they have remained ever since.

4 In a sign that bands know nothing, they claimed the song is not that much cop really. Speaking to the Guardian in 2005, Alex said, "It's a bit shit. The words are rubbish. I scraped the bottom of the barrel. It could be a big song, like. But I'd hate to be just known for that song because it's a bit...crap."

5 18 years later and it remains the highlight of their live shows and one of the most thrilling debut singles of all time. A snapshot of a special time in music when a scrappy indie band with wordy lyrics could emerge from pure word of mouth, harnessing the power of the earliest social networks to become the biggest thing in the world

SUBSCRIBE TO CHART ATTACK AND LISTEN TO THIS EPISODE. JUST SEARCH 'CHART ATTACK' ON APPLE PODCASTS, SPOTIFY OR WHEREVER YOU GET YOUR PODCASTS, OR SCAN THE QR CODE BELOW.

DORK

NEXT MONTH



13TH OCTOBER 2023





THE BIG POP CULTURE TIME MACHINE

→ In 2005, indie music was experiencing the purplest of purple patches. It was massive. Everything was massive. Excitement was everywhere. In October when 'IBYLGOTD' was released there was also a line-up touring the UK that encapsulated the era. NME's Rock'n'Roll Riot tour featuring Kaiser Chiefs, Maximo Park and The Cribs was a chaotic parade of three bands and an audience all having the time of their lives. Arctic Monkeys arrived as the cherry on top of a very satisfying indie-pop cake. Also in October 2005 you had the release of one of the greatest pop songs of all time in 'Push The Button' by Sugababes. An underrated classic album by Rachel Stevens called 'Come and Get It', and 'Back To Bedlam' by James Blunt. An album that became the biggest thing ever despite only having three good songs. We'll leave you to work out which ones they are.

Music For NATIONS

HOT MILK

the debut album

A CALL TO THE VOID

OUT NOW



NOV 10 NETHERLANDS
TILBURG HALL OF FAME

NOV 12 GERMANY
HAMBURG HEADCRASH

NOV 13 GERMANY
BERLIN BADEHOUSE

NOV 15 GERMANY
COLOGNE NTC

NOV 16 FRANCE
PARIS LES ETOILES

with
SUPER LOVE

NOV 18 GLASGOW
SWG3
FINAL TICKETS

NOV 19 ~~NOTTINGHAM~~
~~RESCUE ROOMS~~
~~SOLD OUT~~
~~SOLD OUT~~

NOV 21 BRISTOL
TRINITY CENTRE
FINAL TICKETS

NOV 22 LONDON
O2 KENTISH TOWN
FORUM

NOV 24 ~~BIRMINGHAM~~
O2 INSTITUTE 2
~~SOLD OUT~~
~~SOLD OUT~~

NOV 25 MANCHESTER
ACADEMY

with
WITCH FEVER
MODERN ERROR



WWW.HOTMILK.CO.UK

JUST BE

With a knack for making the most charming indie-pop tunes around, Southern California teen **CLAIRE ROSINKRANZ** is experiencing her coming-of-age moment with debut album, 'Just Because'.

Words: Martyn Young.

→ Like many new artists, Claire Rosinkranz's path to success came via TikTok and a ubiquitous viral hit. 2020's breezy and joyous summer jam 'Backyard Boy' established the then 16-year-old Californian singer as a fresh and vibrant new pop voice, and she spent the next three years releasing a string of well-received singles and an EP, 2021's '6 Of A Billion', which further established Claire's creative world. Everything seemed to be idyllic and going oh so very well; however, this year, as she was poised to release her debut album, Claire suffered some health issues that meant the well-laid plan had to be slightly changed. The resultant nine months give 'Just Because' an added resonance as it documents some of the happiest times in Claire's life set against some of the more recent challenges which she has overcome.

"It's a big moment. I'm super excited," she beams. Indeed, this is one of the first interviews she's done since she got sick. A chance to step back into normality and remind us of her huge personality. "It's a very interesting time for me to release an album," she says. "I'm on the road to recovery. I'm still in my recovery process and kind of healing a lot of things, but I'm doing so much better. It's been a bit of a whirlwind. At the beginning, I wasn't even able to walk. I was super weak. I'm now walking, and I'm talking, and I'm conscious, and I'm here, so I'm a lot better." Releasing their debut record is a massive event for any artist, but given the trauma Claire has endured, the significance of people finally getting to hear this body of work is even more important. "It's super rewarding," she says. "It feels like a little bit of light in the midst of a lot of chaos and a dark time."

It's easy to see why people fell in love with Claire so quickly. Bursting with personality, she's always eager to tell us about her life and everything that goes into her creative process. The last time we spoke to Claire, she told us all about her beach trips, her dog Coco and her love of cooking. This time she also tells us about cooking but with a more holistic approach as she reveals the restorative joy of banana bread. "Since I got super sick, I have been in massive healing mode, so I've got into nutrition and health and finding out what I can eat because I can't eat a lot of things, so it's pushed me to make a lot of interesting meals," she explains. "I'm a health freak. I'm a health food guru. I've been making banana bread that's gluten-free, dairy-free and sugar-free, and it's so good. I do it every single time when I have a lot on my brain, or I'm anxious." So, what's the secret to a really good banana bread, then? "Super ripe bananas and lots of them, and that's what makes it sweet." There you go then, dear reader, now you too can make your own banging banana bread.

Away from the kitchen, Claire reflects on the years leading up to 'Just Because'. "Over the last three years, oh man, honestly, everything has just gone so fast," she exclaims. "Part of me feels like it was yesterday that I dropped 'Backyard Boy', and it just feels like a little tiny blip, but now all of a sudden, I'm 19 years old, and I'm dropping my debut album." It's hard to reflect on such a sudden rise when you're in the middle of it. "I don't really know how it's felt," she admits. "I feel very much like myself, and I get to do what I love the most. I'm always creating. Everything that I'm experiencing, every little thing that happens, is constantly being written down. I feel like me at 19 years old. My experience has been very interesting. I don't really know how to sum it up into one little thing."

> **"THERE WAS A LITTLE VOICE IN MY HEAD SAYING 'DO MUSIC'"**
>
> **CLAIRE ROSINKRANZ**

One thing that is certain, though, is the part music played in her life growing up and how she knew that this was definitely what she was going to do. "Ever since I was little, I knew I wanted to do music for the rest of my life," she explains. "It wasn't really like I dropped 'Backyard Boy' and saw that it did well, so now I want to do music. I knew this was something I wanted to do, but I just didn't expect it to happen and have a song for the first thing I put out blow up right then and there. After that, the thought process was, 'Oh, I want to keep doing this and keep making pieces of art for people to listen to', and eventually, I was like, 'I think it's time for an album'."

"I listened to a lot of things, whatever my parents were playing, but I feel like what really influenced my own music was watching my parents making music." Both of her parents are musicians, but her dad Ragnar has been her closest musical confidant and collaborator as she developed her taste and artistry. "My dad would always be composing in the studio and making live music in the living room, the same with my mum. Most of the stuff that inspired what I do now came from watching them and being literally in the creative zone 24/7. I would listen to The Beatles, Michael Jackson, and Jack Johnson, that's a funny one, but I love his singer-songwriter vibe; I would listen to him at dinner parties. Also, Norah Jones and Amy Winehouse."

The impetus to make music is so burned into her memory that she can even pinpoint the precise moment when she had the realisation that would form the rest of her life. "When I was 11, I had this moment when there was a little voice in my head saying 'do music'," she laughs. "There was literally a switch at 11. I remember the exact moment. I was in the back of my cousin's car, and I just felt like I'm going to do music; this is what I'm going to do. I talked to my dad and said I wanted to start making my own songs because I was so used to going into the studio and working on stuff with him, just random little things for TV or commercials and movies, but I was like, wait, I can do this myself. I've been writing songs since I was a super little babe, but between 11-14, I started making a bunch of stuff in the studio with my dad. It wasn't super serious, but more learning how to make my own songs properly for the first time and then at 16 was when I put out that EP with 'Backyard Boy'."

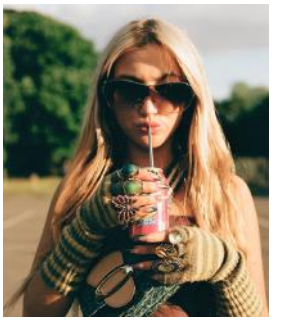
When it came to making the album, Claire tried to keep things as simple and pure as possible. The sound is breezy, indie-pop with a smart edge, but it's also underpinned by a reflectiveness and a deep quality that belies the seemingly endless sunshine of the music. It's a compelling dynamic from a songwriter becoming more and more adept at combining light and shade and laughter, joy and heartbreak. "I didn't go in with one overall vision," she says. "I made a bunch of songs, and they were all over the course of my life as an 18-year-old girl. Honestly, it's for people to relate to. It's like a coming-of-age movie. That's how I envisage it. When you listen to the album, people who are older than me can step back into that time in their lives, and people around my age get to relate to the things that I'm doing because that's what a lot of people my age are doing. It makes you feel super free and young. It goes through little heartbreaks and boys and relationships. It documents the adventures that I'm having. It's a very carefree thing. You put it on and live like you're in a little indie coming-of-age film."

The process of making the album and discovering new things and different experiences was cyclical, as Claire used the process to help her navigate some challenging events in one of the most pivotal periods of her life. A further illustration of how this album is more important for Claire than just another release. "I was experiencing a lot of new stuff for the first time," she reflects. "I was experiencing challenging times for the first time. You're constantly experiencing little challenges, but this last year of being 18, there were some things that I went through that were a lot more challenging and made me grow up in a lot of ways. There was a chunk, too, where I was having my fun coming-of-age moment, and then halfway through summer, I went through more difficult stuff, and I didn't really know how to process it except through the music. That's where some of those deeper and more emotional moments like 'Banksy' and 'Polarised' come from. Honestly, you just have to listen to the songs to understand what's going on in my brain because that's why I write it. I prefer to write it in music than talk about it. The album really helped me work through a lot of stuff. Even some of the songs that I would write, I would then listen to those songs to help me through that time in my life. After I went through something, I'd write about it then that would help me get through my own shit. I want this project to be able to help other people through those situations as well."

It's clear that the period of making the album and dealing with her health issues this year has had a massive effect on Claire. She's eager to get back to work and get back to the exciting business of being a pop star but is also equally conscious of doing things in a different way, taking her time and looking for ways to share her experiences and what she's discovered about herself with her young engaged audience on a deeper level. "I'm getting well enough to where I can get back into the creative world and how we can roll out the album in a different way because I've come from being so sick. It's definitely not the traditional way of putting out an album, but we're figuring it out," she says resolutely. "It all depends on my health right now. It's navigating that. I do want to make more music about this whole health journey that I've gone through. It's really crazy, but you really need to prioritise your health and take time for yourself. I was completely off for three months. I was feeling like three months could be the end of the world. Some people might get sick and be out for a weekend, and it feels like the end of the world, but really, in the grand scheme of things, it's such a short period of time. I would really like to do something this year, either through music or another social outlet, to be able to talk about that experience and help other people, especially young people in this generation who feel the pressure of keeping up and working and moving. You can't be running that fast all the time. I'd like to help people slow down and tell them that's ok." ■ **Claire Rosinkranz's debut album 'Just Because' is out 6th October.**

CAUSE

THIS IS CHARLOTTE PLANK



You may have heard of her - she's been all over 'the radio' collabing with Rudimental, Turno, Skepsis and loads more so far this year. When we caught up with Charlotte at Reading last month, she couldn't decide if her fanbase should be the Plank Army or Planktons, said she is "very shit" at planking and is "excited to get back in the studio properly and make next summer's anthems". She probably will, too.



ONE MORE FOR THE ROAD

→ The 1975 have announced a final run of tour dates around their album 'Being Funny In A Foreign Language', after which they say they'll be taking a long break. The five UK shows take place in Glasgow, London (twice), Manchester and Birmingham next February, with a European tour following through March.



OLIVIA DEAN IS VERY KEEN (TO TOUR MORE)

→ Olivia Dean has announced a new headline tour. The run – in support of her recently-released debut album 'Messy' – includes a huge show at London's Eventim Apollo. Of announcing her biggest tour to date, Olivia shares: "I can't wait to fill these rooms with love and warmth and dancing feet. It's gonna be very special and I can't wait to sing with you all."

TEENAGE KICKS

THIS MONTH...

HEAVY LUNGS

EVERYONE HAS THOSE FORMATIVE BANDS AND TRACKS THAT FIRST GOT THEM INTO MUSIC AND HELPED SHAPE THEIR VERY BEING. THIS MONTH, HEAVY LUNGS TAKE US THROUGH SOME OF THE SONGS THAT MEANT THE MOST TO THEM DURING THEIR TEENAGE YEARS.

Fall Out Boy
Sugar, We're Going Down

Danny: This was a big song for me. Think I heard it first on my second visit to England. I fell in love with this song. I thought I was very alternative at the time as none of my friends listened to any rock music. I was also obsessed with the music video. The bit where Pete Wentz licks his palm and then does a salute - iconic, aha. Also, all the around the world guitar moves were legendary as well. Most importantly, after all these years, this tune still slaps.

50 Cent
Candy Shop

Danny: 50 Cent's 'Massacre' was the first CD I ever bought. Wish I kept it, you know. All my friends in my class got into this brand of hip-hop at the same time, and Candy Shop was one of the crown jewels, of course. Writing this is making me all nostalgic, so I'm going to go and listen to 'Massacre' cover to cover now.

AC/DC
Riff Raff

Oli: Again, I got into AC/DC at a very young age, but the obsession lasted right until I went to uni basically (and beyond, to tell the truth). I had an AC/DC pencil case at school, and I was a die-hard fan. This is one of my favourite songs of theirs; I play it every soundcheck now.

Primus
My Name Is Mud

James: This is one of those songs from one of those bands that I found so quotable. I once typed the entire song's lyrics into a school computer login screen and left it for someone to find. Why? No idea. Quirky, surreal stories mumbled and trickled over tight drums and percussive strings like butter dripping off a hot biscuit. Primus videos are a thing of nightmarish deliciousness - you're welcome.

Interpol
Evil

James: I find the bass intro to this song so effortlessly nostalgic. Angular yet almost sloppy guitars cutting in and out of arrangements that play with dynamics so nicely through a solid album, 100% influencing my early bands growing up. With a text-to-speech-like mundane vocal delivery that dials up its character and replayability, offering an after-dark story-time like something you'd get from those 70s British public safety videos at school. (Google them!). Banks has one of those voices that doesn't always want attention, like a cat - maybe that's why I find it so endearing. I'm a cat person. This band is still in my top Spotify listens, and that says it all.

...And You Will Know Us By The Trail Of Dead
A Perfect Teenhood

Oli: I heard this song on a skate video called Adio-One Step Beyond when I was 8, and I listened to it relentlessly all through my teenage years. Largely because of the bridge that screams 'fuck you' for about 30 seconds. I used to play it in the car with my mum driving; I think she secretly loved it, too.

They Might Be Giants
Boss Of Me

George: This song was the theme tune to Malcolm In The Middle. From the second I heard it. I was obsessed. At that age, I had no concept of what this style of music was; all I knew was that I liked it. I cared more about the theme tune than I did about watching the show. And I loved the show. This is about the time the internet dropped, and we didn't have it, so finding the track still proved to be nearly impossible, but I managed to find a cassette copy in a bin at a charity shop. Still a hard-core banger. Probably the reason I got into rock.

Basement Jaxx
Where's Your Head At

George: This is what we used to listen to in the car on the way to school with my mum. Upon hearing this track for the first time, I realised you can just repeat the same hook over and over again and turn that into a popular song. It was a moment where you think, "Omg. They're getting away with it. I should do this." Also, the bassline slaps. It slaps babies. It slaps everything in its path; it indiscriminately slaps everything. And it probably shaped my brain into having an insatiable thirst for low-end bangers.

Heavy Lungs' album 'All Gas No Brakes' is out 29th September.



JOB SWAP

If she couldn't be a musician, Lauren Spencer Smith wanted to be... a detective!

"I always wanted to be a singer but a part of me was like oh if something happened that meant you couldn't sing then I really wanted to be a detective. I used to watch a lot of murder documentaries so I used to want to be a detective who could solve murder crimes."





FOR QUEEN AND COUNTRY

→ The line-up has been announced for the next SON Estrella Galicia UK-Spain cultural-exchange show at Paper Dress Vintage, London. Following previous events with Jessica Winter, Dream Wife, Balako, DEADLETTER and more, the next edition will host Prima Queen and Shanghai Baby – the new project from Ade Martín, previously of Madrid band HINDS – on 14th September. The event will also have interactive elements embodying the Reduce, Re-use and Recycle mantra, including a second-hand clothing pop-up shop selling jackets customised with unique patches designed by local illustrator Tim Rockins, aka Rockins HQ.



BLEACHERS HAVE SIGNED TO DIRTY HIT

→Jack Antonoff has announced a new partnership with Dirty Hit's Jamie Oborne. "Very proud to be working with Jamie and his entire team – we've known each other for some time now and our connection has deeply inspired me. Have loved everything he has been creating from afar and love the perspective he has on what I do," Antonoff explains. "Feeling wild excitement for everything in the works. Feels so special and rare to be supported like this and just very grateful our paths crossed,"
Their first Dirty Hit release - 'Live at Radio City Music Hall' - is out now.



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PUNK TACTICS

JOEY VALENCE & BRAE are chaos in musical form, and they're about to unleash their debut project.



→ With their debut LP 'PUNK TACTICS', Joey Valence & Brae have finally shared their first extended collection of tracks; a 14-track mashup of influences that fluently expresses the fun-loving simplicity of the college friends' musical pursuits to date. A formidable collection anticipated by a rapidly-growing global fan base, it may seem like these guys have flown straight to the top – but they were on the cusp of giving it all up.

Having just graduated from Penn State, JVB were living at home and unsure of their futures. With a corporate lifestyle on the cards, Valence asked his parents for six months to chase his dream before forcing himself to take life seriously and utilise his Telecommunications degree. Fortunately, things started to gain traction pretty quickly with a flurry of early singles before 'Double Jump' struck gold with instant TikTok virality, only enhanced by a constant state of hyperactivity.

> "WE DIDN'T CHOOSE WHAT TYPE OF MUSIC WE WERE GOING TO MAKE, BASICALLY IT JUST HAPPENED"
>
> JOEY VALENCE

Checking in with Dork backstage at a rainy Reading Festival ("that was just God squirting all over us"), Valence admits that he still lives in a state of disbelief at their fortunes. "We weren't expecting anything to come out of any of the stuff that we've done, so just the fact that people have got attached and have been along for the ride means the world," he shares. "Our fan base is a super dedicated group of people who want to see us win. They know we're just two kids making music in a bedroom; we're just two idiots. People can relate to that."

A rowdy UK tour concluding at Reading & Leeds proves the truth of that statement, with people showing up in droves to mosh to just about anything that comes out the speaker. "It's nuts out here," Joey admits. "People are just so much more turnt. They're excited about music, and that's just true across Europe and the UK in general. They always wanna have a dance, have a party."

That's not to diss their American following, of course, with the pair finding fans in the most unlikely of places. "We met Jack Black and that was pretty crazy," Brae flexes. Maryland rapper Logic has also given these boys his approval while putting his own spin on last year's 'TANAKA', remixing the track and sharing his own verse. "That was our first collaboration EVER so yeah, we're pretty lucky," Valence acknowledges.

When you first hear a Joey Valence & Brae track, the obvious sonic reference point is NYC's own Beastie Boys and Brae shares that this similarity is unavoidable considering their musical upbringing. "It's just what our ears grew up on. For me specifically, there was a lot of old school hip-hop playing in my house because of my dad so that's kind of what I gravitated towards."

"We didn't choose what type of music we were going to make, basically, it just happened," Valence adds, "and then we were like, oh, this is fun let's just roll with it."

Beyond their sound, the Valence & Brae discography is littered with references that span decades of popular culture; from Star Wars and Finding Nemo to Mortal Kombat and Power Rangers, a huge amount of the musicians' interests are expressed through witty, rapid-fire lyrics. Album track 'DELINQUENT' is perhaps the most potent example of this, offering memes galore – but how will this age?

"For us, it's only ever about making music that we like right now," Brae answers. "It's one thing to want to create timeless music - everybody wants to do that, and we do too - and another to be like, 'Oh, that was funny, put it in there'. It's just who we are. We're only two years into this project so really, we're little babies still figuring it all out."

"I don't have a plan with anything I do, I just go and do it," Valence agrees. "That's basically what the music is too, so completely spontaneous. We're just living life how it is. We're just insane pretty much all the time."

Where this next era will take them seems impossible to predict, but they have the ambition to leap over any hurdles that might be thrown their way, as Joey's optimistic conclusion shows: "We're in a little bit of a race with that Olivia Rodrigo releasing an album the same day... I think we might come out on top, you know?" ■ **Joey Valence & Brae's debut album 'PUNK TACTICS' is out now.**

Words: Finlay Holden.

GRIFF IS BACK WITH A BIG SONG

→ Griff has released her first new single of 2023 after a short and sweet festival run that was made up of a single show supporting Haim at London's All Points East. Speaking to Dork backstage, she admits she's nervous about releasing 'Vertigo' because touring and sharing music still feel like separate muscles. "It's been a minute," she grins. "But I'm excited; it feels like people like it."

She describes the song as a "sad, heartbreak" track, and it explores the feeling of not being enough for someone. "When someone leaves your life, you spend a lot of time asking if it was your fault. This song lists all those reasons why it could be, but it's also about trying to reassure yourself that there was nothing you could have done."

"There's a darkness to 'Vertigo' that maybe I haven't tapped into as much before. It's still major, but there's something quite dark and moody about it too," says Griff, with this next set of music following a similar mood. "It's the start of a new season for me, for sure. I've been writing a lot and trying to figure out what's right for me. We'll start with 'Vertigo' and see where we end up. We're going to be walking through it together, bit by bit."

Right now, Griff is in the final stages of planning her debut album, with the next few months revolving around mixing and mastering tracks, going through the visuals and trying to make the whole project feel like a complete world. "Hopefully, there'll be some shows as well," she adds with a grin.

"The new music does sound fuller," she continues. "When you're playing those big shows, you do want to hear lots of people singing along. You want to hear the biggest, most euphoric songs ever." ■

Words: Ali Shutler. Photo: Frances Beach.





SHE'S ELECTRIC

Headlining Reading might be big, but **BILLIE EILISH** proved she can do intimate well with a surprise show at London's Electric Ballroom.

→ Since it first opened in 1938, Camden's Electric Ballroom has given a platform to acts including Joy Division, The Ramones, and even The Weeknd. Last month, though, the venue plays host to yet another huge name, fresh from a stunning headline slot at Reading Festival.

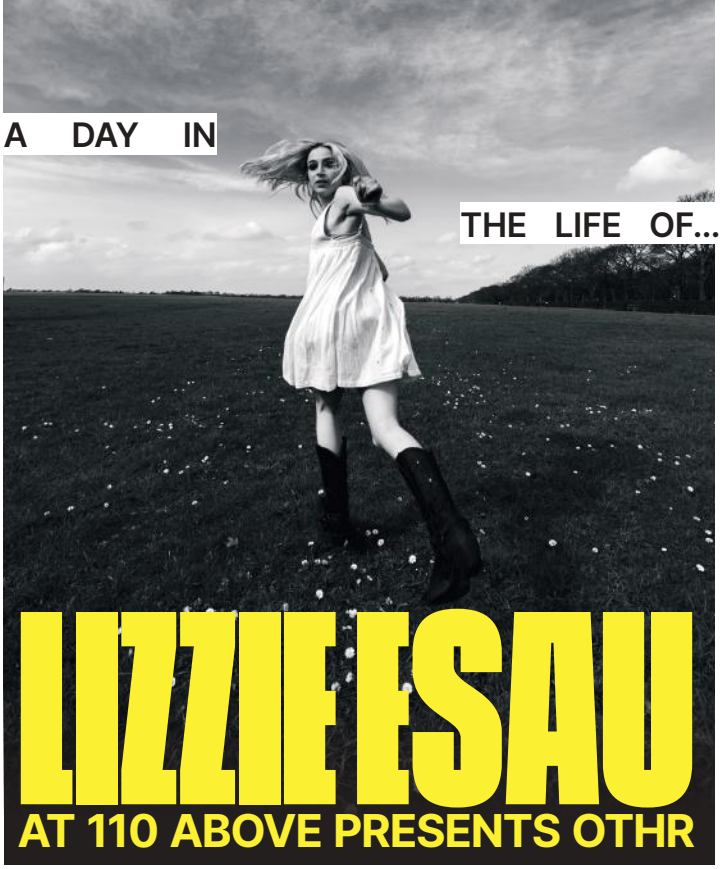
The last time Billie Eilish played in London it was to the O2 Arena for six sold out nights. This gig is sold out too, but that's pretty much where the similarities end. From a 20,000-capacity arena to a sweaty little rock venue, this promises to be something extra special.

Deafening screams beckon Billie's arrival to the Ballroom's stage, with openers 'bury a friend' and 'I Didn't Change My Number' whipping the crowd into a frenzy. By track three, 'Therefore I Am', the magnitude of what Billie is doing clearly hits home, as she has to restart the song twice to calm an already overexcited crowd. Once water bottles are handed around and the crowd listens to Billie's instruction to step back – one that she gives a lot throughout the night – her first small show in six years goes off without a hitch.

"If you're from the label, this show isn't about you – this is for the fans", Billie beams, with her 90-minute set mixing her biggest hitters with crowd favourites. Heartbreakers 'idontwannabeyouanymore' and 'lovely' precede the bass reverb of 'xanny' which makes the whole place shake. With a teasing smile, Billie reminisces about the days "when there used to be moshpits at my shows" before powering through 'you should see me in a crown'. Fan favourite 'bitches broken hearts' gets its first UK airing since 2019, and 'What Was I Made For?' makes a transcendent London debut. Larger than life tracks such as 'Oxytocin' are followed by emotional acoustic numbers 'i love you' and 'Your Power', showing not only her range as an artist, but her astounding ability to keep a crowd in the palm of her hand even in quieter moments.

Billie promises surprises, and the crowd think they're getting one in the form of 'my boy', but Billie is just playing with them. The first shock comes in the form of Labrinth, who takes to the stage to perform 'Never Felt So Alone'. The biggest scream of the night, though, comes with Billie's next announcement: "Please welcome my friends...boygenius". The Boys provide ethereal harmonies during a rendition of 'when the party's over' which sends the audience (and social media) into raptures.

Billie's one night in Camden ends with the tried and tested combo of biggest-seller 'bad guy' and acoustic-punk mashup 'Happier Than Ever'. If the Billie Eilish that played at Islington's Courtyard Theatre in 2017 could hear tonight's screaming crowd, she'd know all the hard work was worth it. **CIARAN PICKER**



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF... LIZZIE ESAU AT 110 ABOVE PRESENTS OTHR

You know what's easier than following around your fave pop stars, day in, day out, to see what they're up to right that minute? Asking them. This month, **LIZZIE ESAU** lets us in on what she's up to as she plays the Dork stage at this year's 110 Above presents OTHR festival.

9:00AM → Wake up nice and early (I appreciate this isn't that early, but it is for me, the queen of lying in). We get into the car and head straight to the festival, which is a good couple of hours from Newcastle!

11:00AM → Briefly stopping at services is always a highlight of these trips for me, treating myself to a sushi meal deal (posh, I know). We take a few different vehicles to this festival, so meeting up with other band members along the journey is always fun too!

1:00PM → By this time, the meal deal is fully devoured, and after resisting the urge to stop for a quick Greggs, we arrive at the festival! We had the honour of playing this festival last year, too, and it was possibly one of the hottest days I've ever experienced. This year isn't too far off, although a few degrees cooler, which is very much appreciated, haha! The atmosphere, though, is incredible as always, the staff lovely and welcoming, and the audience raring to go.

3:00PM → A few hours of unloading gear, drinking beer and chatting with other artists and lovely crew have gone by, and now we're warming up and preparing to go on.

4:50PM → We walk onto the Gopsall Inn stage, which is a nice big open barn. Already slightly sweating from being out and about around the festival, we make sure to give the set full energy as usual, feeding off the incredible crowd. They're all so up for it, and it's so amazing to be back; so nice to see familiar faces too.

5:20PM → The set is finished, and we're covered in an additional layer of sweat from another scorching show at 110! It's so lovely to chat with so many people afterwards who enjoyed the show, too, many of them also coming to see us on our November headline tour! We're now packing down all the gear very fast, too, for the quick festival changeovers, which always have me in a panic, haha, but it's all running smoothly so far.

6:30AM → All the gear is packed away back in cars so we can go around and enjoy the festival a bit before heading off on another long drive. Swim School have just started, who we all love, so we know we're going to have the best time finally being able to catch them live here! So far, the set is full of empowering energy, and I'm anticipating it all to kick off any second now; see you in the mosh pit!

8:00PM → Another lovely day spent at 110, all the bands we managed to catch were incredible, and by now, we've all had many bowls of the chilli and dahl they were serving us. We're so sad to be leaving but feeling optimistic this festival will become a new yearly tradition for us! We say our goodbyes and head on our way further down the country to Bristol before we make the journey all the way to Cornwall the next day for Boardmasters.

10:00PM → We arrive in Bristol after another good few hours of driving; the urge to get a Greggs was just too strong on this journey, so we made a few additional food stops along the way. We're staying at my manager's house, who is very kindly putting us up! All of her wonderful family, along with the full band, girlfriends and my parents, try to get in as many hours of sleep as possible before we head down to Cornwall VERY early tomorrow morning for the festival and a full family trip! As I said, early mornings aren't my strong point, so wish me luck, and I'll see you at Boardmasters.

PICTURE PERFECT

We grabbed some quick Polaroid snaps at this year's 110 Above presents OTHR. You can find more on our Insta @readdork.



















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d4vd

Regularly racking up so many streams it looks like someone fell asleep on the number bit of their keyboard, **D4VD** is well and truly breaking through.

→ We've woken d4vd up. Currently on tour, it's 10:47 in his time zone, but he normally rolls out of bed around midday, so he's a little hazy. He's no average teenager, though, and he's often late out of bed because he's stayed up into the early hours of the morning making music.

Practically the definition of bedroom pop, d4vd's (real name David Burke) rapid ascent is the result of making music on his phone in his sister's wardrobe in Houston, quickly catching the ear of labels and signing to Darkroom Records – home to Billie Eilish and Holly Humberstone – barely a year after his first release.

Initially just making music to soundtrack Fortnite montages he was posting on YouTube, the songs gained traction on their own, leading d4vd to switch career paths and move away from wanting to be a professional video game player to being a full-time musician. When 'Romantic Homicide', the melancholy emo-driven breakup track, went viral last summer, it sealed the deal.

"Honestly, I think it's the relatability," d4vd says of his music's quick and vast connection with his audience. "I feel like in this generation, my sadder music seems to be the most popular at the moment. I feel like when everybody feels misunderstood, it's kind of cool to have an artist that you gravitate to who's able to describe it in words and melodies and lyrics and production elements and stuff like that, to where you feel a connection to artists on a more personal level."

His debut EP 'Petals to Thorns', made up of tracks he'd produced on his phone and dropped sporadically throughout 2022, plus some unheard ones, tells the story of a relationship from beginning to breakup via the lo-fi indie sound d4vd quickly made his signature. As would become common with his career, the story came around by accident.

"I'm so nonchalant with a lot of stuff I do. I don't want to force anything, but then I end up doing it anyways. So I was making a bunch of songs in 2022 for Fortnight montages, and they thematically fit together inadvertently. Then, when I was working on an EP, I realised I had so much music out and so much unreleased music, too, that I could just put together puzzle pieces.

"People were telling me you start from ground one, you figure out what your thing is, and you figure out what you want the motive to be, and then you start making the songs. And I was like, what? I have all the songs already. So it was easy to find that theme, and I used a symbolic rose for it because you look at a rose and it's so beautiful, but then you pick it up and get stabbed. For the EP, you've heard it, and it was beautiful, but then, at the end, you feel sad and self-reflective. And it's like to study yourself: was this relationship with another person, or was it a relationship with myself?"

"WHEN EVERYBODY FEELS MISUNDERSTOOD, IT'S COOL TO HAVE AN ARTIST THAT YOU GRAVITATE TO"
D4VD

Never doing things the conventional way, d4vd's first tour took place before he'd ever been to a gig at all. Part of that was a result of only hearing Christian music until his late teens, leaving him with no awareness of popular culture, but it was also likely due to his age and coming up during the lockdown years. Nevertheless, it hadn't stopped him from going on a huge tour across Europe and North America, recently extending the dates to Asia.

"I wasn't nervous, but I was sceptical of how it felt because I didn't want to have any previous influence on how I performed based on what I've seen. It was like I was an audience member at the same time I was performing, which was cool because I got to see how people reacted to the energy. On this tour right now, the 'Petals To Thorns' tour, I've crafted my entire stage presence, and it's very natural and not forced at all, which is cool."

d4vd seems very aware of the expectations to deliver a wow-worthy show every time. Despite this, he's shaking off any pressure no problem.

"I wouldn't say it was a lot of pressure," he says. "But I felt like, especially for the type of music that I make, I have to have a certain standard and not be up there just holding the microphone to stand still for an hour. I tried to mix in a bunch of different genres to try to make the show as entertaining as possible and just feed off of the crowd."

His first concert – aside from his own – was SZA's 'SOS' tour at Madison Square Garden, an artist who he's since found a fan in, and in a full circle moment, he'll be opening up for her on the second US leg of that very tour this autumn.



With bigger and bigger rooms to fill, d4vd is starting to outgrow his bedroom producer beginnings. He notes that working on collaborations (that'd be the 'This Is How It Feels' with fellow indie popster Laufey and 'Superbloodmoon' with labelmate Holly Humberstone) has pushed him out of his comfort zone and into the studio. Still unfamiliar with the traditional process, he recently found himself standing in Alicia Keys' Oven Studios in New York, pulling out his phone in the booth because he didn't know how to use the $3000 mic in front of him.

"I'm very used to being alone while I make music," he explains, "So it's a very therapeutic, self-reflective process for me, and making music in different ways has been like, okay, it feels like work now. It's like you have a coach in the room, and every time you do something, they push me to be better. I feel like the standard that I held on Bandlab is very different than the standard I hold in the studio, and it's very evident in the music that you hear or will hear in the future."

With touring also playing havoc with his usual process (the tour bus is too noisy to record on his phone properly), d4vd's next release is an extended cut of his debut EP, now titled 'Lost Petals', which plucks five extra songs out that didn't make it onto the EP the first time. Taking his time to select the tracks, he was still able to craft a story from the extras, finishing off where 'The Bridge' left a cliffhanger.

He describes it as the usual d4vd music, melancholy, lo-fi rock vibes, and a closing of a chapter of this book. "By the end of it, you feel like it's a fresh start. It feels like it's the next step," he says.

The next step for d4vd will be undoubtedly a big one. Before he joins the call, we're told he has big ambitions, although he might not give anything away yet. He remains tight-lipped about where he's going next, but with his huge SZA support slot coming up imminently and a d4vd cinematic universe that gives A24 a run for its money expanding rapidly, his vision is already far beyond his accidental start in music. ■ **d4vd's EP 'The Lost Petals' is out now.**



Georgia Gets By

BROODS' Georgia Nott has been quietly working away on a solo project of her own – now **GEORGIA GETS BY** is finally here.

→ Her new incarnation sees the New Zealand artist create something that's wholly her own, with debut EP 'Fish Bird Baby Boy' delving into crushes, old hurts, striving for independence and more.

Tell us about Georgia Gets By, what sparked its creation?
I've been working on it since way before I even realised I was making a new project. Through the pandemic, I spent all my time looking out the window for hours playing guitar and writing. I made a LOT of music, and after a while, this project just kinda emerged.

You've been working on it for a while; why is now the right time to launch Georgia Gets By?
This whole process has unravelled quite naturally. When I finally worked up the courage to admit to myself and my management that I was seeing a new project unfold, I started sharing the music, and a bunch of wonderful people started to get involved in finishing the record and releasing it. I'm still walking around thinking, "Woah! This is cool! Is this real?" It's nice to have that feeling of being a beginning of something again.

You've said the EP was written and recorded with "organic instruments" – can you tell us a bit more about that?
I think, after making a lot of electronic music throughout my 20s, I found myself looking for something that felt tangible and imperfect. Especially with everything being so cyber-focused through the pandemic, I was drawn to the wonkiness of old tape and live recordings. I really wanted to feel fingers on strings and the room and the birds.

What do you most enjoy writing songs about at the moment?
I like visual poetry. It's comforting. But lately, I've just been spewing my feelings everywhere without restraint or intelligence.

Georgia Gets By's debut EP 'Fish Bird Baby Boy' is out 6th October.

Words: Abigail Firth. Photos: Patrick Gunning.

Miso Extra

Coming straight from her own alternative world, things are starting to light up for **MISO EXTRA**.

→ **London-based newcomer Miso Extra** is an all-encompassing experience; an anime-inspired character who lives in an alternative world dubbed the "Misoverse", she embraces storytelling and world building like few others.

Following the release of her 2022 'Great Taste' EP, things have really been kicking off - tips from just about everyone, buzzy festival sets at Reading & Leeds and The Great Escape, and a support slot with Thundercat at O2 Brixton Academy, London.

Newly signed to Transgressive Records, she's just dropped a final single ahead of her new EP; live favourite '50/50' arrives just a few days ahead of 'MSG', a five-track effort she describes as "umami for the ears".

Hello Miso Extra! How's it going? What are you up to today, anything fun?
I've got to fit in some piano practice before my lesson. I've been learning 'Itsumo Nando Demo' from Spirited Away.

What first sparked your interest in music, did you grow up in a musical household?
I come from a long line of people who sing to themselves but most likely my love for music stems from me obsessively watching cartoons and anime then learning the theme songs.

Who was your first ever favourite band or pop star?
Probably Destiny's Child and Kelly Clarkson.

Can you remember the first song you wrote?
Yes, but don't ask me to sing it for you, aha.

How did you progress from those early forays, to developing the Misoverse? What is it that draws you to experimenting with fiction?
I'm a passionate daydreamer so it only makes sense I found a way to manifest this creatively and tie it into music. I seek a lot of inspiration for world building from video games and films that I've grown up with. I find it makes for a wholistic experience when consuming any art form.

What do you most enjoy writing about at the moment? Are there any themes or vibes you're particularly drawn to?
Thematically in terms of the lyrics I've mostly been writing songs about patience and self preservation, but, for me the beats have to always be addictive and fun to listen to.

You've a new EP out soon, 'MSG' - where did it come from, and how was the process of putting it together?
It was being written as 'Great Taste' EP was coming out so was a direct response to the reception of that project coming out.

How does your new single '50/50' fit into the EP?
I've been playing '50/50' as part of my live set and it always gets such an incredible crowd response so it seems only fair I now release it!

What else are you currently working on?
My current focus is getting back to performing live and continuing to write new music. Diving deeper into the Misoverse!

What would you most like to achieve during your music career?
I would LOVE to write an anime theme song, or better yet voice a character!

What do you do for fun?
Aside from making music I'd have to say snacking and playing Switch.

Is there anything else we should know?
My favourite Tekken character is Alisa and favourite move of hers is: Spam Bomb (u/f+1+2).

"I WOULD LOVE TO WRITE A N ANIME THEME SONG"
MISO EXTRA



HAVE YOU HEARD ABOUT bby



→ bby are a band kicking up a fuss. Already getting co-signs from the likes of Zane Lowe, their debut single 'hotline' fizzes with the kind of tense energy that crackles with electricity. Born from an online connection that transcended the virtual realm, Benjy, Jessy, Tommy, Deon, and Tom merged their musical passions to create something both fresh and exciting. Where they go next is well worth keeping both eyes on.

THIS MONTH IN NEW MUSIC



ALL RIIZE

→ K-Pop's hottest newcomers, RIIZE, just dropped their long-awaited debut single, 'Get A Guitar'. Comprising SHOTARO, EUNSEOK, SUNGCHAN, WONBIN, SEUNGHAN, SOHEE, and ANTON, RIIZE is already breaking records, hitting one million Instagram followers within just four days of their account launch. Unlike most K-Pop groups, they've broken the mould by already signing with a US label before making their official debut. Big things awake.

Words: Sam Taylor. Photo: Claryn Chong.



"WHEN I'M MAKING SONGS, IT'S THE HAPPY SPACE – I'M IN MY ELEMENT"
SOFY

SOFY

A future star making big, bold music, **SOFY** is starting a new chapter with a resounding bang.

→ **There are very few artists** who would suggest holding a single launch party in a laundrette. For SOFY, however, it seems to fit her particular brand of vibrant chaos. Out of the box, approached with apprehension and miraculously pulled off by way of a laundrette owner with a huge PA karaoke system, and she had perhaps her most unusual, though special, gig to date. Mounds of washing were swapped for stripped-back versions of her greatest hits and some of her loyalist fans.

"It was so nice to see everyone together interacting with people they haven't met before," SOFY reflects. "How this is bringing people together, real-life people is what it's all about to me. That was really nice. Sometimes a new release of music can feel like it's just in the ether now, and you see the streaming numbers, but you can't really equate them to real people and emotions and stories."

Those emotions and stories are no doubt plentiful – SOFY's music is recognisable for its ability to resonate with so many. Masterfully detailing her way through the peaks and troughs of her twenties, SOFY continues to paint a picture familiar to many.

However, as she returns with another banger, 'Ashley Cole Type Beat', SOFY seems to have upped the stakes a bit. The third track from a brand new mixtape, 'Chaos and Commotion', set to release in October, SOFY's latest is an absolute firecracker. Exploding in different directions, rowdy and unrestrained, it's worlds apart from the earlier two singles, 'socks' and 'supermarket'. It's a brand new side to SOFY, one that seems to have been readying itself to erupt for a while.

"It's a very silly song," SOFY laughs over Zoom. "I think I was feeling a bit chaotic that day. We were talking about people being dickheads and how you can take on a persona that's not necessarily your own. In 'Ashley Cole Type Beat', I was just channelling pure chaos, dickhead energy. It's got a lot of RATBOY energy – we were listening to 'MOVE' from his first project, so we wanted to capture that raucous, 'fuck everyone' energy with it."

The track bursts into life, a quick-fire pelt into that cocky unruliness and the new grounds for exploration it offers. Whilst SOFY's first project, the 'Bored in Colour' EPs, favoured laidback beats and chilled guitars, 'Ashley Cole Type Beat' sets a new precedent for her upcoming project. 'Chaos and Commotion' ups the ante – it's a larger-than-life throwing of paint at the wall and seeing what sticks. Thankfully, the stuff that does is absolutely golden.

"This new project is more confident and more experimental," SOFY explains. "There are way more genres crossing over in this bad boy – there aren't any two songs that are the same. It pulls from a lot of different influences."

"With these new songs, I feel like I've said my initial piece with the 'Bored in Colour' EPs and this new project can explore different avenues and thoughts and sonics. 'Chaos and Commotion' for me sums up the last year and a half. I've experienced quite a lot of change, quite a lot of chaos. A lot of fun and good times went into making it, and it shows."

The experiences SOFY has had over the last few years have undoubtedly changed the narrative of the project – both in terms of life experiences informing her lyricism and the musician experience that has just blossomed and sprawled out further than ever before. From writing her first-ever songs to playing impressive headlines and making the FIFA soundtrack in just a couple of years, SOFY's output started to transform in reflection of that. She's always been chameleon-like – from sarcastic to sincere, from singing along with your mates to wallowing in your room, she manages it all. Here, though, those tendencies are amplified.

"A lot of it is also influenced by the live show. In this new project, a lot of the songs are more upbeat. Ever since I started playing shows, the more I play, the more I want to write a rock song and shred on my guitar. They're more upbeat, live bangers."

With this project, more than ever, that time capsule-like nature to music will be one looked back on fondly for SOFY. Pouring more and more of both herself and her time and energy into this mixtape, the tracks are completely marked by the joy and happiness found whilst making them and made even better because of that.

"If I love what I'm doing, I can feel confident with it," SOFY says. "When I'm making songs, it's the happy space – I'm in my element that nothing from the outside can touch. That's what I like most about writing songs. When I'm actually doing the artist stuff – making songs, playing shows – I feel like I can fucking rule the world."

From the FIFA 98-inspired 'Yoyo' to the spiralling anxiety of 'Breathing Exercises' or the innuendo-laden 'Timothee Chalamet', that part of SOFY is always close to home for a lot of her listeners – it's not just a part of her, but a relatable, engaging part of them too. Capturing everything from falling in love to feeling like you're falling behind, from being on top of the world to being in the miserable throes of seeing your ex move on, this is a sonic journal that is written with a pen of universality. It's more ambitious than ever, but it's also more real than ever, too. 'Ashley Cole Type Beat' exemplifies just what SOFY is capable of, and 'Chaos and Commotion' promises more of that – it's a new chapter opening with a colossal bang.

Words: Nelve McCarthy. Photo: Moja.



ONLY IN DREAMS

→ junodream have announced the details of their debut album, 'Pools Of Colour'. Set to arrive on 26th January 2024 via AWAL, the news comes alongside a new track, 'Death Drive'. Frontman Ed Vyvyan explains: "When you get a bit existential about it all, some aspects of human behaviour on a macro-level are completely absurd. We're on a blue dot hurtling through space. It's a miracle we're here and yet we have power hungry tyrants pushing us to extinction from their own toxic personal agendas. We're done with it."



ABBY ROBERTS + HALSEY = BOP

→ Abby Roberts is back! Back!! BACK!!! with a brand new track, 'Imposter Syndrome'. Produced by Harry Styles co-writer and producer Sammy Witte, it was written with Halsey. Coming out of an LA writing session where Abby felt out of her depth, she explains: "That day I had a session with Ash (Halsey) and confided in them on how I was feeling - and in the strangest coincidence Ash had also written down a bunch of lyric ideas on this feeling on her way to the studio that day, it felt like fate that 'Imposter Syndrome' was born."



TWST AND SHOUT

→ Following her appearance at Reading & Leeds just last month, Welsh alt-popster twst has returned with news of a brand new EP. Titled 'TWST0002', it - unsurprisingly, really - follows up on debut 'TWST0001'. The news comes alongside a new track, 'Catch Me (Beautiful Fall)', which was co-produced by Clarence Clarity (Rina Sawayama, Dorian Electra).

Mitch Rowland

The first signing to Harry Styles' record label, **MITCH ROWLAND** is already a sensation in his own right - and his debut album's not even out yet.

Words: Jessica Goodman. Photos: Sarah Louise Bennett.

THIS MONTH IN NEW MUSIC



GET WRECKED

→ Dumb Buoys Fishing Club have announced their debut album, 'WRECKED', set for release on 15th September. The duo describe the project as "a completely unintentional album. What began as a creative experiment, as more and more songs were written it became clear that a distinct, twisted world was being formed. A world that reflects the trials and tribulations of two fishermen with mysterious pasts and uncertain futures. This reflection was a manifestation of what we were going through on a day to day basis. Taking inspiration from the likes of Beastie Boys and N.E.R.D, we wanted to match that same unforgiving energy that these artists embodied whilst establishing our own lane.."



PRIYA RAGU HAS ANNOUNCED HER DEBUT ALBUM...

→ Priya Ragu has shared the details of her debut album. Titled 'Santhosam', the Tamil word for happiness, it's set to arrive on 20th October via Warner Records. Recorded with her brother and producer Japhna Gold, it follows up on her mixtape 'damnshestamil'. "The album is my story of finding happiness," Priya explains. "It helped me find my purpose in life. Maybe it will help others, too."

→ After spending the best part of the last two years performing on one of the highest-grossing tours in history, anyone else might be ready for a well-deserved break. For Mitch Rowland, it's an opportunity to step away from stadium stages and demonstrate what he's capable of on his own.

"I think I'm always just trying to not make an ass of myself," he laughs. Revered for his stellar guitar playing and reserved presence both on and off the stage (a YouTube video with the title 'Mitch Rowland talking/singing for 3 minutes and 57 seconds' and the description 'I had to do some REALLY deep diving on the internet to find some of these...' boasts over 75,000 views), Mitch is best known as a songwriting collaborator and touring guitarist with Harry Styles, but music has always been a part of his life.

When he thinks back to growing up on the outskirts of Columbus, Ohio, it's to visiting a family friend who had decked out their living room with a pool table and a vintage jukebox. "I wasn't even tall enough to see the balls on the table, but I could see the songs on the jukebox," he grins. Feeding in a quarter over and over to listen to the likes of The Black Crowes and Aerosmith on repeat, this is where his lifelong love of music first ignited.

"Weirdly, a lot of my journey through guitar playing can kind of boil down to that," he describes. "Had it not been for the seed that was planted when I was just making memories, things would've gone differently."

Teaching himself drums and then guitar, his early interest in playing stemmed less from a drive to be creative and more from a pure love of the music he was playing. For him, experimenting with songwriting didn't come until later. "I wasn't quite ready to make songs," he says. Instead, he'd use iMovie to record videos of himself playing as a visual reference to help him memorise the music and melodies he was toying with.

"I didn't know what I was doing – to some degree, I still don't," he laughs. "I had all this stuff saved up, these ideas." After cutting his teeth in bands Lionel The Jailbird and Total Navajo, he received an off-the-cuff invitation to step into the studio with a former boyband member working on his solo debut when another guitar player couldn't make it. The rest, as they say, is history.

From missing their second meet-up to work a shift at a pizza place to winning a Grammy award for a song they wrote together, theirs is a friendship that dreams are made of. "With Harry, it's always been very team-based," Mitch enthuses of their time in the studio together. "I could be more fly on the wall and just wait until it's my turn."

Now, he's about to release his own solo debut, something that, in comparison, he found to be a lot more consuming of a challenge. "I had to just be on my own as much as possible to realise what I was doing," he portrays. The first song written for the album, title-track 'Come June', was born out of that need to escape the chaos of inner city living and find not just solitude but safety.

"I'M ALWAYS JUST TRYING TO NOT MAKE AN ASS OF MYSELF"

MITCH ROWLAND

"The song comes from city stressors," he describes. "In our neighbourhood, suddenly, things got kind of weird and scary. There were acid attacks, there was a stabbing. There was a time when I thought things weren't what they seemed. I wanted to retreat."

While a lot of the songs were written between LA and London, they also found seeds of inspiration in the English countryside. "When I'm in the countryside – and this is not just for me, but for everyone – there's just less crap going on," he details. With fewer distractions, he was able to play more to write more, and the concept for his debut album slowly started to come together. "It's better to be somewhere quiet," he enthuses, "it's nice to walk up to a cow."

The more he wrote, the more the record took shape, emerging as a collection of stripped-back folk songs charming in their simplicity. "I was trying to make a conscious effort to go minimal," he describes. "At the time, I thought I was making a vocal and guitar record." In the studio, that changed. The songs grew, with added layers and lush sounds – all things that, initially, Mitch consciously tried to stay away from. "I reached a point where I could feel myself being boxed in by my own doing," he recalls.

"You go through everything in the studio. You try everything out. But I think what translates the best is space," he describes of his approach. "Don't be the busy person. Just play what counts."

Talking about the work that went into creating the album, he doesn't go long without giving credit to the other musicians who helped mould the record into its final shape, like Rob Schnapf ("I just let him do his thing, he just knows what to do"), Matt Schuessler ("he's so good I don't need to own bass equipment any more"), and Jerry Borgé (who "takes longer to finish a glass of wine" than a song).

"Having guys like them on the record, guys that just really know how to play to a song, that was a big deal to me," he enthuses. It's something that meant a lot to him, not just for complimenting his own musicianship ("I'm a t-rex on the piano," he laughs, pinching the fingertips of each hand together and miming pressing down on keys. "I added a couple of little things, and consequently had to put my name next to it, but I can't play piano, let's just make that clear"), but for enabling the songs to grow in a way that was entirely natural. "I just kind of gave over. That is what you end up hearing."

Announced in July (as far away as you can get from it next being June, something he teases "must've made sense on the calendar when I wrote it"), 'Come June' has already stirred up excitement online and with fans. Opening slots at Love On Tour's Slane Castle and Wembley Stadium dates gave crowds a first taste of what's to come, while stripped-back shows in London and LA offered a more intimate glance at the songs in their rawest form.

"When I do look, which I'm not supposed to, it seems good?" he hesitantly questions the reaction to the songs he's shared so far. "I know that a lot of my support is coming from Harry Styles fans, and I'll take it because they're amazing. They're really supportive people."

Talking with fans outside of Third Man Records in London, where he played a stripped-back show, giving everyone who attended a free tote bag, his gratitude to his audience is boundless. "They don't have to like it. The fact that some do is really sweet," he expresses. "So, I think so far, so good?" he asks again, "but I'm not looking."

Instead, he's focused on what comes next, on working out what shape these songs take with a live band, and on preparing for live shows (naming the UK, Europe, and the US as places he imagines he'll tour early next year). "The thing I kind of take away from the records I listen to over a thousand times is that it's more than music," he describes. "I have some level of companionship with music that I keep listening to."

"All I can hope for is that it helps somebody out," he earnestly describes. "If it makes someone feel less lonely when they're feeling lonely, that's kind of the best thing that could happen." ■ **Mitch Rowland's album 'Come June' is out 6th October.**



THIS MONTH IN NEW MUSIC



COMPUTER LOVE

→ 'Digital Heartifacts' is set for release on 2nd February via AWAL. "Writing 'Miscommunikaty' was the moment where I landed on the 'Digital Heartifacts' world," she explains. "There are all these emotions, but they're stored digitally. I have these little snapshots on my laptop of my life and of the place I was at mentally during the time I made the album. I just find it fascinating that all those emotions are just code on a computer."



PARTY TIME

→ She's In Parties have announced their debut EP. The news arrives alongside their second single of the year, 'L Word', with EP 'End Scene' following on 6th October via Submarine Cat Records. They'll play an EP Launch Show at Three Wise Monkeys, Colchester on the same day. "This song is personal to me," Katie Dillon (vocals/guitar) says, "and quite frankly lays all the emotion down right in front of your ears and eyes. I'm not known for verbally saying "I love you" to the people I love."



HEMLOCKE SPRINGS IS GOING... GOING... GONE

→ hemlocke springs has announced a new EP, 'going...going...GONE!', set for release on 29th September. "The songs from going...going...GONE! serve as records of my thoughts as I transitioned from the teenage/young-adult phase to adulthood," she explains. "Sure, at times I sound a bit silly, but I think it's used as a way to cover up impending fears that are only bound to grow as I get older. What better way to deal with that than singing to a beat with self-depreciating lyrics?"

Paris Paloma



With a handful of assertive hits already under her belt, **PARIS PALOMA** is all about women coming together.

Words: Martyn Young.

→ If you've been online at all this year, particularly on TikTok, you've no doubt come across Paris Paloma's stirring anthem of feminist rage, 'Labour', whether it's the song itself or as a soundtrack to videos in which other women offer their own experiences of misogyny and how the patriarchy has impacted them. It's became an incredibly powerful song, so powerful that it propelled Paris all the way into the Top 30 of the UK singles chart. "It's a song that's a lot bigger than me now," Paris tells us. There's a lot more to Paris, though, than virality. The singer from Derbyshire is a special talent, and 'Labour' is just one small part of the tapestry of storytelling that she is putting together.

"There were definitely a couple of weeks where it was just like a runaway train," she says of the song's snowball-like momentum. "It was growing and growing and growing. I'm quite an anxious person, but what kept me grounded was being there with it and noticing that this is a song that I wrote partially from experiences and partially from observation, but I'm coming to it not as someone who has any authority to talk about solving it."

Paris always knew she wanted to tell stories with her music. Big, meaningful and powerful stories. "The music I started listening to in my teens was very lyrics focused. When I was little, my dream was to be a creative writer," she says. "I'd write stories all the time, and at some point, those stories started becoming poems, and those poems became songs. That transition happened out of influences in literature as opposed to influences in music."

The formative music of her childhood was the soul and jazz her mum would play, but for Paris, she naturally gravitated to people who liked to play with words and language, whether florid and wordy or incredibly pure and simple. "When I was 12, I started looking up to songwriters like Ed Sheeran and people I thought were really telling stories," she remembers. "Following on from that, people like Florence + The Machine and Hozier, who use their words in a considered way."

As she started making more and more songs, Paris's songwriting began to evolve. "I've become a lot more considered," she reflects. "I've got to a point where I understand that it's ok not to say everything. The main driver for my music when I started was catharsis and feeling heard. It was an emotional outlet to use whatever it was that was incredibly difficult to go through. I'm still staying true to that but not beating myself up when I want to keep some things."

She now sees her songwriting as a true body of work which allows her to focus on each song as a part of a world she's creating. "I think of my songs informing each other now rather than being specific," she says. "It's now this considered thing which all have relationships to each other and inform each other. My next songs stand on the shoulders of my previous songs."

Indeed, her next single, 'As Good A Reason', carries on some of the big themes of 'Labour' but from a slightly different perspective. More triumphant and defiant and with a rollicking groove to it. "I wanted to write a song about the power of women learning from each other," she explains. "There were lots of things I was thinking about in terms of misogyny being eradicated through the generations, and that's happening because of work that women are doing."

It's clear that Paris is an incredibly passionate and thoughtful songwriter who thinks carefully about what she wants to say and recognises the impact and engaging quality of her words. "I was thinking a lot about ageism and misogyny and this fear of being an older woman or any type of woman that doesn't correlate with patriarchy's idea of what women should be," she continues. "Also, the manufacturing of insecurity in women and the trends in body types and all of this exhausting stuff which women are really only realising is obsolete through talking to each other."

'As Good A Reason' is a song with a different kind of energy to 'Labour' but no less inspiring. "I wanted to write a joyful song," she smiles. "It was written prior to 'Labour'. Female rage is an incredible thing, but I don't want to reduce the meaning of being a woman to our capacity for pain and anger. 'As Good A Reason' speaks to your reasons for doing things and your reasons for self-love. The idea that if self-love is too difficult for the sake of oneself, loving yourself out of spite for those who would profit out of you doing the opposite is as good a reason in the interim."

> **"I DON'T WANT TO REDUCE THE MEANING OF BEING A WOMAN TO OUR CAPACITY FOR PAIN AND ANGER"**
> **PARIS PALOMA**

For the rest of the year, Paris is getting on with the important business of being a pop star. "I've got my first European tour in September," she beams. "I've never played outside the UK before. It's going to be incredible to get over to see a whole new space of people who've been listening to my music." And is there anything else planned for the rest of the year? Well, we'll just have to wait and see. "There's definitely a whole lot more music coming," she teases. Engaging with meaningful conversations and making music that resonates across generations, Paris Paloma is full of ambition and confidence, ready to tell her stories to a mass audience. ■

THIS MONTH IN NEW MUSIC



GROUNDS FOR DIVORCE

→ Divorce have announced a new EP, 'Heady Metal'. The news follows recent single 'Birds', with the Nottingham band's EP set for release on 17th November, just ahead of their UK tour. They've also shared new single 'Scratch Your Metal'. Co-vocalist/bassist Tiger Cohen-Towell says: "'Scratch Your Metal' means showing the most difficult and sometimes unbearable parts of yourself outwardly, because the sound of something scratching against metal is the most unpleasant noise I can think of."



RAIN ON ME

→ Meadow Meadow – the project of ex Spring King members Peter Darlington and James Green – have dropped a new single. 'Rain' marks the first taster from their debut album. Peter explains: "I was walking along the side of the Thames and could see that it was raining on one side of the river, but not on the side where I was standing. This idea of the city being cut in two halves really struck me and that's when the lyrics began to arrive."



WITH TEETH

→ Gia Ford is back with a new single, 'Alligator'. Speaking about the track, Gia says: "Alligator is a song about a desperation to be seen and heard. I am being facetious by painting myself as multiple unbelievable creatures to garner attention." So there we go.

Hannah Grae

With her bold and brutally honest debut mini album 'Hell Is A Teenage Girl' out now, **HANNAH GRAE** isn't holding anything back.

Words: Ali Shutler. Photo: Frances Beach.



→ **Hannah Grae makes big,** dramatic rock songs that refuse to minimise her emotions. Debut single 'Propaganda' rebels against beauty standards with a snarling bite, her brilliant 'Hell Is A Teenage Girl' record is a bombastic collection of revenge, fury and isolation while hammering new single 'Screw Loose' sees her fighting with her own head. "I just don't ever want to be embarrassed about how I feel," she explains. "If I'm feeling petty, bratty or confused, that's what I'll write about."

Right now, though, Hannah is feeling nothing but excitement. She's about to head out on a two-week European festival tour that'll see her play the likes of Sziget, Pukkelpop and Rock En Seine before appearing at Reading & Leeds. Not bad, considering she only played her first outdoor gig in May. Hannah already knows what every festival stage will look like, thanks to an evening sat on Google, and has just one day to crochet eleven different hats inspired by the flags of each country she'll be visiting. During each set, she'll throw one into the audience, but for now, it's a way for her to wrap her head around exactly how momentous this summer is turning out to be.

It's made more special because, for a long time, Hannah really wasn't sure if things were going to happen.

Growing up, Hannah believed music only existed within the worlds of film, TV and theatre. She loved Hannah Montana and had her mind blown when she discovered Justin Bieber as a ten-year-old. Her original plan was to work in musical theatre, but then she saw an episode of Friends where Phoebe Buffay writes a song, which sparked something within her. Hannah wrote her own "ridiculous" track called 'The Chicken Song' and would play it constantly. "I just loved creating something from nothing and playing it to people." She carried on doing that throughout her teenage years, writing stripped-down, piano-led pop songs based on stories and suggestions sent in by her blossoming YouTube following. A rejection from theatre school coincided with her first proper studio session, and she quickly realised playing her own music is all she really wanted to do.

From there, she started posting rock-inspired covers and reworkings on TikTok as she chased what felt good and set about figuring out how to bring that untethered joy to her own music. In 2021, she shared an updated version of Aqua's 'Barbie Girl' featuring pointed lyrics like "they think that they can stare, undress me anywhere. 'It's just romantic, stop being dramatic'." It quickly racked up millions of views on YouTube and TikTok.

"It was weird because nothing like that had ever happened to me before," she explains. "I read every single comment, and I got really emotional because I felt this strange sense of responsibility knowing I was responsible for the conversations that were taking place. I think people wanted to share their own stories and experiences, and they saw that video as a safe space for that."

After seeing the impact that sharing something so honest had with others, Hannah started writing the super personal, super direct songs that she's known for today. "I'm so proud of how brutally honest I am in my songs now. And I'm only getting more confident in doing that," she teases, her background in musical theatre giving her permission to not hold anything back and removing any fear about being "too much".

Hannah Grae's ambitious, nine-track 'Hell Is A Teenage Girl' was released earlier this year. Inspired by Paramore, My Chemical Romance, Queen and Taylor Swift, the record sees her revisit her shitty high school experiences with all the swaggering, disruptive attitude of Mean Girls. "I wanted it to feel like a movie," she explains, with a focus on worldbuilding as well as killer songs.

"School was a really tough time for me, but I always knew I'd get my revenge someday, somehow," she grins. The entire process was a cathartic one, offering Hannah a much-needed sense of closure. It also gave others a chance to "scream about their feelings at the top of their lungs," she explains. The entire project was written before Hannah had ever played a proper gig. "Seeing people's faces and just knowing which moments hit, that was a really important thing that I took into writing this next era."

> **"I WANTED TO TAKE OVER THE WORLD. I STILL WANT TO"**
> **HANNAH GRAE**

And that next chapter starts today with 'Screw Loose'. According to Hannah, the fiery, twisting track sits well with 'Hell Is A Teenage Girl' but is also quite different. "I'm not worried about that, though; it's exactly what I wanted to say in this moment."

While her debut mini-album offered empowerment and giddy catharsis around every corner, Hannah isn't sure you'll finish listening to this next record and feel excited. "It's more a picture of a really bad time in someone's life. Hopefully, if anyone has gone or is going through that, they'll feel seen. That's all you need sometimes."

Hannah's spent this festival season sharing the bill with artists like Dylan, Nieve Ella and Maisie Peters, who make unapologetic guitar-driven anthems. "I'm so inspired by all those women. I love seeing that feminine energy in something that is usually quite masculine. It's just so powerful," she explains. "They're all so lovely as well; it feels like a big community."

Her ambitions haven't changed since she released 'Propaganda', though. "They were always quite unrealistic," she grins. "I wanted to take over the world. I still want to, as well. I do get lost in my ambition," she admits. "But I think you need to be a little bit delusional if you want to do this."

For the moment, Hannah is focusing on giving each new song its own moment and has her sights set on playing some headline shows. "All I really want is to be in a room full of people singing my lyrics back to me, who find something meaningful in them. I think a lot of us feel like we're on the outside of something," she adds. "I want to create something that feels inclusive."

"I also want to prove to people they can do things they've been told they can't do. And that it can be fun." ■



HUM

HOLLY HUMBERSTONE IS THE REAL DEAL

Dive into HOLLY HUMBERSTONE's debut album, 'Paint My Bedroom Black', where raw emotions and relatable experiences create a musical sanctuary.

By **Neive McCarthy.** Photography by **Bryce Glenn.**

"**Here's to new horizons,**" sings Holly Humberstone on the opening line of her debut album's titular track, 'Paint My Bedroom Black'. Emerging from possibly the most hectic year of her life, Holly has come face to face with newness time and time again – new cities, new people, new emotions, new heartbreak, new love. Navigating those things hasn't always been easy, but for the 23-year-old, writing proved a balm for those darker times. On 'Paint My Bedroom Black', Holly invites you to step into that whirlwind with her, to block the rest of the world out and hear exactly what she has to say.

Spending much of the last year away from home on back-to-back support tours, Holly found herself in a weird situation. Struck by the knowledge of how lucky she was and yet hyper aware of how much she missed home and her loved ones, it became difficult to grapple with the chaos of what was happening. As she has always done, Holly turned to her writing.

"I think a lot of people journal and try to touch base with their families, but I find it really hard," Holly admits. "I don't have the capacity for it at the end of a long day of work or travelling. I tend to make notes or voice notes throughout the day or even at night when I've shut the door and I'm in my hotel room on my own. If I have ideas, I write a lot of it down and then when I have time, I'll go into the studio and flesh the ideas out a little bit more. It can be quite alienating, and I think writing in the last year has been a process of trying to figure out how to look after myself and try to preserve my mental health."

> "IT'S ABOUT LETTING GO OF THE SHIT THAT IS HOLDING ME BACK"
>
> HOLLY HUMBERSTONE

Somewhere amidst these tours, the album began to come together – across different cities, continents, and worlds, in hotel rooms and studios as and when it was possible. Bit by bit, Holly unloaded the weight of what she was feeling into her lyrics, and soon a story took shape.

"A few weeks into a tour, you start feeling like nothing is real," Holly explains. "Nothing is constant; everything is changing every day, apart from the people you're with and the music you're playing. There's a lyric on one song on the album, 'Ghost Me', and it says: "The more I see, the less I know / this feels like the Truman Show". That lyric, for me, really rings through. Everything starts to blur and feel like an alternate reality after a while. Writing helped me to stay grounded."

Part of that came in the things Holly was actually writing. That narrative that takes hold is not necessarily one of empty hotel rooms and a constantly hectic schedule. Instead, Holly found herself attempting to bridge the gap between herself and her loved ones in different places. The story of 'Paint My Bedroom Black' could be any 23-year-old's – it brims with all the cornerstones of navigating that period, as Holly glanced at the things she was missing back home and chronicled those moments more than ever.

"I can't stress enough how cool it is to

be able to travel and do all these things," Holly acknowledges. "But the stuff that I'm writing about that people will connect to is the real stuff. Relationships and my friends, my sisters, the feelings of being away from people and feeling like I'm neglecting things back at home and missing people. Real stuff like that, I feel like everybody will connect to it in some way."

Since her very first release, that truthfulness has drawn people to Holly's music. Reassuring your sister that you're there regardless on 'Deep End', coaxing your best friend through a breakup with 'Scarlett', feeling out of your depth and out of your comfort zone with 'The Walls Are Way Too Thin'. For many of her listeners, Holly's music has offered solidarity and assurance that she is on the same page – these things are not yours alone to deal with. 'Paint My Bedroom Black' offers that kinship tenfold. It's woven into the fabric of the album, holding it together even when it adventures in various directions. It's something that maintains a string of hope and love even in the darkest moments, and that string is, of course, first braided into the tapestry of the album in its title-track.

"So much has changed since I last released music," Holly reflects. "It's that thing of wanting to feel like you're on a new chapter. 'Paint My Bedroom Black' came about halfway through the writing process, and as soon as we wrote it, I felt like it had to be a really important track in the album. It felt like such a 'fuck it' release, like the ultimate serotonin hit. It isn't really about anybody; it's more for myself. It felt like something I needed to write to let go of all this shit I was feeling. It's about letting go of the shit that is holding me back and all the stresses and pressure that I'm constantly putting on myself. For that reason, I felt like it summed up the whole album. It just felt so fucking therapeutic to write."

The track bounces into being – despite the dark image conjured by its title, it's closer to the feeling of the sun first breaking through on a morning when you wake up and realise everything is actually going to be okay. "I'm gonna bottle up this feeling / Now with the windows down, I am reborn," she sings. It's that new page she was chasing – one of light and joy and freedom to chase what you want above all else. The album immediately opens with straight-up release.

Life is not linear, though, and neither is the album. Like any 23-year-old, Holly has multitudes to her – that freeing, high-chasing version of herself does not exist in permanence. Moods ebb and flow, there are as many lows as there are highs, and it was important for 'Paint My Bedroom Black' to accurately reflect that in its quest to document this year in Holly's life. Somewhere along the way, it became clear that the album was divided between these two versions of the self.

"There are definitely two separate sides to it," Holly explains. "On one side, with 'Antichrist' and 'Into Your Room', it feels like a release, like my extroverted self. Other songs, like 'Room Service' and the other half of the album, feel like my introverted self, wanting to shut things out and forget about everything and fuck everything off."

> **"I FEEL LIKE EVERYBODY WILL CONNECT TO THE ALBUM IN SOME WAY"**
> **HOLLY HUMBERSTONE**

Of course, everyone flits between the two, and the album is a true reflection of that, both sonically and lyrically. 'Cocoon' craves intimacy, the comfort of someone else to help you through a rough patch – despite its bright guitar line and catchy hook, it's a particularly stirring moment. The increasing pace of the guitar throughout perfectly captures that feeling of keeping yourself frantically busy to avoid dealing with something that lingers over you. The repeated mantra of "I'm just going through something" – which was almost the album's title – is an incessant part of that spiral.

Immediately followed by 'Kissing In Swimming Pools', the mood could not be more different. In a Mazzy Star-esque cascade of guitars, Holly shares perhaps her most romantic track yet; it's a moment that is intrusively tender, her voice at its most gentle and overflowing with love. It's a stark contrast from the moments preceding it, but a glorious one nonetheless. Those wildly different emotions co-exist for us all, and Holly immaculately documents how they sit side by side.

"Sharing so much of myself and who I am has been something that I've had to navigate over the last few months and years since I've been releasing music," she notes. "Everybody has a couple of sides; nobody is one thing. I feel like this album listening back is sort of all over the place. It's such a mishmash of random sounds and feelings and whatever I was feeling in the moment, we just did. Whatever me and Rob [Milton, her longtime producer] felt was good, we went with; we didn't think too much about how all the songs would fit together. It's honest and the truth. People who have their sound down and their thing nailed, I'm really jealous of. I feel like I'm a different person when I wake up every single day, and I want to do something different. The one thing that will be the same is the lyrics and that I can be vulnerable in them. It's become really cool and empowering. Everyone feels things really deeply, and it's a really empowering thing to share with people."





It may seem to Holly that it is a bit all over the place, but that's part of the album's charm. Anyone with a mildly chaotic stream of thought will recognise that feeling of





HOLLY FIRE

The key songs that got Holly Humberstone from over there to right here.

Overkill

Released: June 2020



→ 'Overkill' was one of the earliest suggestions that Holly Humberstone might be the extraordinary talent she turned out to be. With a video shot during lockdown ("we couldn't shoot a professional video, so we had to improvise a little!"), it was filled by Holly and her sister Eleri out in the forest. "It was basically my version of the 5k run except I had no idea where I was going and it was impossible to see anything and not to trip!" Holly says.

The Walls Are Way Too Thin

Released: May 2021



→ "I wrote 'The Walls Are Way Too Thin' about a time in my life when I felt like I'd lost control of where I was heading and struggling to find my place in the world," Holly explains. "I'd just moved to a small London flat and felt claustrophobic and alone. To avoid confronting how I was feeling I'd sneak out the flat and go on train journeys to see my mates, get drunk, then come back hungover through the night and early hours. I wrote most of the Walls and the songs that come next on those trains. It was my place of therapy, in the middle of nowhere, constantly moving with no destination."

Scarlett

Released: September 2021



→ "This track is my absolute favourite," explains Holly. "It's a fuck you to the guy that was going out with my closest friend Scarlett and it was written as they were breaking up. The relationship was totally one sided and lasted for years. Scarlett was all in and had pretty much planned their future and it was pretty clear to me that he was stringing her along, until he broke up with her in a really insensitive and heartless way. It's a pretty positive song as it's about her finally letting go, realising his many faults and taking back her life."

London Is Lonely

Released: January 2022



→ "I wrote 'London Is Lonely' back in February 2020 right before the pandemic hit here in the UK," Holly recalls "I had just moved out of my childhood home down to London and had spent the past few months feeling really trapped and alone in my tiny flat with strangers. London felt so intense and although there were so many people around me, I felt even more isolated and like I didn't belong. I kind of lost myself in the city."

Room Service

Released: June 2023



→ "I wrote 'Room Service' a little while ago when I'd just started touring full time," Holly reveals. "I was finding myself constantly stressed out and although I was having fun, I was really missing home and my friends. All I wanted to do was to get a hotel room with my best friend, lock the world out and do stupid stuff like order room service. To me, this song is a simple love song to the people I care about the most, and the seemingly basic experiences you share together that can so often be taken for granted."

jumping from idea to idea, spiralling into something entirely unrelated but still as keenly felt in seconds. Though the mood is in constant motion, there is that string of words and emotions running throughout that is intrinsically Holly. At times, her songs provide her the opportunity to say the things she can't out loud, to work through feelings that have built up over time until they are nearly overflowing. Under the lights and warmth of the studios she built this album in, those emotions were finally unleashed.

"I push things to the back of my head as much as I can, so I don't have to think about them and don't have to properly confront how I'm actually feeling about stuff," shares Holly. "I try and not really think. I feel like loads of people are really good at staying in touch with their emotions, but I find it really hard. I try not to think about stuff until the moment I get into the studio. That's how I've always done stuff. A lot of the time, I also feel like I'm not great with conversations and words. In a writing session with people I trust, I can pick through my thoughts and find the best way to say things without having to be stressed in that moment. I can properly word things in the way I want to and take control of what I want to say."

In a sense, it seems the best way to understand Holly is through her music; her thoughts at their rawest. It's another level of vulnerability, where her loved ones have her feelings and words to them immortalised in song. With every confession soundtracked by the luscious indie-pop beats Holly excels at, it's made more palatable.

"There are songs about my friend Lauren on the album, where there were so many things I wanted to say, and I didn't feel I could articulate in a phone call or a conversation. Getting it into a song is my way of telling people things, and being able to send her the songs is better than having a conversation with her and explain shit. Everything comes out wrong for me."

The track in question, aptly named 'Lauren', is a late-night escapade, a pulsing drum beat bearing witness to acknowledgements of a friendship growing distant and desperately bringing it back to life. It admits every fault of her own and attempts to make amends through a nostalgic twilight jaunt through beloved memories of Rock City nights out and dropping everything for a friend. 'Baby Blues', a stripped-back moment for Holly's ethereal vocals to shine, is another track for Lauren – time and time again, her closest confidantes and loved ones are embedded into the album's fabric, drawing it closer and closer to Holly's heart.

Often, those connections are brought to life in specificity – rewatching The O.C., a first kiss under a streetlight, sticky floors of



a dive bar, singing 'Angels' at karaoke. The hallmarks of your early twenties are brought to life with every word Holly sings. At points, she allows this to extend further. 'Ghost Me' includes a voice note quoting a Spongebob meme known and loved by all, and it's that subtle humour amongst the heartache that makes the album resonate even harder.

"I wrote this song called 'Elvis Impersonators', and to me, that's the most personal song on the album," Holly decides. "I wrote it about my sister living in Tokyo and being quite far away. When I'm writing about personal stuff, I love adding as many personal, heartbreaking details in there as I can. The more gut-wrenching I can make it for myself, the more satisfying it is when it comes out and for other people to hear. The more I can expose myself, the better."

'Elvis Impersonators' feels like a sonic fist tightening around your heart. Placed in the depths of the experience, the images of her sister play out as though in a snow globe, where Holly watches from above. It's filled with heartache and sheer, inescapable adoration and love. Like much of the album, there's a real cut-open, say-it-how-it-is nature to the song: no depth of emotion is too much. Somewhere in that process of repressing her thoughts until the minute she stepped into a studio, Holly allowed everything to come out bolder and brighter than it ever might have. It explodes onto the track, completely unmasked and largely untouched.

"I try not to think too much or get in my head too much about what I'm doing," considers Holly. "I just try to be as honest and be as vulnerable as possible and as real as I can with the lyrics. I never try to overanalyse my lyrics or rewrite stuff. That's really hard for me. We don't really touch much production stuff after we're done. Mostly, all of the songs you'll hear are demos, with a few added little bits. They are supposed to be what they are on the day. I don't think I've ever gone back and changed lyrics after we've written it. It's always been just how it is in the moment. The demo is always the best."

"THE MORE GUT-WRENCHING I CAN MAKE IT FOR MYSELF, THE MORE SATISFYING IT IS WHEN IT COMES OUT"

HOLLY HUMBERSTONE

That impulsivity ensures that these songs are exactly what needed to be made and say exactly what needed to be said. Whether that's a promise to bunker down and be there for a loved one, or treating someone badly, or overthinking the early parts of a relationship, Holly gives space for her thoughts in their most original, authentic form. Chasing that truth was crucial on 'Paint My Bedroom Black', even when it didn't come as easily.

"A way of dealing with shame and things like that is by putting humour into my writing and being a bit self-deprecating," recognises Holly. "That's my way of dealing with it. 'Antichrist' and 'Flatlining' were both about the same situation and feeling like I didn't have spare energy for somebody – hurting somebody you really care about. It's about taking accountability for being a bit shitty and not being there for somebody who really deserves it and treating people like shit, which we all do unintentionally."

'Flatlining' feels like a completely new direction for Holly: erratic beats, building towards a true frenzy where it seems the words won't quite come out quick enough. Though it is an unpredictable turn for Holly, that tumultuous, feverish outpouring returns it home. Her truth persists, and centring that in the process was vital – it allowed her to extend musically into different worlds, knowing hers will remain spinning.

"Being able to trust myself, always, is when I get the best results," Holly concludes. "When I'm trusting myself, not trying to be anything, not trying to be anyone, just being myself. I also think there are so many people that I feel like I have to impress and deliver for, and I honestly have learnt to stop giving a shit about what everyone else thinks, and to trust myself above everybody else, and trust Rob. I trust my manager and my core team. I think that I'll know, deep down, if it's a good song. At the end of the day, when I'm an old lady looking back, I want to be like, 'I made myself proud, and I still love this music and connect to it; I wasn't trying to fit into any boxes or any mould, I was just doing my thing'. Hopefully, the authenticity will come through in it. Whether it is a sky-rocket success, at the end of the day, it won't matter if I'm really proud of it. For myself, for my friends, my family and the people who are connecting to it, that's kind of all that matters."

It's hard to see how Holly wouldn't be proud of it. She recently shared a video of a girl at one of her shows getting emotional at one of her tracks. It's not an isolated moment – over the past few years, Holly's music has come to mean a lot to her listeners. It's a musical invite to your friends, an assurance that someone is with you each step of the way and you will get through this, whatever it may be. On 'Paint Your Bedroom Black', Holly Humberstone continues to do exactly that. It's the extension of a pinkie finger, an oath to stay by her listeners' sides for as long as they remain by hers – with such a brilliant debut, it's hard to imagine they'll do anything but that. ■ **Holly Humberstone's album 'Paint Your Bedroom Black' is out 13th October.**







CAN I TALK MY SH

Enthusiastically kickstarting a new era, VAGABON's latest record 'Sorry I Haven't Called' is a complete joy. "I just wanted to have fun," she explains.

By **Ali Shutler.** Photography by **Philip Chester x Sarah Byrne.**

→ **Vagabon spent every day** making her glorious self-titled second album crying in the studio. "I really didn't want to be this tortured artist," she admits today, but she was feeling the pressure following the sudden success of 2017's debut album 'Infinite Worlds'.

That first record was made on weekends when Vagabon (real name Laetitia Tamko) wasn't in school working towards a degree in engineering. She wasn't expecting it to do much, one step in a sprawling journey, but she soon found herself touring the world. The pressure to follow it up felt immense.

But she did. 'Vagabon' took the introspective vulnerability and quiet sadness of 'Infinite Worlds' and dived deeper. However, released at the end of 2019, she never got the cathartic release that comes with touring, thanks to COVID. "I couldn't mourn the fact either because we were already mourning so much. It did take a toll on me to not complete the cycle," she says. It meant she went into what came next with watered-down ambitions and plenty of questions about her own abilities.

You wouldn't know it from listening to her outrageously vibrant new album 'Sorry I Haven't Called', which is bolder and more daring than what's come before. From the sleek 'Can I Talk My Shit?' to the giddy, percussive 'Carpenter', the record pulls influence from dance and house music, with Laetitia finding herself drawn to high BPMs and a relentless sense of playfulness.

"I found my confidence through the process of making this album," she explains, now just excited to take it on the road. "It's very different to what's come before," she continues. "But I'm different, too."

Writing for 'Sorry I Haven't Called' properly began in 2021, with the songs evolving and shifting as Laetitia slowly built them up until they felt joyful enough. She got impatient, then fearful as the process stretched from months to years, but it just "felt like there was more to discover," she explains. At one point, she thought the record was done, but then crossed paths with super producer Rostam, and the pair added more colour to the record. "I had to start telling myself it was a power move, waiting four years between albums."

For this album, Laetitia also wanted to explore a more conversational style of songwriting. "I've always been honest in my music, but there's a difference between writing a journal as a stream of consciousness and writing it thinking someone might read it," she says. "I really wanted to find the poetry in casual conversation." It helps create a fearless, free and fun record.

> **"I WANT THIS TO BE A RECORD THAT PEOPLE PUT ON WHEN THEY'VE HAD THEIR HEART BROKEN"**
>
> **VAGABON**

Of course, Laetitia has toyed with upbeat pop songs before, including 'Vagabon''s breakout single 'Water Me Down'. "The difference is that 'Water Me Down' feels like dancing alone in your room. 'Sorry I Haven't Called' feels more like dancing in a club. It's about being in community, sharing that feeling."

"There's a lot of depth on the record, but I wanted it to have moments of fun," she continues, with tracks like 'Made Out With Your Best Friend' leaning into that lightness and the title a giddy wink at the fact it's been four years since Vagabon's last album. "You need those highs sometimes, especially when there's been a lot of lows."

Laetitia goes on to explain that she wanted to feel escapism through the creation of 'Sorry I Haven't Called' following the death of her best friend, Eric Littmann. "Grief changes your whole perspective on everything. I care so much less about self-consciousness or being as reserved as I've grown up being. There was almost this urgency to feeling euphoric," she says. "I wanted to make music where I could live inside feelings that felt bearable, to combat those unbearable feelings I was experiencing."

Like a lot of artists, Laetitia has a hard time listening to her previous albums but regularly listens to 'Sorry I Haven't Called' for casual fun. "I'm not worried about it being too real, too honest or too much of anything else," she says. "I still identify with it so much. I didn't actually write about my grief, but it does relate to those feelings, and I know that its purpose is to make me feel good."

The album ends with 'Anti-Fuck', a fuzzy, stripped-down track that's dripping in sadness. It was written after a rare psychedelic experience and rebelled against all the little changes that Laetitia has tried to make over the past few years. "I wanted the crisis, the chaos and the confusion because that's what I was experiencing," explains Laetitia. "It feels like an absorbed state of calm as well. Some songs are about being sad and agitated; this one is about acknowledging that grief won't ruin me."

"I know I'm not a new artist, but I feel like one going into this era," she continues, with her hopes, expectations and ambitions all reset through grief. "I'm just excited to rediscover where music can take me."

Vagabon will be touring with her friend Arlo Parks when 'Sorry I Haven't Called' is finally released, and they're already planning on singing songs together. "I really just want to commune through this music," says Laetitia. "This is the first record I've made where every song can be screamed back to me, and I'm so ready for that."

"I want this to be a record that people put on when they've had their heart broken, and they need to feel empowered in the same way that we listen to Nicki Minaj or Megan Thee Stallion. People like to commune over things they're afraid to say themselves," she says. "When you want to talk your shit, this is that record." ■ **Vagabon's album 'Sorry I Haven't Called' is out 15th September.**



I?



Strap



The last twelve months have seen JOCKSTRAP rise from buzzy newcomers to Mercury nominees. Breaking the mould, fusing genres and defying expectations, they're not done yet.

By **Martyn Young.**
Photography by **Nici Eberl.**
Photography assistant: **Pooja Dua.**



Music can often be about scenes and specific groups of people. It can also be about sounds, defined sounds that become so popular that they proliferate to be heard in multiple different places and through multiple different artists. It's rare that you find a band that sound truly different and entirely confounding. In the case of the duo of Taylor Skye and Georgia Ellery, there's no one else in the world making music quite like Jockstrap. It's this visionary approach to alt-pop that has made them one of the most exciting bands around and the last year since the release of their debut album 'I Love You Jennifer B' has seen them scale new heights and blow musical minds, culminating in a Mercury nomination and some typically idiosyncratic events to crown a landmark year for one of the genre's most beguiling success stories.

One thing that is undoubtedly true about Jockstrap is they haven't let success change them. They seem permanently unruffled. Perhaps that's what allows them to be so open and free-spirited with their music. "I think it's been pretty steady," begins violinist and singer Georgia, describing their journey since they first started Jockstrap after meeting at London's Guildhall School of Music & Drama in 2016. In typically understated fashion, she says, "Maybe this year has taken off because we've never done as many festivals as we've done this year. We've kept on going on with doing our creative and our visuals alongside it. We

haven't had any massive changes. No crazy team changes or anything like that. Anyone we've worked with has been here since the beginning."

This close-knit and insular relationship has fostered the dynamic that has allowed them to be so creative. The symbiotic musical relationship between Georgia and Taylor is ever-evolving and continuously thriving. "Georgia has certain things that she needs to bring to the table, and I have certain things that I need to bring to the table," explains producer and electronic wizard Taylor. "We have found a way to allow both of them to exist at the same time. It's an opportunity for us to focus on one thing each. We both still believe that's useful and possible and interesting and fun. We want to just keep doing that."

The relationship between the two finds them bouncing off each other and discovering their different creative skills as they evolve from their first, more rudimentary electronic singles to the grand symphonic pop odysseys of their debut. "You just think I don't do this, but you do this, and this is interesting to me, so there's things to learn," says Taylor. "It keeps you inspired. It's like a self-reviving carrot. It gives you energy. You carry on doing it." It's a creative bond that Georgia echoes. "Jockstrap wouldn't exist without one or the other," she adds. "I'm always very grateful that we met and we can make music together. I wouldn't be able to do that otherwise."

When we meet Jockstrap, they are enjoying some well-earned downtime in a whirlwind year while they await the Mercury ceremony and two celebratory performances at the Barbican in London in December. Taylor is in Market Harbour, where his family live, and Georgia is in Cornwall. "It's just where I go down for a week off," she says. Relaxing is something that the duo treasure, especially in a year in which they haven't had much time for it. "I just like relaxing and pampering," laughs Georgia. "Self-care." For Taylor, he likes to unwind by enjoying visiting steam rooms and saunas. "I've actually realised that I think what I get from it is I don't take any drugs, so I get quite lightheaded from that, and I actually really like that feeling," he says. "The heat and the cold inside your body. It's exhausting, but it's relaxing." It's a wholesome way to enter a mind-altering state in much the same way that Jockstrap's music can prompt heady stimulation.

Something else Taylor is almost blissfully relaxed about is Jockstrap's overwhelming critical acclaim and ascension to a new realm of success for ostensibly an experimental alt-pop act. He's pretty sure the newfound level of attention isn't going to change anything for them, but they're yet to test that out. "We've not made anything since people have been paying more attention," he smiles. "The album was made quite a long time before it came out, so at that point, there weren't a lot of people paying attention. We're surrounded by a load of musicians who are far bigger than us, so it's quite easy to feel like there are not that many people paying attention, and there's not that much pressure still. Maybe in the future, we'll feel it more, but it still feels pretty relaxed."



Since the release of 'I Love You Jennifer B', Jockstrap have enthralled more and more people as a genuine crossover act. Indeed, they even supported indie legends Blur at Wembley Stadium this summer; however, their roots and the genesis of Jockstrap go back to their love of electronic music. "When we met, we both knew that we liked dance music," remembers Georgia. "Jockstrap didn't start off like that, but it's become a good amalgamation of songwriting and dance music, which is what we love. I'd say we're now making music we loved back then. We're executing it really well now."

Despite blowing up in the last year, Jockstrap have been doing this for a good while now to a loyal and growing audience, firstly from the alternative electronic underground and now to a wider spectrum of people. "We started a long time ago. About five years ago," says Georgia. "When we made our first song together, it happened really easily," adds Taylor. "That was the sign that there was more to be done between the both of us. We did everything quite gradually. We did singles and EPs and remix EPs. It was all testing the waters."

As he explains their early days of trial and error, Taylor alights on one of the main defining principles for the band. There isn't and might not ever be a defining Jockstrap sound. "I kind of think there's been no click point," he says. "I think it would be good to stay away from figuring out what it is that's working and then continue doing

that. I don't think either of us is interested in finding some template to use. We try to avoid feeling too comfortable."

So, how do the duo look back on their landmark debut album a year later with a little bit of distance and clarity? "Well, I haven't listened to it for a very long time," laughs Georgia. "We play it live all the time, so I still really enjoy all the songs. I haven't really gotten tired of anything yet. Singing the songs is a very different experience to listening to the songs. It's so different. You're not really appreciating it when you're singing it. I'm just trying to do it justice and trying to be emotive. You just think about them in a different way."

For a listener, the experience of hearing 'I Love You Jennifer B' is one of continuing to discover new sounds, new aspects and dizzying twists and turns. It's an album that offers much to revel in even a year and dozens of listens later. From the off-kilter 80s hip-hop Art of Noise sound collages of a track like 'Greatest Hits' to the baroque, graceful classicism of a song like 'What's It All About?' to the unhinged sound clashes of 'Debra', there's nothing quite like it, and you discover something new every day. For the people actually living it, though, it's a bit harder to find such revelations. "Maybe if you get into that mindset and say, I'm going to appreciate it and try and hear some new things or pay attention to this song because normally it sits at the back of my periphery," says Georgia. "You can turn that on and off."

With the album as a living thing out in the world, for someone like Taylor who thinks so deeply about the music and their art, there's a temptation to wonder what might have been and whether they should have changed anything. "It probably depends on your temperament, but that's all I think basically," he admits. "It's been a year since it came out, and I'm finding it's quite a weird time to look back on it. I imagine everyone's got such a unique relationship to what they make because it's so complicated. I think I would change every drum sound now. Not to say there's anything wrong, but maybe that's just me thinking about it right now."

Jockstrap's music feels very instinctive and impulsive, with sounds and styles clashing and meshing into each other, but really, their approach is a kind of carefully considered and refined freeform experimentalism. There is no plan, but they want to refine everything they do until it makes complete and perfect sense. "I learned that I could be a perfectionist," says Georgia, looking back on the album process. "When I was writing the songs and doing my bit on it, I made sure I explored every single option to try to be 100% sure of my decisions when I was making it. That was very stressful." It's a contrast between chaos and refinement that makes them so compelling. "I think potentially that's what the intrigue is," agrees Georgia.

Taylor expands on their experimental process and desire to develop new ways of doing things. "You could say if that's how you see it with things coming in and out without much warning or in a surprising way because there's so little methodology," he explains. "You do a C-minor, then go into E-flat major; there's musical theory that already establishes what to do. If we're trying to do things that don't align with that, then there's even more reason to double-check it loads because you're doing something you're not sure about. So I think actually it makes more sense to me to go over it a million times because you've not got any support in place to figure out whether it's right or wrong."

"I'M MUCH MORE CONFIDENT IN WHAT I WRITE, AND I DON'T REALLY THINK TWICE"

GEORGIA ELLERY

The willingness to fail, make mistakes and make unconventional sounds is what makes Jockstrap so thrilling, and it's an impulse that's always been there. As they have grown, the desire to be inquisitive and constantly inventive has only increased. "I feel like when I listen to some of the earlier music we were doing, it's a bit more naive," explains Taylor. "That's not a good or bad thing. I probably question what I do more and more as time has gone on. That's probably been the arc of my life since I started making music. As time has gone on, I've found myself questioning what music is more and more. I just think about it more as we do it. That's been a progression."

For Taylor, the search for transcendent music is something he's constantly exploring, and for someone who thinks so deeply about what music is and can be, it's something that he finds pretty consuming and sometimes even hard to work out himself. "My tastes have changed, and the artists that I value have changed," he ponders. "The things I look for in music have changed. I'm looking for different things. I wasn't interested in lyrical material for a long time, but I'm more interested in that now. There are certain feelings that you look for that are quite hard to describe. I believe that there are some artists who provide those feelings and some other people that don't. There are certain qualities that are quite hard to describe. Everyone wants truthful music, and I think I've got a new definition of that, but it's just quite hard to define."

Georgia offers the lyrical and melodic counterpoint to Taylor's sonic collages. Her songs provide the beautiful flourishes and soul within the synthetic soundscapes of their music. Songwriting is something that requires a distinct environment to flourish, though. "Since the album, I've only written one new song, and that was for Black Country New Road," she says as she mentions her other band. "That was the only time I've picked up something to write a song. I have to be very relaxed and have enough time and blank space for inspiration to come. When you're travelling all over the world, then that doesn't happen for me."

Songwriting has definitely become easier, though. "When I started, I was an unconfident writer in lyrics for sure," she admits. "Knowing if it was too sincere or too funny or too subversive. Now, I'm much more confident in what I write, and I don't really think twice. I just see it for what it is on the page, and if I think it's good, I'm confident enough to go with it." Often, the boldness



and the ambition of their music is mirrored in equally bold and fantastical lyrics and imagery from Georgia, like in the iconic Madonna referencing of the album highlight 'Greatest Hits'. "I think for sure the style of the track, if I'm writing lyrics, definitely inspires," she says. "If the track feels really sexy, then I'm going to try and give that, or if it's playful or rhythmically interesting, then I'm going to try and match that lyrically as well."

She hasn't yet thought about some of the stories she might like to tell on the next album, though. "The lyrics are very much about what's going on in my life. My feelings, thoughts and experiences that I've had. They were definitely a chapter in my life. I expect the next time I sit down to write something, it will be in a new chapter," she explains before adding with a knowing wink, "Things change, don't they?"

A lot of the beauty of Jockstrap comes from contrasts. The mashups of different styles and sounds. Stuff that absolutely shouldn't work but unequivocally does. The contrast between classic traditionalism and progressive futurism. "All the best music seems to have that," enthuses Taylor. "You take from the past and imagine what the future might sound like. I don't think we see it that obviously. Pastiche and doing some sort of string quartet isn't our tick in the box of the past. It's not really as simple as that. The practical side of using classical instruments or jazz songwriting that's just because that's what we're into, not because we have some sort of agenda to conclude this period of time from the 70s or this period of time from the 80s. It just happens to be what we're into. We're always changing. The next stuff, we'll definitely be listening to different things and will continue to do for the rest of our lives. It's up for grabs."

"I EXPECT THE NEXT TIME I SIT DOWN TO WRITE SOMETHING, IT WILL BE IN A NEW CHAPTER"

GEORGIA ELLERY



Race for the Prize

If you're reading this and the Mercury Prize has already been announced, and Jockstrap have won, then, wooo, that's amazing, and they're very deserved winners. If they haven't won, then, y'know, maybe they will win on album two? For Georgia and Taylor, just being nominated in the first place is a dream. For some long-in-the-tooth established acts, the Mercury Prize's importance might be a little overstated, but that's not the case for Jockstrap. "It depends who it is," says Taylor. "We're still up and coming, so we get quite a lot of exposure from it, and we feel quite lucky to be put in it." Perhaps the biggest aspect of being nominated is not the chance of maybe winning the thing but the opportunity to play live at the ceremony. "We haven't played on TV yet; there's a few new things to come from doing it," says Taylor excitedly. "I would like to think it was nominated because it's quite a unique record," says Georgia. "It's nice that we're not big, and we were still nominated. The nice thing about the Mercury is it's a mix of really popular people and more unknown stuff. The nomination is great; that's such an honour, so we don't mind if we don't win."

Sometimes, there's a sense that Jockstrap are teasing you. A feeling that they could make the greatest pop song in the world, but they don't want to quite make it that easy. It's a suggestion that they refute. "We kind of do want to write the biggest pop songs in the world, but somehow we can't," laughs Georgia. "They'd end up too long, or the structures can't keep it really simple. We're coming at it from a different angle." "We just end up doing it," interjects Taylor. "The way we make music is different to songwriters writing songs with six other people for big pop artists," adds Georgia. "We just do it differently. We're coming at big pop songs from a different angle."

People immersed and engaged in the Jockstrap world will no doubt expect a certain amount of discombobulation in their music, and the time when they find themselves making something too overtly conventional might be the time that they have to reassess. "If you're doing something too conventional and it's going to sound bad, then you should change it," says Taylor. "If you're doing something wanky for no reason, you should change that too. It's definitely something you don't want to do. You don't want to get it wrong. I think we're willing to take a risk rather than play it safe."

One of the areas in which Jockstrap have made a significant leap this year is their live show, which has made them one of the most must-see acts of the year. "In a similar way to how we both like to take different roles in the way we make music, we have something similar in the way we do live shows," explains Taylor. "Georgia brings something to it, and I bring something to it. For me, it's quite an unusual thing doing live music when it's mostly prerecorded. What inspires me is feeling like I'm aware of all the weird paradoxes of doing live music and then making a decision on how to make it the most engaging, knowing that. That's why we've gone from live bands to prerecorded stuff. What we want to do is make it as engaging for me as possible whilst feeling excited ourselves. I'm not doing what Georgia is doing onstage because that's a big part of it as well with how Georgia performs."

Indeed, Georgia's stage performance, as perfectly captured on their defining performance at Glastonbury this year, has taken them to a new level. "I've definitely enjoyed it. This has been the best year of touring for me," she says excitedly. "Through doing Jockstrap, I've been able to take it somewhere different slowly and give a performance performance. I really enjoy doing it, embodying the songs and making it slightly campy. Singing to people and people singing back to me. That's very different to how I started, just standing behind the mic looking angsty. I definitely feel more confident; it just took doing more and more shows, having the tech sorted, and not having to worry about tech. Hopefully, we'll continue to grow, and maybe we'll be doing backflips." One other notable aspect of the Glastonbury show is Georgia's iconic gold stage outfit. If every amazing pop star has a defining image in which they'll be remembered, this one might be Georgia's. "Thank you, I think so too!" she laughs.

Glastonbury was certainly a big deal in a

very big year, but in typical Jockstrap fashion, they took it in their stride while enjoying the moment. "We'd never been to Glastonbury," explains Georgia. "We'd watched it on telly numerous summers when we were growing up, so that was really special. It was a standout moment for us. I think it went well. We were a bit nervous because it was on the telly. Maybe not at the time; we didn't really think it was a step up. That's not really what we think before a show; we're just hoping that the vibes were there and we can bring the vibes and enjoy it. I have to remember to enjoy it."

In a further crowning of a special year, the duo are releasing a special remixed edition of 'I Love You Jennifer B' entirely reworked by Taylor, featuring some special guests and whole new track titles. It's a typically inventive and diverting way to mark the end of their first era. But why give themselves extra work, though? "I just make them while I'm making the album," says Taylor nonchalantly. It's an almost childlike impetus to constantly rip things up and start again. "Yeah, now that I've finished the remixes, I don't think I'll do it, but I have quite a strong urge to redo those, to be honest. It's good because it keeps you making music, but it's also infuriating, constantly wanting to change what you've done. That's just life, I think," he laughs.

Through doing the remix album, though, new aspects of the tracks and their dynamic qualities shine through. "I like chopping up melodies that are in the track either instrumentally or that Georgia is singing," says Taylor. "New melodies come out of it that feel like they're born out of or connected to the original ones. There is something satisfying when you're messing about with something, and then something almost equally just right sounding comes from something that was already right. It's a parallel reality that this could have gone this way. That's very objective because obviously, people will have different opinions on what makes sounds good, but for me, it just clicks, and I'm like, 'Oh, that's nice', and move on."

In the very short term, the duo's ambitions are simple. "We want to smash the Mercury performance, smash the Barbican, smash the remix album and round off the album campaign in style. There's lots of exciting things coming up," enthuses Georgia. As the year ends and the cycle for their debut culminates, thoughts naturally turn to what's next. A question that even the band are not sure how to answer right now. "We're grateful to have these Barbican shows as the last things of the year," says Taylor. "The remix album is definitely of the time of the album. The shows are very focused on the album; the whole year has been doing that. We've been very absorbed in it to the point where you don't really know what you think creatively anymore, so we're looking forward to it ending and starting something new." "I think next year's plan is to have a break. Clear the slate clean and see what comes next," adds Georgia.

There's a sense that whatever does come next, though, is not going to be obvious and is probably going to be wildly inventive and adventurous. The duo, though, still cannot quite see themselves in the same visionary way in which they've been acclaimed. They still feel there's no limit to what they can do and how they can push more boundaries. "It's quite hard because I don't really know what that is anymore," ponders Taylor. "There's so much different music all the time. Something can seem like it's pushing the boundaries, and then the next week, it feels old. It's not like we have now completed our inspiration list. I think there are still many people we're still inspired by and in awe of that humble us to the point where we don't feel like we're pushing things forward. There are tons and tons of other people who I think are way ahead that I'm aspiring to. I feel like we want to get closer and closer to our heroes."

Going deeper into the rabbit hole of the future of music, Taylor cites a book he is currently reading by Adam Harper called Infinite Music, which explores the ways in which new technology and new horizons have brought us to an era of limitless musical possibilities. It's an idea that feels very Jockstrap and is emblematic of what could come next. In reality, literally, anything can come next for Jockstrap, and that's the really exciting thing. As we talk about all this musical philosophy, we're interrupted by the piercing sound of a cordless drill. "That's a drill, btw. Just so you know," laughs Georgia. "It's my family getting a new kitchen. I'm just coming back to the chaos, so I don't have to live through it all the time." It's a fittingly unexpected moment of discordance for a duo who thrive on surprises and doing the unexpected. They never really should have gotten this big, and y'know, maybe they might just be the future of music, or maybe not, but they're resolutely going to follow their own vision. Whatever comes next, though, the legacy of their thrilling debut era is enshrined forever. ■



"WE'RE WILLING TO TAKE A RISK RATHER THAN PLAY IT SAFE"

TAYLOR SKYE

→ **"It does feel like it's mental** that we're kind of up to 8 years of Lucia & The Best Boys, and we're just getting to the album coming out." Lucia is explaining how her debut album is one that genuinely can be described as long-awaited. Everyone has known Lucia has been something special for a long time, but sometimes it's necessary to wait, focus and be true to what you want to do, and that's exactly what Lucia has done on her journey to 'Burning Castles'. "I wouldn't change anything, and I feel really grateful that I've had the chance to go on my own path and create what I want to create," she continues.

The road to 'Burning Castles' began for Lucia back in Glasgow as she experimented and began to find her voice as an artist, the early incarnation of the 'Best Boys' providing the spark that has morphed over the last near-decade into a formidable alt-pop monster.

"When I first started music as Lucia, I had quite a lot of angst and frustration that I wanted to release, as a teenager and as a woman," she explains. "I was also very influenced by the music that I was listening to and the music scene in Glasgow and Glasgow itself. I was very inspired by that wall of sound. I was super into The Ronettes when I was younger. I was really sugarcoating my lyrics and having so much fun with it. Just making everything so dramatised and energetic. I was really playing around with it and creating my own world within my music. That was always something that I loved doing."

That sense of drama and a story bigger than the music has carried on all the way into today with 'Burning Castles' defined by rich, evocative imagery and a sense of grandeur and spectacle. It's an elemental music that is a development from her earliest musical loves that were more primal and primitive but no less powerful and raw. "I remember when I was younger if people would ask me what music I played, I would classify it as bubblegum punk," she laughs. "I was super into this idea of this 70s punk world where a lot of artists, not in an insulting way, would really dumb down the lyrics. It was a thing. It was really simplistic. I really took to that and loved doing that when I was younger. That was where I started out. I just ran with it. This is me talking about our very first EP, which was called 'Best Boy'.

"That was the turning point, you could say. There was a slight shift in the music that I was making or how we felt we wanted to take even more control of what we were doing. We changed the name to Lucia & The Best Boys."

"It was almost a homage to the original Lucia sound and to never forget where we started out," she adds. "I thought it was such a smart and fun thing to do to have the boys just be the 'Best Boys'."

With the band name now set and a firm identity and spirit in place, they began to hone their sound and their aesthetic, with Lucia's dynamic personality driving them forward. They took their time, but the songs that comprise the album demanded care and attention. There was a palpable sense of their ambition and their music becoming bigger in scale. Bigger ideas, bigger emotions and more powerful feelings.

"The songs have been written over the course of 4 years," explains Lucia. "Within this album, I'm singing about so many themes and things that I've touched on in the past with my music, but where the difference lies is that I'm always growing and evolving, and the music is growing and evolving as I do. You can experience things like heartbreak and insecurities when you're 18, and you can experience them when you're in your mid-twenties, and it can be such a different experience. The emotions that you feel are completely different because you've obviously gained however many years of experience of life."

Sometimes when you're an artist, you're creating something, and it just feels different, more powerful, more engaging. You can't quite pinpoint why, but you know you're onto something potentially transformative. "It sounds silly to say because it's my music, so I've always felt deeply connected to it because I wrote it, and it's always been such a personal and vulnerable thing to share, but in some way, I've never felt more at home when making music. This album is a very clear representation of where I am at today," she says.

Lucia acknowledges it's been a long gap between releases, but there's no trepidation there. "People maybe haven't heard music from me in so long, but that's why I'm so excited for people to hear it. It definitely has this new path to it but also very much has that Lucia & The Best Boys stamp."

"I'VE NEVER FELT MORE AT HOME WHEN MAKING MUSIC. THIS ALBUM IS A VERY CLEAR REPRESENTATION OF WHERE I AM AT TODAY"

One of the themes of the album is a sense of cavernous wide open space. It feels like an album designed for expansive open-air situations, which in part comes from Lucia's love of hiking and being out in the natural environment and experiencing the different atmosphere you feel when you're out of the city. There's nothing more invigorating than being hundreds of feet up in the air.

"At the beginning of my journey making music when I first moved to Glasgow, I was very inspired by Glasgow and the people here and the chaos of all the nights out we would have," she reflects. "Because I'm travelling so much now, though, when I'm at home, it's such a novelty. I feel so much more pride in it. I've spent a lot of time in the countryside when I've been at home. That's had a major impact on me and my music. Not to say that I'm about to drop a trad album, but visually as well, if you were to listen closely to the album, you'd hear little hints of things that would tell you that."

You can hear this in the album's use of traditional Scottish instruments like bagpipes on the song 'Butterflies' or the Celtic backing vocals that illuminate moments throughout the album. Lucia's Scottish heritage, as experienced as a grown woman removed from the wildness of youth, is at the heart of the record.

"We recorded the album up north just off Stornoway on the isle of Great Bernera, which is super isolated," she says. "We didn't have any distractions and weren't in a busy city which is quite funny to me because I grew up in the countryside. I grew up super isolated. When I was younger, I took it for granted that I wanted to be in the city. I always loved really atmospheric and loud settings. I really thrived off of that. As I've gotten older and spent more time away from home, a lot of the time, I really do want to be back in the countryside. I find something quite nostalgic in it because of my childhood. That impacted the album, being there and having nothing to go off but your feeling in your head and your heart. I feel like I've come into my own while making this album, and I'm really proud of it."

Part of the sense of drama that fills the record comes from Lucia's appreciation of the wider world that envelops these songs and the imagery that runs through the artwork, the stage performance and the striking music videos. "I've always been such a visual artist," she enthuses. "When I've just started making a song or started the process, if I see a visual in my head, I find it very hard to replace it, and I'm just like, that is what we have to do. The visual is really important; it tells such an important part of the song. It elevates it in so many ways, for me as well, not just for somebody watching. It's such an important extension of the whole world of writing songs.

"With the album, it felt really important for me to channel the exact same I put into making those songs into the music videos and the artwork. I wanted to showcase in those visuals what it was that inspired the songs. It's been a major part of the process more than ever. "

The album finds Lucia & The Best Boys flexing their pop muscles and channelling artists like Prince on the smouldering electro-rock of 'Love Yourself' or shimmering synth-pop gems like 'Haunt You Back'. There was one key song, though, that provides a connective tissue back to the time when they were simply the 'Best Boys'.

"There was a point we were questioning 'So Sweet I Could Die' being on the album," admits Lucia. "It's the one song that I wrote with the boys. It pays an ode to music that I've made in the past and has this sweet and euphoric feeling for me, so it was really important it was on there. I really wanted to sing about my own experience of heartbreak and insecurities and tell all the different tales of everything I've been through as a teenager growing into a woman. I've now been writing them as a woman. I don't think that's something that people have heard yet. The last stuff we put out, I was 24. I wasn't super young, but I've felt a major shift in my songwriting."

The shift in songwriting also allowed Lucia to do different things with her writing and challenge herself in more expansive ways. "The one thing I also love on this album is that I've really enjoyed exploring my melodies and using my voice," she continues. "That's helped to capture the vulnerability and intimacy in these songs. They all play their unique part on the album. 'Burning Castles' felt like the beginning of this new world."

The beginning of a new world feels like an apt way to illustrate the coming of age of an artist who is now revelling in the freedom to do whatever they want. They might be 8 years in, but Lucia & The Best Boys are only just getting started. ■ **Lucia & The Best Boys' album 'Burning Castles' is out 29th September.**

THE CLIMB

If you're going to call your album 'Burning Castles' it suggests a certain degree of adventure. A rejection of any boundaries or feeling "no, you can't do that." This free-spirited passion is reflected in one of Lucia's favourite hobbies. Not only is she looking to climb to the summit of mount pop she also likes to climb mountains as well. Y'know actual, really big ones. She's from Scotland. There are loads of them up there.

"When I'm feeling like I need a little boost of energy or need to feel inspired and cut myself out of everything, I love going up north into the Scottish highlands. I love hiking and mountains. I love going up Monroes," she says. "What's the biggest one that I've done? I don't actually know height-wise what the biggest one I've done is? There have been a few hikes where I've done 3 in one go. One of my favourites is called Beinn Achaladair. It's this really otherworldly and incredible view once you climb to the bottom of the first one. "

It's a pastime Lucia recommends for anyone just wanting to get away from the hustle of being a popular and in-demand musician.

"It's super peaceful. I've found a lot of inspiration in things like that over the last few years," she continues. "The thing that's really cool about it for me is it's such a contrast to my actual life. I've found another form of escapism. I just love swimming in natural waters and waterfalls. To be cliched, I just love being at one with nature. It's nice to just take yourself away. Being in Scotland keeps me feeling very grounded."

LUCIA & THE BEST BOYS

It's been a long time coming, but LUCIA & THE BEST BOYS are delivering on their early promise with scorching debut album 'Burning Castles'.

By **Martyn Young.**
Photography by **Ronan Park.**



KENNY VS THE WORLD

There's no doubting that **KENNYHOOPLA** is one of the most exciting artists to break through in recent years - but he's not done yet. As he admits himself, he's trying to take over the world.

By **Ali Shutler.**
Photography by **Derek Bremner.**

Sitting backstage at Reading Festival, KennyHoopla is momentarily transfixed by a television screen broadcasting Holly Humberstone's confident Main Stage performance. Later on today, he'll deliver his own explosive, twisting set on the Festival Republic stage before crossover rapper Yung Lean and mysterious pop-metal group Sleep Token that rattles through his most urgent cuts. "I'm going to try and give the crowd a little bit of everything," says Kenny a few hours before he spins onto the stage. "Every artist is out there killing it, and I just hope I can do the same," he continues before ambition overtakes gratitude. "I want to push it, truthfully."

It's Kenny's second appearance at Reading Festival after a scene-stealing lunchtime appearance in 2021, and he feels grateful to be back. "So many artists don't get invited a second time," he explains, with the excitement around a lot of the musicians who blew up over lockdown fizzling out in recent months, unable to maintain the communal euphoria they first offered.

Bucking that trend, KennyHoopla is fresh from an arena tour with Blink-182 after releasing the Travis Barker-produced 'Blink, And You'll Miss It' EP and being the first artist Bloc Party have ever collaborated with on dreamy indie number 'Keep It Rolling'. "It's not hard to be grounded, but it's hard to even hear the crazy shit I've done," he grins,


Garbage Hill

wanting to carry those successes forward.

"I just went on tour with Blink, so now I have to make sure my music meets that level going forward, or what was it all for?" he asks, taking a similar approach to the various co-signs he's racked up. "I want to do them justice."

Still, there are a lot of expectations. "I hear a lot of people saying that I'm someone who broke through the noise," and while he agrees, he describes the pressure as "a little toxic".

"But it's also an honour. There could be no pressure, and nobody could care about anything I have to say," he adds, getting used to being the sort of artist people look up to. "It gets to a point where you've done the things that I've done or seen the things I've seen, and it would be disrespectful not to at least try and see it through, especially coming from where I've come from. I want the chance to be what other people see in me."

"I FELT LIKE THERE WAS SOMETHING MISSING IN MY GENERATION. WE'D HAD TWO DOOR CINEMA CLUB, WE'D HAD RADIOHEAD; WHAT WAS NEXT?"

KENNYHOOPLA

Kenny was born in Cleveland, Ohio, before his mother moved their family away from neighbourhood violence to Oshkosh, Wisconsin. He listened to hip-hop before discovering punk through Blink-182 and The All-American Rejects, while The Drums, Phoenix and Passion Pit sparked a lifelong love of indie rock. His childhood influences playlist on Spotify lists everyone from Drake and Jay-Z to Two Door Cinema Club and Wolf Alice. At first, he rapped over rock-inspired instrumentals for a series of standalone SoundCloud tracks, while his 2016 self-released EP 'Beneath The Willow Tree' brought a lo-fi swagger alongside crunching 808 beats. At school, he was made to feel like an outsider and couldn't put a band together to bring his grand vision to life.

"I felt like there was something missing in my generation. We'd had Two Door Cinema Club, we'd had Radiohead; what was next? My ambitions were always to be as big an artist as possible," he explains, but he couldn't find the same drive in those around him. "I guess it's just got to be me then," he reflects. Then came 2020's emo-infused 'How Will I Rest In Peace If I'm Buried By A Highway', which quickly resonated with a global audience. Part 90s emo, part 00s flamboyance, the song and the following EP saw KennyHoopla championed as a vital voice in reinvigorating the pop-punk scene, as classic anthems from the likes of Paramore were rediscovered by a new generation. "I was just trying not to stray away from being a fucking weirdo," he says.

On reflection, he describes his breakthrough EP as a little bit show-offy, but he wanted a platform to show people just what he could do. "It felt like the time to be loud because so many other people in the scene were being quiet," he says. "I was angsty; I wanted to make an impact. I loved the idea of making words come to life. I just wanted to use my voice."

Soon after the record was released, KennyHoopla found himself in the studio with Travis Barker, who was on a hot streak, having worked with the likes of Machine Gun Kelly, Willow Smith and Yungblud. "I was constantly thinking, 'You're in the room with Travis Barker, don't fuck this up'," but the pair quickly hit upon a rhythm that allowed them to create the eight-track 'Survivors Guilt' mixtape in two weeks. "It was artistically liberating. Having an OG like him standing behind my voice gave me a lot of solidification," says Kenny, with Travis telling him his instincts were right and to not overthink things. "That really helped."

'Survivors Guilt' was released in 2021 ahead of a support slot on Machine Gun Kelly's 'Tickets To My Downfall' North American Arena tour. KennyHoopla was very much at the forefront of the continued



pop-punk resurgence, which had now gone mainstream thanks to global megastars like Billie Eilish and Olivia Rodrigo taking influence from the genre.

His career was blowing up, but on a personal level, "I found the whole thing really traumatising," says Kenny. From the moment he dropped 'How Will I Rest In Peace', he was compared to Bloc Party, Dev Hynes and "pretty much any other Black rock artist. I had to fight extra hard for my identity, and even then, I had so many big moments taken from me," he explains. "I definitely lost my sense of identity, and I had so much shit to say about it all, but I felt like I couldn't, so I stayed quiet and grateful."

"I was at such a height, I got scared to fall," he adds. "I'm a universe-fearing person, and I've seen things change for an artist in an instant."

At the same time, he found a long-overdue sense of belonging within his fanbase. "I'd had breakdowns in front of Travis due to anxiety and pressure, but then to perform the same songs in front of an audience and see that loving a reception, it was liberating," says Kenny. "When I was younger, I was always so excited about the prospect of having a fanbase because I knew I could finally find people like me." He still has a close relationship with his supporters. "I truly am grateful for them. They literally are the reason I'm here."

In 2022, KennyHoopla pulled back from the spotlight somewhat, focusing on live shows rather than new music and interviews. "I was trying to find the right people to be around," he admits. "I have to make music that sounds like a band that's been best friends for ten years." But not releasing as often meant "things were happening with my mental health because I wasn't being as consistent as I wanted to be."

It's where 'You Needed A Hit' comes from. Released at the start of 2023, the snotty, venomous track is a sarcastic pushback at the looming pressure to release music based on timelines rather than inspiration. He regrets he couldn't spend as long as he wanted on the track, but there's a newfound sense of confidence to the track that sees him twisting, then owning uncomfortable situations.

'Keep It Rolling', the collaboration with Bloc Party, ends up with a similar takeaway. Originally written together for KennyHoopla, Kele Okereke went on to text Kenny asking if Bloc Party could have the giddy indie anthem instead. "I thought he was going to hate me because my music had always been compared to Bloc Party's, but in the studio, he ended up giving me so much love. I've always wanted to shout about my love for that band, but felt like I couldn't because it would just push me further into a box," says Kenny. "They've done a lot of things I want to do with my career, so to have that song together, it's truly a blessing."

However, he's feeling "angst" about being a person of colour in the rock scene. "I know people are looking up to me, and it's important to others that they can see a Black person making guitar music, but I don't want to give my story to just anyone," explains Kenny, who's got no interest in tokenism. "It's about finding that balance. Like everything I do, it has to be meaningful."


KENNYHOOPLA

"I WAS CONSTANTLY THINKING, 'YOU'RE IN THE ROOM WITH TRAVIS BARKER, DON'T FUCK THIS UP"

KENNYHOOPLA

It has all led to 'Keep A Window Open', which Kenny describes as a reclamation of his indie rock roots. "I'm super stoked on it because I had a bigger hand in the creation of it than any of my other songs," with Kenny acting as executive producer. There's more new music on the way as well, with KennyHoopla wanting to break away from the pop-punk tag. "I'm in love with so much shit, I get lost in the sauce," he admits, unsure about which specific direction he wants to head next. "I'll figure it out though. I definitely want to explore


Garbage Hill

the colour of sound, though," he adds.

Like his music, Kenny veers between moments of raw vulnerability and swaggering confidence. "I'm getting to a point where I think I'm meant to do this," he explains. "When everything around you crumbles, you see what's left, and music has definitely always been there. I've just to keep doing what I'm supposed to be doing, keep being loud with my voice, and everything else will be taken care of."

Later, he admits that he's feeling "extremely numb" after a busy few months of touring and the loss of his mom. "I feel a little like an abandoned kid that's been given the chance to have the world, and I have no choice but to do it for myself," he says. He wants to inspire others, he wants to impact change, he wants to connect with people at live shows, and he's starting to trust his gut a little more. "My mind is kind of chaotic; I think about everything, really," he explains, not afraid of holding anything back either.

He believes his music is resonating with people because of the infectious, heart-wrenching guitar tones he's been obsessed with since he was a kid and how much of himself he puts in every track. "People can feel that earnestness," he explains. "I come out of the studio feeling like I hate myself and that life is horrible because making these songs brings everything up to the surface," he continues. There's no resolution to the cathartic, confrontational anthems, but the fact he's unafraid to pour it all out makes for comforting, empowering music.

That's not changing anytime soon, either. "I still have so much to prove. I'm realising that I'm really angry about a lot of things, and I have a lot of shit that I need to say. I have a voice, and it's been torturing me because I haven't been using it," he explains. "I'm not out here trying to be that rock star cliche, but maybe that's what I need to be."

For his 'Survivor's Guilt' mixtape, Kenny was throwing stuff as fast as possible at the page, with the record exploring how, as the youngest in the family, he's always been around "super fucked-up, traumatic things" and could only watch on, unable to help. "You don't know if you're a victim or not," he says today. On the record, though, he hid complex, vulnerable conversations behind sprawling poetry and songs about love.

"I'M REALISING THAT I'M REALLY ANGRY ABOUT A LOT OF THINGS, AND I HAVE A LOT OF SHIT THAT I NEED TO SAY"

KENNYHOOPLA

This new music has nothing to hide. "I'm just trying to reflect on what I've been going through and who I've become," he says. In previous interviews, he'd avoid talking about growing up poor, wanting any success to come from the music he'd made rather than the things he'd overcome. Now, though, he's starting to realise that's a part of his story. "As much as I wanted to run from my past, I think it's important to talk about those things because that's what made me. I'm in a place where I feel like I've worked hard enough to tell people the whole story." Maybe it'll inspire someone else to tell theirs.

It all feeds into a growing concept Kenny is thinking about called "inner city mythology". He still calls Oshkosh, a small town that's slowly getting gentrified, home but lives in the more "beat up" north side. "There's a lot of crime that happens, but you'll see white, rich people on the internet that are so disconnected from it, they have no idea of what life is like outside of their suburbia. To them, a person having to steal from Walmart to feed their family is equivalent to the Loch Ness Monster. I want to talk about the real-life shit that goes on."

"I know I can come across as reclusive and serious, but I understand that this is bigger than me," explains Kenny, who wants to make the sort of music that can impact a life even if people don't know his name. "I'm definitely having some growing pains, but I'm trying to be nice to myself because I'm still young, and I'm still learning. I go into every new thing ready to fail. I'm excited to learn before I win."

With all this talk of new music, is a debut album on the cards? "It kills me that I've not had a debut yet," says Kenny. "I'm ready for the next level," but he's still trying to build a team to bring his ever-growing ambitions to life. "I'm not going to waste my time making an album if it doesn't live up to the vision. I've got no interest in releasing music just to be releasing music."

"I'm saying fuck your consistency if it's not on my terms," he adds.

"What I'm trying to do, truly, is take over the world, and I know I've got a long way to go, but angels keep putting stepping stones in front of me," says Kenny, his eyes once again drifting to the Main Stage livestream. "In short, I want to be on those big stages. I don't just want to be a festival filler. I'm starting to realise that's what a lot of artists are, just keeping their heads above water, but I want the whole experience," he continues. "I want to be a fucking powerhouse of an artist. It'll take a lot, especially as a solo artist, but I refuse to settle." ■









BL

WELCOME TO THE BLACK PARADE...

Building up a cult following, REBECCA BLACK is one of pop's most endearing success stories.

By **Jessica Goodman.**
Photography by **Kaio Cesar.**

"Even before I knew this was what my life was going to be like, and this was what I was going to get to do, I built my whole life off of performing and trying to understand an audience and how to get them in." To put it simply, Rebecca Black is living her dream. Travelling around the world, playing shows celebrating her ever-so-anticipated debut album 'Let Her Burn', this alt-pop sensation is having the time of her life.

If you've been to one of her shows, then you've seen that for yourself. Armed with backup dancers, a bedazzled chainsaw, and an abundance of hyperpop bops, there's a very real sense that on stage in front of a fired-up crowd is where Rebecca is meant to be. "I'm just having fun and going for it," she grins. "The fact that my audience does the same? The way that they look out for each other, the amount of fun that they're having... That's one of my favourite things to see. I feel really, really lucky."

Dressing to the nines every night, all-out dancing around the room, even starting up a venue-wide cheer-chant of "gay shit!" at a London date, her fans put just as much energy into her shows as she does. "It's the most rewarding feeling," she describes. "I put so much work into this, and everyone on my crew puts so much work into this for a reason. I'm just really proud of the audience that I have."

> **"I'M JUST HAVING FUN AND GOING FOR IT"**
> **REBECCA BLACK**

Speaking a few days before wrapping up the last of her 'Let Her Burn' tour dates, Rebecca is hyped up and ready to go. "I think, for me, live shows are so important because they are the one hour that I get to spend in person with the people that are spending so much of their time keeping me going, supporting me, buying the merch, listening to the music," she enthuses. "I literally was told, hundreds of times, that would never happen."

Achieving unexpected infamy pretty much overnight with her much-memed music video for 'Friday' over a decade ago, her journey from viral flop to iconic pop has been a long and public one. A viral hit for all the wrong reasons, 'Friday' became a magnet for vitriol to such an extent that it was, for a while, the most disliked video on YouTube.

"I think one of the craziest parts of what I dealt with was that your world stops being this tiny little middle school bubble of what is important to you and what is not," she describes. "When that opens up into the entire world, or at least what that feels like, when you're 13, you're just not able to really handle or process or understand that."

"Dealing with that as a child," she continues, "it's just impossible to not struggle with reclaiming that." But reclaim it she has done. A tenth-anniversary remix produced by 100 gecs' Dylan Brady saw her recreate the track on her own terms. Now, 'Friday' is a euphoric and empowering part of every live show she plays, a hyperpop anthem that not only celebrates where she came from but also compliments the music she's writing and releasing right now.

Music has been one of the main loves in her life for almost as long as she can remember. The album that started it all? 'In The Zone' by Britney Spears. "I would sit in



this little office room in our house, play the CD, and perform it top down," she recalls. "I just loved it." How much those songs meant to her is something she finds hard to put into words.

Describing it as feeling "like I was on meth", she starts to laugh, quickly rectifying her statement in an attempt to do her meaning justice. "I've never done that, so I don't even know what that feels like." What she's trying to express is as all-encompassing as it is ineffable, a sense of being seen and heard and recognised that comes when you find something you feel particular to you set down by someone else and brought to life in song.

"I felt an unexplainable feeling that I would come to realise was like, 'Oh, you are really connecting with this music'," she conveys. "That's my favourite thing when you're listening to something, and it literally makes you feel like you could punch down a wall because it feels that energising and alive."

It's this same feeling that she strives for and prizes in her own music and at her live shows. With the release of her achingly-long-time-coming debut album 'Let Her Burn' at the start of this year, Rebecca Black reintroduced herself to the world as an artist on fire. After more than a decade of fighting to prove herself, this is how she's meant to be heard.

"It's the debut! Everyone tells you it's the moment that you're never gonna get again," she laughs, thinking back on the pressure she felt when she finished working on 'Let Her Burn' early last summer. "I really was in my head about what I wanted to deliver and what I thought everyone deserved."

Released in February while she was in the middle of a headline UK tour, 'Let Her Burn' is Pop with a capital 'P', a record that's as electric as it is eclectic as it is exciting. Releasing it while on the road, she saw her audiences react to her new material in real-time. "I think those songs became really, obviously, very personal and very important to me, and still are," she conveys. "It becomes a different experience once you know that everyone else is having their first moment with them."

"It was really important for me to make this album about the way I viewed my relationships and myself. I think I was really coming to terms with confidence and learning how to understand myself," she describes. Now she sees these songs as belonging just as much to anyone who connects with them as they do to her. "I think it took a long time to really process that. This is not mine anymore; this is not this secret that I've had or this thing that I felt like I've kept to myself."

From London's Heaven to Hyde Park in just five months, she's stood on stages and seen the songs on 'Let Her Burn' find themselves a home with her audiences. When she performs now, her album deep cuts are just as celebrated as the singles, and she couldn't be more proud of what she and her fans create together every time she steps out on stage.

"It just makes me feel like everything that I've been through, and this very long journey that I'm on, I feel like that has been worth something," she enthuses. "Seeing the fact that people not only listen to the music but also clearly are connected enough to understand what it says and for it to stay within their realm? That is everything you could ask for."

"I JUST HOPE THAT IT HELPS PEOPLE FIND THAT INVINCIBLE FEELING"

REBECCA BLACK

She might be over a decade into her career at this point, but this is only the beginning of what Rebecca Black is capable of achieving. Already she's looking towards the future, using downtime between tour dates to work on sketching out new material and starting to piece together the next chapter of her story.

"I'm always trying to move forward. I never want to make something that feels like what I've done before," she enthuses of the writing sessions she's been diving into recently. "I think now, having done this once, I have a totally new perspective on how to approach those things as a whole and not just collect songs and put them together."

She doesn't know yet what form this next chapter might take – "that's the thing with this process, you can have as many ideas as you want, but really, you never know what it all comes to until the end of the day – but if her excitement is any sure indication, there's absolutely no doubt it's going to be something special.

"This is the first time I'm approaching it with as much intentionality, I think, as I've ever done," she describes. "It feels like a very new moment, but at the same time, I think people will like it. It's a fun era, for sure."

As for what else the future might hold for her? Her hopes remain simple: to find and forge that same ineffable feeling that made her fall in love with music when she was younger. "I just hope that it helps people find that invincible feeling, like you are in supreme flow with everything that's happening around you," she conveys of her music. "Whether they're good or bad feelings, all of those are important to the human experience."

"I think, as people, that is the greatest gift that music gives us," she distils. "It connects us directly with the pieces of ourselves that are the most true. That's all I could hope to do." ■ **Rebecca Black's album 'Let Her Burn' is out now.**



PARTY HARD



The culmination of years of hard work, Isle of Wight alt-rockers COACH PARTY's debut album is finally here.

By **Steven Loftin.**
Photography by **Patrick Gunning.**

→ Since 2019, Isle of Wight four-piece Coach Party have been knuckling down. Across three EPs in three years – starting with 2020's 'Party Food' – they've been establishing their raucous reality ruckus, and 2023 is finally the year of their hotly anticipated debut album. It's a moment the band have been building up in their heads since day one. "The allure of putting a debut album out - we've spoken about that so much, but not wanting to rush it, not wanting to do it for the sake of it," explains guitarist Joe Perry.

'Killjoy' is a project that either marks the end or the beginning of chapter one - they haven't decided yet. Either way, it's a big bloody deal. "I feel like it holds more of an era of us," vocalist and bassist Jess Eastwood adds. "That part of us from the start of the journey to now feels like, even though we had done EPs, I feel like it's all of us up until now, and I feel that it's more sacred than anything to me."

The toil and trouble they've been mastering over the last four years is compounded into its runtime. It has their trademark snark - courtesy of Jess - ripping riffs, singalong choruses, and most of all, it's got the future in its sights. Something they're now realising has crept up on them.

> **"THIS IS NOT YOUR FULL-TIME JOB; THIS IS A LIFESTYLE"**
>
> **JESS EASTWOOD**

"Recently, I'm realising how much has changed," Jess says. "And that goes from how quickly you want to make it your life to do this, and then how quickly it is your life; and like, actually, this is not your full-time job. This is a lifestyle."

This idea is a world away from when the four of them - completed by guitarist Steph Norris and drummer Guy Page - first banded together in 2016. The Chess Club signees barely had a handful of gigs under their belt when the tastemaker label came calling in 2019.

Between the cycle of touring and recording, Coach Party have been earning their stripes. Their most recent expeditions have given them the scope of what band life can bring you, and all of these experiences play into 'Killjoy'. Explaining that before it was christened, "We were looking at calling it 'Interactions With People'," says Jess. "Because that is the concept of the album."

It indeed plays out like the observational diary of a group who have been and met a lot of people over the past few years. Experiences include pedestals people can be placed upon ('Born Leader'), love ('Always Been You'), and a dash of nihilism ('What's The Point In Life'). Having been able to wrestle with themselves and how far they can go, Joe mentions their attitude to tackling 'people' has changed. "When we first started doing it, there was a lot more skirting around things that you want to say, whether that's humour or whatever... That's kind of remained throughout, just not as afraid to say actually how you feel."

One example is the swift change in perspective from 2021 EP 'After Party' cut 'Everybody Hates Me', to standout 'Killjoy' single 'All



I Want To Do Is Hate'. "It goes back to that and being more comfortable approaching what you want to say in a more matter-of-fact way, and [everything] was a bit more insecure back then - not within you, just in general!" Joe nods to Jess. "I'm more insecure now!" She blurts. "Oh my god, I just realised how much use 'hate'!" Joe laughs.

Mentions of hate aside, Coach Party have certainly grown into their newfound lifestyle. They're a bonafide rock band ready to pay service to those listening and to firmly establish their place. Their 2021 single 'FLAG (Feel Like A Girl)' is one monument to this. It's Jess's moment of demonstrating her vocal distaste for a certain type of person. "If you've got young girls or guys that have heard 'FLAG' and [say] it's completely changed their life or helped [them] through something, I want to make sure that they know that that is the meaning, and I don't want to let them down by being this person that's not true to who they were when they wrote that track or whatever," she says. A similar sentiment drives recent single 'Micro Aggression'; it's not always easy going.

A connection is where Coach Party's lofty ambitions come to a head. They've seen first-hand what longevity and a studious fanbase can offer on their support runs, and for a solid group of mates from the Isle of Wight, they've not done half bad - and the rest is most certainly yet to come. Jess enthuses she is, "Hoping there's some sort of tangible connection that people get through it." They've not had the chance to give 'Killjoy' a proper airing yet. Their autumn headline tour is where it can all come to fruition, particularly Jess' hungrily envisioned "chaos" for 'All I Wanna Do Is Hate'. But for now, it's time to bask in the glow of 'Killjoy'.

"If we had the opportunity to tell ourselves what we've done year on year a year ago, how crazy we'd find it but also just so unexpected," Joe marvels. "We didn't ever expect these sorts of things to happen. That's just the mindset we have. There's obviously ambition, but maybe it's pessimism of 'that'd be nice, but who knows?'"

But with all this soaring success - what with the stadium shows and the like - what's next? "Maybe we'll be accused of being an industry plant!" The pair burst out laughing. ■ **Coach Party's debut album 'Killjoy' is out 8th September.**



RUSH HOUR

BLEACH LAB explore the depths of emotion with their strikingly rich and evocative debut album.

By **Neive McCarthy.**

→ One line of poetry can have a thousand meanings. For Bleach Lab, stumbling across the line "lost in a rush of emptiness" in a book of Leonard Cohen's words, they all found themselves reaching for different interpretations. The phrase took on a myriad of different entities for the band, transcending its original context for each member until it became the title of their debut album.

"We've always wanted our lyrics and names of things to be personal to each person," Jenna Kyle, the band's vocalist, explains. "You can take whatever you want from it. For me, 'Lost In A Rush Of Emptiness' is that horrible gut feeling you get when you hear some awful news. That feeling of spinning out of control. I don't know if it's a universal feeling, but you feel your stomach sinking."

Bassist Josh Longman adds: "I always thought of it like loneliness in a crowded room, which I think is another way of interpreting the same thing." The remaining band members, drummer Kieran Weston and guitarist Frank Wates likely have wildly different thoughts on the topic – it's a shifting, evocative image that, whatever the distinct emotion it conjures up, seems to eventually manifest with an ache in your chest.

From start to finish, 'Lost In A Rush Of Emptiness' is an odyssey – into the darkest hours and the glimmering of light. It's always challenging, always transforming and always revelling in a constant shift of moods. As soon as the crackle at the beginning of 'All Night' sounds out, there's a sense of stepping into Bleach Lab's palette of blues and dark greens – the mystical, haze-filled world they have created on this album is yours to explore.

"We said that we want this album to be red wine and dark chocolate," Josh explains. "That's the vibe we want when people put it on; that's what should be on the table."

A body of work that is both sweet and bitter, it's a late-night venture into the experiences of this band; it's almost always impossible to predict. Having established their sound across three incredibly impressive EPs, going into the studio, the band were well aware of what they wanted to make. They were surer of themselves than ever, and it's that quiet confidence that lingers in the silent moments.

"A piece of all three of those EPs can be found within this record," says Josh. "We found things we liked and didn't like in each of the EPs we did, each of the styles and the experimentation we did along the way. I think after those EPs, we felt ready to do an album – we've tried other routes and ways and figured out what works best for us and what we think our sound should be."

Though constantly in flux, there are elements that stick through each track – the capacity for a near-smothering atmosphere, delicate vocals and guitars that effortlessly match the weight of those emotions are all mainstay features. It's those sliced-open feelings that often take centre stage.

"From the get-go of thinking about the album, we all really wanted that element of rawness that we had in our first EP," continues Jenna. "Although we were quite new to the whole thing, it felt authentically us. We wanted to bring elements of that back in."

Seeking a fervent, undisguised display of this journey meant an added vulnerability in terms of lyricism as well as a need to be okay with imperfection across the record. It's an accurate portrayal of the band – no smoke and mirrors, just Bleach Lab.

"The tiny mistakes we leave in..." Josh reflects. "Imperfections make things perfect sometimes. We got to be more free-flowing and creative when we're all together because it's just off the cuff, seeing what works and trying this and doing that."

Whilst the EPs were all recorded separately, with vocals laid on top and different parts recorded at different times, the making of the album marked the first time the band were all in one space to create the album. That proximity allowed the songs to come together much more rapidly and naturally, and there was more fun to be had for the band as a result of that. All in one room, they were able to fine-tune the album until it was, inextricably, completely them.

"Our main goal was the way that they sound and complement each other musically rather than lyrically," Jenna explains. Josh continues: "With the album, it was very crucial that it felt like a piece of work for vinyl. The whole track-listing was about how it would sound on vinyl – how does Side B connect and lead on from Side A? How does it finish, how does it start?"

From the warped guitars and the way they entangle with Jenna's ethereal vocals, 'All Night' sets the precedent for the album – born from Jenna's love of true crime and a new approach writing-wise, it's dark with ambition and undiluted emotion in a way that the album never quite shakes.

"Josh and I are equally as involved with lyric writing as each other," Jenna says. "But we always saw we use our lyric writing as a cathartic process to explore and find out more about ourselves in a creative way. A lot of the things I write about are very personal and are things that I or someone close to me has been through directly. 'All Night' was one of the more interesting ones to write because I took from another perspective that wasn't my own, and it was more of a creative writing exercise than a self-discovery."

For Josh, it can be slightly different. "Sometimes, it's very personal experiences. But I read a lot of literature. A lot of that seeps into my lyrics as well. The interpretations of those, I'll apply it to my own situation. Jenna has true crime; I'll have something weird like 'Dune' or something. I read all sorts of rubbish – slowly, words or phrases will ring out to me, and I'll write them down."

The album allows the freedom for the two to explore different styles of writing – there's 'Saving Your Kindness', which Jenna assures is her "full-on, unapologetic Phoebe Bridgers moment", whilst 'Life Gets Better' is one gigantic eye roll. Some, however, were more difficult than others. 'Smile For Me' is a highlight of the album, but its takedown of the impact harassment has daily on women proved a demanding experience, understandably.

"['Smile For Me'] was quite easily emotionally one of the most challenging songs to write on the album, lyrically," Jenna recalls. "I wanted it to be an empowering experience to write, and I was envisioning playing it live. It is with the intention of taking some element of control. We've never been a political band; we've never chosen to get into those sorts of things. This is my attempt at calling out that sort of behaviour. I think it's just that anger that I carry around and that so many women carry around, of just being constantly afraid to walk around on your own or constantly afraid to be alone at night – just walking to the shops, you can be harassed for no reason."

"It's things that I would be too afraid to say at the moment because of fear of repercussions and reaction. It was a challenging thing to write, especially the bridge. We played 'Smile For Me' live for the first time at Latitude, and it was quite hard to get through for me. It's such a personal thing, but I know it rings true for a lot of other people. I was choking up a little bit – it's emotional, but in a way that I have a need to say it."

'Lost In A Rush Of Emptiness' continued to allow the band the space to explore those unsaid things and find some relief in voicing them, no matter how hard it was at times. In the end, there was some kind of exorcism-like freedom to be found.

"I think that's the whole catharsis behind it," Jenna muses. "Being able to have a platform and having somewhere to put all of these personal, challenging, difficult emotions and feelings and thoughts and experiences – being able to put that into something that sounds really pretty and nice to listen to can take away a lot of the difficulty of processing it. I feel quite lucky to be able to have that platform to be able to talk about things like that."

It's something the band have mastered at this point. The sonic world they inhabit is often breezy, swirling and light – at times inviting guitar riffs that practically glisten, others leaning for percussion that seems to strive for a kind of release. It's not a linear listen – the emotions ebb and flow in real-time, and there's an underlying tension that is almost unbearably tightly coiled. It's a delicate balance that they have commandeered beautifully throughout. 'Leave The Light On' is breathless and hopeful, a final plea that gets wrapped up in the complexity of those feelings but soundtracked by a glimmering guitar line.

A particularly special moment on the album comes in the form of 'Nothing Left To Lose' – a hesitant tale of a relationship's beginning that practically buzzes with that frenetic energy of nerves and panic. It's sonically a perfect indie-pop moment – alive with that current and sonically bouncing alongside its nerve-ridden lyrics, it's electric.

"One of my favourite lyrics of the album is in this song," Jenna notes. "There's this place in the ocean where two bodies of water meet but don't cross into each other. One is very dark blue, and the other is very light blue. I write very visually, envisioning things in my mind. That was a vivid visualisation in my mind – two bodies of water that meet but don't mix. It's the idea of colliding with someone else and not seeing eye to eye. You're both strong forces, but you don't quite work together. That's one of my favourite lyrics on the album – 'when oceans collide / there's a different blue on each side'. Two strong forces that meet but don't understand each other and can't blend. It was tapping into thoughts that I'd had in my brain for five, six, seven years prior. I've been saving things up."

That image of the two blue seas is a striking one and incredibly resonant for the album. Those different blues spill across it, each blue hue swirling in tendrils – 'Smile For Me' the darkest twilight, 'Life Gets Better' seemingly sky blue at first but melting into darker tones. 'Everything At Once' and 'Never Coming Back' are more clouded. Throughout 'Lost In A Rush Of Emptiness', these different shades curl against each other but never lose their own saturation. Instead, they create one layered portrait with every aspect of Bleach Lab on display. It's a treacherous act at times, but by the time the final notes of the album roll around, Bleach Lab have crafted a miraculous work of art – a debut to be proud of, for sure. ■ **Bleach Lab's album 'Lost In A Rush Of Emptiness' is out 22nd September.**

INCOMING.

THE NEW RELEASES YOU NEED TO KNOW

WHAT DO THE SCORES MEAN? ★ Rubbish ★★ Not Great ★★★ Fair ★★★★ Good ★★★★★ Amazing



Baby Queen
Quarter Life Crisis
★★★★★



➔ There was once a time where pop music was all about the performance. Artists were other worldly creatures, larger than life, separated from us mere mortals by a combination of stardust and magic. Gatekeepers actually kept the gates, with any window into that world stage managed through a music media that had a near monopoly on direct communications. And then came the internet.

Today, your modern popster exists in a world that's fully knocked through the fourth wall. Social media, direct to fan channels, a need to be identifiable and real - all these things have turned the dial from distant adoration to a meta cool best mate, sharing every step of their emotional journey with their gang. Running to a different rule book, it's a landscape which suits Bella Latham down to the ground. Baby Queen's debut album is a tour-de-force of what she's been doing best for a couple of years now.

Fizzy, raw, identifiable bops that bubble with honesty, 'Quarter Life Crisis' is like a diary left unlocked; covered in doodles, influences worn as stickers plastered on its cover, but every word within authentically hers.

From the battling denial and self-admission of 'I Can't Get My Shit Together' to the frustration with the pressure of expected maturity on 'Grow Up', there's some deep and meaningful topics on display, but each presented in a way that never become so heavy they kill the mood. 'Quarter Life Crisis' swings in locked step with its internal monologue, while the exposed nerve of 'Die Alone' crackles with resigned emotion. They're universal themes passed through a prism that echoes those that Baby Queen exists to reflect. Future anthems that will mean something to those they're created for, because they mean something to the person who presented them.

There are moments of more bubbly bombast - 'kid genius' is Bella at her strutting, sassy best, playing the part of brat-pop icon to perfection - but it's closer 'A Letter To Myself At 17' that shows what 'Quarter Life Crisis' really represents. Doing exactly what it says in the tin, it's sincere, exposed and makes the heart swell. A note scrawled to sum up Baby Queen's first chapter, the next page will be even bigger, brighter and bolder. Get out the glitter pens - Bella Latham is 2023's perfect star. **STEPHEN ACKROYD**

underscores
Wallsocket
★★★★



➔ Underscores' wildly exciting second album starts with 'Cops And Robbers', a smirking electropunk anthem about a bank robber hiding out in a small Michigan town, before the robotic party anthem 'Locals (Girls Like Us)' brings together Lady Gaga, Nine Inch Nails and Gorillaz. It's a bold beginning but 'Wallsocket' thrives on those big swings, the most powerful moments the calm in-between storms. It's an attention-grabbing album that'll keep you coming back as the intricate world reveals itself. **ALI SHUTLER**

yeule
softscars
★★★★



➔ After earning a reputation as a forward-thinking pop artist, Yeule had their breakthrough moment with second album 'Glitch Princess'. A haunted, dreamy record defined by jarring synths, it wrestled with technology, annihilation and individuality. New album 'Softscars' is just as confrontational, pitting a larger-than-life ambition against personal loss, and sees Yeule continue to toy with the world of pop, reshaping it in their image while bouncing between bedroom pop admissions and urgent party-starting ragers. **ALI SHUTLER**

Lucia & The Best Boys
Burning Castles
★★★★

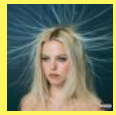


➔ 'Burning Castles' is full of elemental power and stylish electro-pop swagger as Lucia & The Best Boys fully deliver on all that promise they held when they first emerged from Glasgow's post-punk hotbed in 2018. Lucia is a magnetic presence who shapeshifts her way across these vivid pop songs. Shimmering choruses, great big Prince-like guitar solos, and a cavernous sense of ambition—it's all here on a brilliantly realised and dynamic debut. **MARTYN YOUNG**

RECOMMENDED RELEASES

The albums out now you need to catch up on.

Reneé Rapp
Snow Angel
★★★★



➔ Oh, so you're an actor who dabbles in music, are you? Or perhaps a musician with a flair for acting? We've seen plenty of those. What's so special about you, huh, Reneé Rapp? Well, quite a lot, as it turns out! Within the first few beats of the opener 'Talk Too Much', it becomes evident that 'Snow Angel' is a record that bites back with genuine fervour. Clear a space in the A-list, Reneé Rapp has arrived.

Genesis Owusu
Struggler
★★★★★



➔ Genesis Owusu remains a hot property. Second album 'STRUGGLER' takes inspiration from a close friend hitting the brink and coming out the other side, focused through the prism of questions prompted from readings of Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot and Franz Kafka's Metamorphosis. Weighty stuff, then. Operating on a plane that's willing to query the big stuff, it's no surprise that the swings hit for the stands.

Hot Milk
A Call To The Void
★★★★



➔ Inspired by the little voice in the back of your head that wonders what it's like to jump from a tall building, 'A Call To The Void' is decidedly darker than Hot Milk's previous work. Despite this, their cheeky Mancunian wit is still front and centre, allowing them to poke fun at their demons as they navigate modern life.

Courtney Barnett
End of the Day
★★★

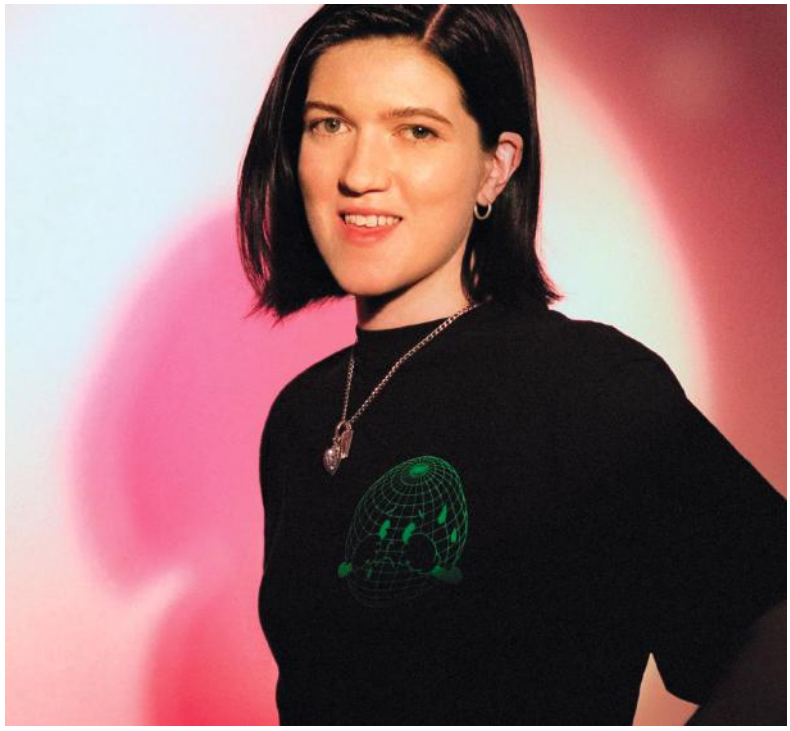


➜ While it is always a pleasure to hear Courtney Barnett's easy-going, drawling vocals, this instrumental album holds its own drifting through 17 beautiful, lingering melodies. Slow-paced and atmospheric, Courtney eases listeners into a meditative state through opening tracks 'Start Somewhere' and 'Life Balance'. Moving seamlessly into 'First Slow', a minimal, improvisational sound fills the air as plucked guitar strings rise and fall. The pace can sometimes lack excitement, but there's a sense of quiet enjoyment throughout; a beautifully serene audioscape that feels intimate and heartfelt. The perfect soundtrack to an early morning walk through the woods; this is music to get lost to. **EMMA QUIN**

Joey Valence & Brae
PUNK TACTICS
★★★★



➜ Nostalgic, hyperactive and sizzling with energy - Joey Valence & Brae's first album is filled to the brim with big beats and wise-cracking bars. It's a style that immediately stole attention upon their 2021 debut, but can the appeal hold up over 14 tracks? The short answer - absolutely. The 'Punk Tactics' LP wears the Pennsylvanian college buddies' influences on its sleeve, with Beastie Boys clearly holding a colossal place in both their childhoods, but their ability to twist that into something current and unique is what carries the project. This is Joey Valence & Brae's moment, and it is glorious. **FINLAY HOLDEN**



Romy
Mid Air
★★★★★



➜ Dance music, in its purest form, is deeply physical music. By its very nature, it's music that compels you to move, but, perhaps more importantly, it also compels you to feel. On Romy's debut solo album 'Mid Air', the voice of The xx provides a masterclass in emotional dance music with all the feelings ramped up to a transcendent level.

Romy has always had one of the most distinctive and idiosyncratic voices in UK music, and here it works perfectly against the beats and rhythms that Romy has constructed alongside producers, including dance music royalty Stuart Price and man of the moment Fred Again... What really makes this a special work, though is the purity through which Romy distills some deeply personal and emotionally resonant songs with sharp, crystalline clarity. The shimmering epic 'Weightless' is a beautifully measured evocation of desire and how it feels to just lose yourself to the feeling, while the celebratory single 'Enjoy Your Life' is a mission statement for the whole project.

'Did I' is a trancy epic, while a song like 'The Sea' mixes that classic xx guitar sound with an overt club approach that highlights both the perfectly crafted songwriting at work along with the blissful levity of the club sounds. When they both come together on the yearning closer 'She's On My Mind,' it encapsulates all the joy, sadness and ecstasy that is wrapped up in falling in love, navigating what that means and finding your own personal salvation. This stunning record is a declaration of who Romy is as an artist and as a person. **MARTYN YOUNG**

Mae Muller
Sorry I'm Late
★★★



➜ So, it turns out Mae Muller didn't just write a song for Eurovision; she wrote a whole bloomin' load of them. When you have 17 songs on your album, it's unlikely that everything is going to hit. Unless you're incredible. Mae isn't incredible. Not just yet, anyway. But she is sharp and funny and has a knack for a memorable hook. Where 'Sorry I'm Late' shines, though, is when Mae offers a little bit of herself and lets us see another side. 'Somebody New' is funky and fresh but has a lovely sense of vulnerability, while 'Breath''s easy-going charm is a blissful moment on an album that is largely full steam ahead. It makes for an enjoyable glimpse into an artist who is yet to find her distinct sound. **MARTYN YOUNG**

Bleach Lab
Lost in a Rush of Emptiness
★★★★★



➜ Bleach Lab are one of those special bands whose sound just has some sort of ethereal magic - and their long-awaited debut album 'Lost In A Rush Of Emptiness', a line taken from Leonard Cohen's collection 'The Flame', is just as beautifully melancholic as its name suggests. A quintessential mixture of 90s shoegaze, dream-pop, and indie-rock, it's the product of Bleach Lab's journey of experimentation with different genres and sounds - making for a unique and solidified sense of sonic identity. Listening from start to finish, it feels like its own little intimate world. And if this is how it sounds through headphones, what a treat it'll be to hear it live. **REBECCA KESTEVEN**

NOISY
Fast Fwd: To Friday [Vol. 1]
★★★



➜ Ever since exploding onto the rave scene with a major label signing and 4-track EP in 2020, Worthing trio NOISY have been blazing a trail with a thrill-seeking mashup of dance, drum'n'bass and various other electronic subgenres. The first volume of their 'FAST FWD: To Friday' mixtape summons that charged euphoria across their longest project to date, presenting eight new tracks that each offer a new guest vocalist, with contributions from rising stars Charlotte Plank and Master Peace standing out. Offering diversity in voice and sound, NOISY succeed in building a sense of community and cementing their ambition. **FINLAY HOLDEN**

Coach Party
Killjoy
★★★★



➜ Coach Party are, frankly, killing it right now, and their much-awaited debut album not only lives up to the hype, it smashes it out the park. 'KILLJOY' pulls no punches. The wonderfully bleak opener 'What's The Point In Life' sees Coach Party set their stall out early, letting you know exactly what you're getting yourself in for a tongue-in-cheek, brutally honest assessment of modern life layered over a sunny shoegaze backdrop. It's very rare that a band as widely acclaimed as Coach Party meet expectations with a debut album. It's even more rare when they take that expectation, rip it up, and set the bar even higher. Watch out, world, Coach Party are coming. **CIARAN PICKER**

Corey Taylor
CMF2
★★★★



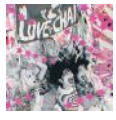
➜ Corey Taylor is one of the most famous rock vocalists in the world. From revolutionising metal with Slipknot, to writing best-selling novels and appearing on QI (yes, really), Taylor now brings us 'CMF2'. A record that twists and turns through all of rock's subgenres, heavy metal drums are merged with filthy glam rock guitar licks in 'Post-Traumatic Blues'. Meanwhile, classic American rock transports you to a road trip through the Midwest in 'Breath of Fresh Smoke'. These huge tracks are interspersed with respite in the form of 'Sorry Me' and 'Beyond', which allow Taylor to show his immense vocal range. It's personal. It's passionate. Most of all, though, it's a pleasure to listen to. **CIARAN PICKER**

JAWS
If It Wasn't For My Friends, Things Could Be Different EP
★★★★



➜ The return of JAWS is here, and 'If It Wasn't For My Friends...' was absolutely worth the wait. There's always been a distinct quality JAWS capture, even when their subject matter is less than cheerful, they project this warm, balmy feeling that makes everything feel okay again. In those familiar guitar tones, there's a comfort to be found. Nevertheless, the EP undoubtedly introduces a new side to JAWS – it's a more elated version of the band, taking that old fuzziness and growling vocals and giving it a brighter, glowing edge. Holding on to hopeful mantras, there's a healthy dose of late summer sun to be found. **NEIVE MCCARTHY**

CHAI
CHAI
★★★★



➜ Fusing yacht rock and cutesy computer-start-up jingles with aggressive vocals, the latest self-titled LP from CHAI asserts an explosive, confusing yet fun sound. Blending influence from a range of Japanese and Western genres, 'CHAI' is a melting pot of sound and ideas waiting to be explored. The group flaunt their musical skill, from the chilled, boppy 'MATCHA' to the synth-pop, offbeat 'GAME'. CHAI's music, while fun and ear-wormish, also connects to a deeper message, encouraging revolt against oppressive social norms. With lyrical undercurrents of feminist anger paired with delicious synthy beats, 'CHAI' is feisty, in-your-face and fun. **EMMA QUIN**

Sincere Engineer
Cheap Grills
★★★★



➔ Chicago's Sincere Engineer are fast establishing themselves as the latest band to break through from the punk-rock underbelly, following the likes of The Menzingers, Spanish Love Songs and Joyce Manor. 'Cheap Grills', Deanna Belos and Co's third full-length, more than fulfils this early promise, broadening the scope and upping the production to make for a satisfying collection of alt-rock hits. Belos' vocals remain rough-hewn – perfect for retaining their early fans – while her lyrics – which have always possessed a degree of self-effacing humour – have never been sharper or more prescient. It cements their position as one of the most exciting acts on Planet Punk. **ROB MAIR**

Will Butler + Sister Squares
Will Butler + Sister Squares
★★★



➔ Will Butler has returned with his third solo album (and his first with backing band Sister Squares), and it's actually a bit good. He sounds the most comfortable he's ever been, weaving his way through electronica, indie, a bit of jazz, and more. 'Stop Talking' is a lovely bit of toe-tapping electronica that serves as the opener (disregarding the intro track 'Open'), 'Willows' is catchy, leaning more into Butler's poppy sensibilities, while 'I Am Standing In A Room' sees Butler embrace his more slightly avant-garde influences for a bit of a Marmite song. **JOSHUA WILLIAMS**

Cherry Glazerr
I Don't Want You Anymore
★★★★



➔ For a lot of artists, 2023 seems to be the year of ripping everything up and starting again. Cherry Glazerr's fourth album marks something of a rebirth for the group, particularly lead singer Clementine Creevy, and it finds them in their most self-actualised form. Looking inward for inspiration has always been a common theme, but it stands out most on this record: Creevy pulls herself apart like a thread unravelling, showcasing more electronic styles and explosive guitar riffs. 'Shattered' is probably the clearest signpost of this sonic change, while the eponymous closing track shows someone who's a true artist. **MINTY SLATER MEARNS**

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT KING NUN'S NEW ALBUM LAMB



Our drummer produced the record
Ever since we started as a band, Caius, our drummer, has been recording demos for us. We usually write our songs together in a rehearsal room, but we love building demos up to see what works, and it's always been an integral part of the process. Everything else we've released we've done with someone else producing, but for 'Lamb', we realised that we had the best producer we could ask for already. It felt so organic, and it's our best recording as a result.

We gained a band member from it
We spent the week before recording in our rehearsal room, during which time Caius's brother Ethan offered to sit in and lend us some guitar pedals so we could try different sounds. One day, he started playing some drums on the song 'Golden Age', and also a bass VI we had on some other songs, and by the end of the week, we knew we had to bring him to the studio to record those parts. He's on about half the album now, and it seemed inconceivable that he wouldn't join us for everything going forward.

He painted the artwork
As well as being a brilliant musician, Ethan is also an amazing painter. For maybe a year before we ever went to the studio, Theo had always talked about calling the album 'Lamb', and had a really clear concept of what the name meant. We also had a painted cover for our first album 'Mass', done by our friend Kazland, so it seemed really natural for Ethan to paint a cover for this one. We really wanted to capture a sense of innocence, and Ethan did a beautiful job of it.

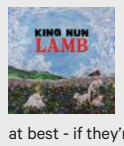
Some of it was recorded two years before we went to the studio
There were a couple of guitar solos which James and Theo recorded as demos years before the two weeks we spent recording Lamb. In both cases, when it came time to record them again, we realised we'd done something irreplaceable already, and kept what we'd already recorded. Everything else was recorded from scratch, but in those two moments, we couldn't beat what we'd caught in the spur of the moment.

We recorded one track in about twenty minutes
There's an instrumental on the album called 'Escapism', which is just two minutes of this riff we had played at maximum volume. It's one of our favourite things to play live, so we pretty much did every part of it in one take. Originally we had our bassist Nathan shout as loud as he could over it, but all we used was an outtake of him arguing with Caius right before that.

We wrote the title-track three days before we finished recording
Originally, we had a different song planned for the album closer, but before we recorded it, Theo came up with these chords and a melody. It was one of those really inspired moments where once he showed the rest of us, it took about 20 minutes to flesh it. It fit so well, and now we couldn't imagine the album ending any other way now. It serves as a perfect summation of all the themes we'd been trying to get across on the record.

King Nun's album 'Lamb' is out 29th September.

King Nun
Lamb
★★★★



➔ Modern music has a bit of a problem when it comes to being patient. New acts get one chance at best - if they're lucky. Achieve anything less than wild success, and that's your shot. Done. See you later. Or so the narrative often goes. King Nun aren't giving that any time of day, though. Following up on their promising debut album, and an initial wave of buzz that suggested they may be The Next Big Thing, 'Lamb' is the sound of a band resetting themselves for battle. Punky, scratchy and discordant, it's also melodic and immediate. Echoing some of the best of turn of the millennium Brit-rock, it's been well worth the wait. **DAN HARRISON**

Del Water Gap
I Miss You Already + I Haven't Left Yet
★★★★



➔ Del Water Gap's debut album was defined by a burning honesty, a smattering of nostalgic guitar slides and shattering heartbreaks through candid lyricism and sentimental soundscapes. On his second, 'I Miss You Already + I Haven't Left Yet', he becomes more contemplative, the searing pain of his earlier work now a dull pain. Traversing a newly existential outlook with new stability, over the course of the album, there's a pulsing resilience. Of course, those moments of turmoil are still there, but there's a willingness to persist and see the lighter side in each glorious indie beat. Sheer pop excellence. **NEIVE MCCARTHY**

Heavy Lungs
All Gas No Breaks
★★★★



➔ With grungy, downer energy paired with brash synths and noisy riffage, Heavy Lungs' debut album 'All Gas No Breaks' is loud, aggressive and bleak, laced with a tinge of humour and crafted with immense talent and precision. Through 'It's Been' and 'Rock, Paper, Scissors' it's unrelenting, but everything has a sense of buoyancy and texture. The album explores topics of mental health and anxiety in a trippy, kind-of-creepy way; 'Dancing Man' is wonderfully horrifying, a snappy 2-minute track that feels like a fever dream. Despite tackling heavy themes, this is a pure joy. Every moment within the album is alive, fun and infectious, demanding to be experienced. **EMMA QUIN**

Koyo
Would You Miss It?
★★★★★



➔ Go back to the start of the century, and Long Island was the hottest place on the planet for a minute. Koyo capture the spirit of this time beautifully, and after a handful of quite stellar EPs have brought their bouncy punk-rock sound to a perfectly crafted full-length. Not quite hardcore, not quite emo and not quite pop-punk, Koyo instead inhabit the same hallowed middle ground found by their forebears in the Movielife, having enough about them to appeal to fans of all these disparate but related genres without alienating the others. With 'Would You Miss It?' they've found the sweet spot between melodicism, accessibility and bite. **ROB MAIR**

Jorja Smith
Falling or Flying
★★★★



→ Jorja Smith's second album 'Falling or Flying' is the sound of an artist finding freedom in expression. Embracing imperfections and revelling in the highest highs, it's a striking and dynamic comeback, combining lively club stormers and lush R&B along with a dash of indie-rock rowdiness. Direct and incendiary on the rumbling epic of 'Try Me', it sets the tone for an album dealing in big themes and big sounds. 'Feelings' featuring J Hus is a moving and personal highlight, while towards the end of the album, Jorja really takes things to another level on the stirring cinematic grandeur of 'Backwards' and the soul searching of closer 'What If My Heart Beats Faster'. A triumph. **MARTYN YOUNG**

Citizen
Calling the Dogs
★★★★



→ As the adage goes, if sharks stop swimming, they die. Citizen, it seems, must fear the same fate as they embrace reinvention in their perpetual march of forward-thinking evolution. Indeed, breakout 'Youth' may be a lifetime ago, and while some may find it hard to reconcile the band they were with what they've become, there's no doubt that 'Calling The Dogs' is a blistering alt-rock tour de force. Embracing their pop and indie sensibilities, what's perhaps most interesting is how un-American it all sounds, pulling as much from New Order and Bloc Party as it does The Strokes or The Killers. There's no filler here, just a band laser-focused on pushing their sound and identity. **ROB MAIR**

Claire Rosinkranz
Just Because
★★★★



→ 'Just Because', the debut from nineteen-year-old Californian sensation Claire Rosinkranz, embodies her West Coast upbringing. It's a very assured performance. Vocally, she nails down a naturally conversational style that sets her apart from the rest of TikTok's Gen-Z alt-pop stars. Tales of high school drama in 'Never Goes Away', of trying to block out a loud brain in 'Jupiter', and of not wanting to grow up in 'Screw Time', all evoke a teenage nostalgia which highlights that being young can kind of suck sometimes. There is a surprising amount of introspection. An upbeat and very listenable record, if you like one song on this album, you'll probably like them all. **CIARAN PICKER**

Teezo Touchdown
How Do You Sleep At Night?
★★★★



→ Teezo Touchdown has been twisting R&B, indie and pop around a rock'n'roll swagger for a few years now. He's been praised by Travis Scott, Drake and Tyler, The Creator, dismissed as a fashion rapper more interested in gimmicks than good songs, and has a hyper-engaged fanbase that regularly praises his sprawling, artistic vision. Through all that, Teezo has crafted a debut album that's tender, exciting, funny and wholly unique. Considering his eclectic back catalogue, 'How Do You Sleep At Night?' is surprisingly focused but Teezo hasn't lost any of his individuality in its creation. It's as bold and brilliant as they come. **ALI SHUTLER**

Madison Beer
Silence Between Songs
★★★★



→ When Madison Beer dropped 'Home To Another One' earlier this year, it signalled a deeper dive into some perhaps unexpected influences. Built around a Tame Impala-lite wonky bassline and embellished with twinkly keys and Madison's airy vocals, it immediately put her in her own lane. A refreshing update on the lovelorn pop she was making on debut 'Life Support', follow-up 'Silence Between Songs' sees Madison Beer fully indulge in her left of centre favourites. An immediate step up, it feels more sonically cohesive than Madison's first record, literally and figuratively stepping into her groove with a record that's surprisingly cool. **ABIGAIL FIRTH**

Molly Burch
Daydreamer
★★★★



→ Oozing class and style, Molly Burch's 'Daydreamer' is delicious enough to eat. The LA-based artist's new album is a shimmering, delicate, yet powerful force of nature. Dressed in 80s glamour with a jazz flair, each track feels full and lustrous, dripping in tender vulnerability. Everything moves smoothly and effortlessly as Burch walks through the experiences of her formative years, dazzling with her songwriting and melodic vocals. While lyrically reflective and pensive, she effortlessly moulds each track to feel light, airy and decadent. It makes for a thoughtfully crafted artwork that may make you cry, but will definitely make you dance. **EMMA QUIN**

Svalbard
The Weight Of The Mask
★★★★



→ On album five, 'The Weight Of The Mask', Svalbard are increasing the intensity of their fiery and enigmatic approach to heavy music. The four-piece swell and surge, providing vocalist Serena Cherry's embracing of her deep and dark side with a cloak of empowerment. 2020's 'When I Die, Will I Get Better?' dealt Svalbard a new platform, which they've built upon with magnificently grand riffs and snarls. Erupting up from this, the directness with which they deal with the darkness that envelopes Serena this time around is masterfully done. The album plays out with a raging confidence, giving the distinct feeling that they're only just getting started. **STEVEN LOFTIN**

Slaney Bay
Why Does Love Mean Loss? EP
★★★★



→ Prepare to get blissfully lost within the orbital sound of Slaney Bay. Intertwining influences from dream-pop, shoegaze and pop-rock, this EP packs a soft yet piercing punch. With each track boasting a full, expertly layered sound nestled on pulsing, anthemic drums, the South London-based group once again exercise their power in tugging at your heartstrings. Combining a blurry, mystical sound with angsty coming-of-age lyrics, each track feels vibrant yet achingly youthful. Standout track 'EST' embodies this perfectly, capturing the despair of long-distance love and vulnerability. It would take the most hardened of hearts to resist. **EMMA QUIN**

Chappell Roan
The Rise And Fall Of A Midwest Princess
★★★★★



→ Bursting to life like a carnival parade thumping onto your street, Chappell Roan is greeting her adoring public. Toting pop songs like confetti canons, throwing caution to the hurricane of youthful passion, she's bringing to the forefront a new wave of glitzy empowerment and a lust for life. Poking fun at the inabilities of male lovers ('Femininomenon'), boasting beats that ripple with the mid-00s pop sheen with bisexual abandon ('After Midnight'), and taking overt sexuality to a whole new level (basically every track), it's a wild ride, with the hooks flowing fast and easy. 'The Rise and Fall of a Midwest Princess' is a pop masterpiece for 2023. **STEVEN LOFTIN**



James Blake
Playing Robots Into Heaven
★★★★



→ Since the beginning of his career, James Blake has been a shape-shifting presence. Each album feels like a reshuffling of what he is capable of, another layer peeled back. Returning with 'Playing Robots Into Heaven', he reinvents himself once more, into a version of the self that marries the future-facing talent with the electronic roots that launched his trajectory. It's a masterful display of work.

From the dark beats of 'Loading' to the euphoric heights that 'Tell Me' reaches, with his latest James Blake commands attention unwaveringly. It's a late night escapade at the climax of summer, the last of the sun giving way to a crisp twilight chill – the brooding electronica creeps around you, engulfing you in this dark world. 'He's Been Wonderful' revels in glitchy beats that feel quintessentially James Blake, choral samples transforming it into something of an unpredictable beast. 'Big Hammer' is a twitching, writhing moment, whilst 'I Want You To Know' is hypnotically ethereal. 'Playing Robots Into Heaven' feels like an act of resurrection. Transforming with each album cycle into something different, inviting a host of A-list features and amplifying those major moments, the core of who he is seemed to drift away for a moment. Whilst there is sheer brilliance in the albums that preceded this one, here, he seems to reconnect with that initial vision. The rawness and charm of that particular style of dance that James Blake cut his teeth on returns in full force, just with years of experience and style added on top. An immersive, spell-casting album that plunges you into a nocturnal world, this is James Blake in his absolute prime. **NEIVE MCCARTHY**



Mitski
The Land Is Inhospitable and So Are We
★★★★★



➔ A Mitski album is always a surprise. Each one feels like it might be the last, but this one, 'The Land Is Inhospitable and So Are We', moreso because it arrives so quickly after last year's 'Laurel Hell', another comeback after she'd vowed to quit music in 2019.

Perhaps you'd think Mitski may be tempted, after spending some time touring with pop heavyweight Harry Styles last summer and experiencing the light speed popularity of now-TikTok-hit 'Nobody' from 2018's 'Be The Cowboy, to go down a more accessible, poppier road for her seventh record, but Mitski does not make conventional moves.

Now over a decade into her career, her albums have explored love and loneliness in all its forms, this time taking on the high concept story of an unnamed narrator navigating an abandoned planet, finding themselves in the nothingness and discovering that when all else is gone, there's still love.

While not as immediately striking as some of her other albums, namely 'Laurel Hell' and 'Be The Cowboy', it's undoubtedly her most epic - a marathon not a sprint, if you will - featuring a full choir and orchestra, tracks often blossoming from tender and delicate to full blown cinematic affairs. The extravagant centrepiece 'When Memories Snow' is less than two minutes long and almost entirely that.

'The Land...' is sprawling but not overblown, grounded by Mitski's consistently personal lyricism and the record's turn towards a more country sound than she's tried before. 'The Deal', a track about selling your soul, features some of that western pull before crashing into an enormous orchestra-led chorus and a final rumbling drum outro. As always with Mitski's records, it's an outpouring of her own pain that resonates far beyond the album's walls.

Quieter moments like 'The Frost' also pull from that Western world, crystallising the album's overarching theme into under three minutes as she wanders the world alone in a post-apocalyptic haze. In what is arguably her most back-loaded record, the triple-feature of the final tracks 'Star', 'I'm Your Man' and 'I Love Me After You' are her most expansive, taking us out to space, back down to earth and into her head.

In a decade where female singer songwriters, once misunderstood, are becoming recognised as The Greats (see: Taylor Swift and Lana Del Rey), Mitski can't be far behind. A disregard for the mainstream proves again to be Mitski's strongest armour, as 'The Land...' becomes her most sonically interesting full length yet. **ABIGAIL FIRTH**

COMING SOON

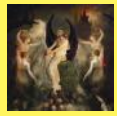
What's out in the next few months you should have on your radar.

CMAT
Crazymad, For Me



➔ Billed as "an abstract break-up album about what happens when you are still angry about something that happened 10 years ago", CMAT's second outing is worth making a date with.
Released 13th October 2023

Creeper
Sanguivore



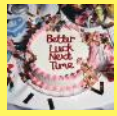
➔ William Von Ghould and Co. are ridiculously extra, and their new record 'Sanguivore' is set to be one of the most theatrical of the year (as per). Also, it's out on the super-creepy Friday 13th.
Released 13th October 2023

Holly Humberstone
Paint My Bedroom Black



➔ One of this month's Dork cover stars no less, Holly Humbo is delivering on all her early promise with a debut album that deftly chronicles her coming of age.
Released 13th October 2023

Sundara Karma
Better Luck Next Time



➔ With a nod back to their indie of yore, Sundara Karma are embracing the band's roots with their third full-length.
Released 27th October 2023

Poppy
Zig



➔ Poppy's rock/dark-pop stylings always make her new projects a compelling prospect. Taking influence from childhood faves Talking Heads and Blondie, as well as newer discoveries Burial and Blawan, 'Zig' set to be a diverse and ambitious addition to her catalogue.
Released 27th October 2023

Hunny
Hunny's New Planet Heaven
★★★★



➔ Hunny have rarely fit into any box. The quartet merge emo sentiments with a twinkling sheen, a formula that is as saccharine as it is irresistible. Racking up singles and EPs around their 2019 debut 'Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.', the LA band have been hard at work, and the result this time around is an album that feels like a trio back to the start. 'Hunny's New Planet Heaven' feels like a group getting back to grips with where they came from. The sheen is traded in for a slightly less perfect but equally as effective sound. The sentiments still fall like autumn leaves, bolstered by twinkling effervescence, pushing the band forward by nodding to the past. **STEVEN LOFTIN**

Vagabon
Sorry I Haven't Called
★★★★



➔ Vagabon's career has been defined by delicate, vulnerable moments of introspection but after a four-year gap, she's back with a bang. 'Sorry I Haven't Called' is a smirkingly confident album, with the title brushing off any worries about taking too long to make her return. Dreamy opener 'Can I Talk My Shit?' blends ethereal escapism with cocksure pop swagger while the pulsating 'Carpenter' is driven by a main character energy. She knows music this good is worth the wait. An album that chases joy at every turn, 'Sorry I Haven't Called' cycles through urgent dance, fiery indie and feel good pop with a resilient sense of euphoria underpinning every joyous moment. **ALI SHUTLER**

Honeymoan
Sorry Like You Mean It
★★★



➔ A long time coming, Honeymoan's debut studiously brings together all they've been promising. 'Sorry Like You Mean It' is chockfull of pop bops generously slathered in charm and buoyancy, the kind that the London-based South African trio have been toying with since 2017. A revelatory glimpse into the romantic fumbles and tumbles of vocalist Alison Rachel, it plays out as barefaced as it does dreamily, frequently mixing ethereal synths and acerbic drum machines with astute observations of love and life. While not entirely captivating, often getting lost in its ideas rather than perfecting its execution, it still stands as a more than worthy debut step from this trio. **STEVEN LOFTIN**

koyo

WOULD YOU MISS IT?



PURENOISESTOREUK.COM

KOYO IS:
SAL ARGENTO
JOEY CHIARAMONTE
HAROLD GRIFFIN
TJ ROTOLICO
STEPHEN SPANOS

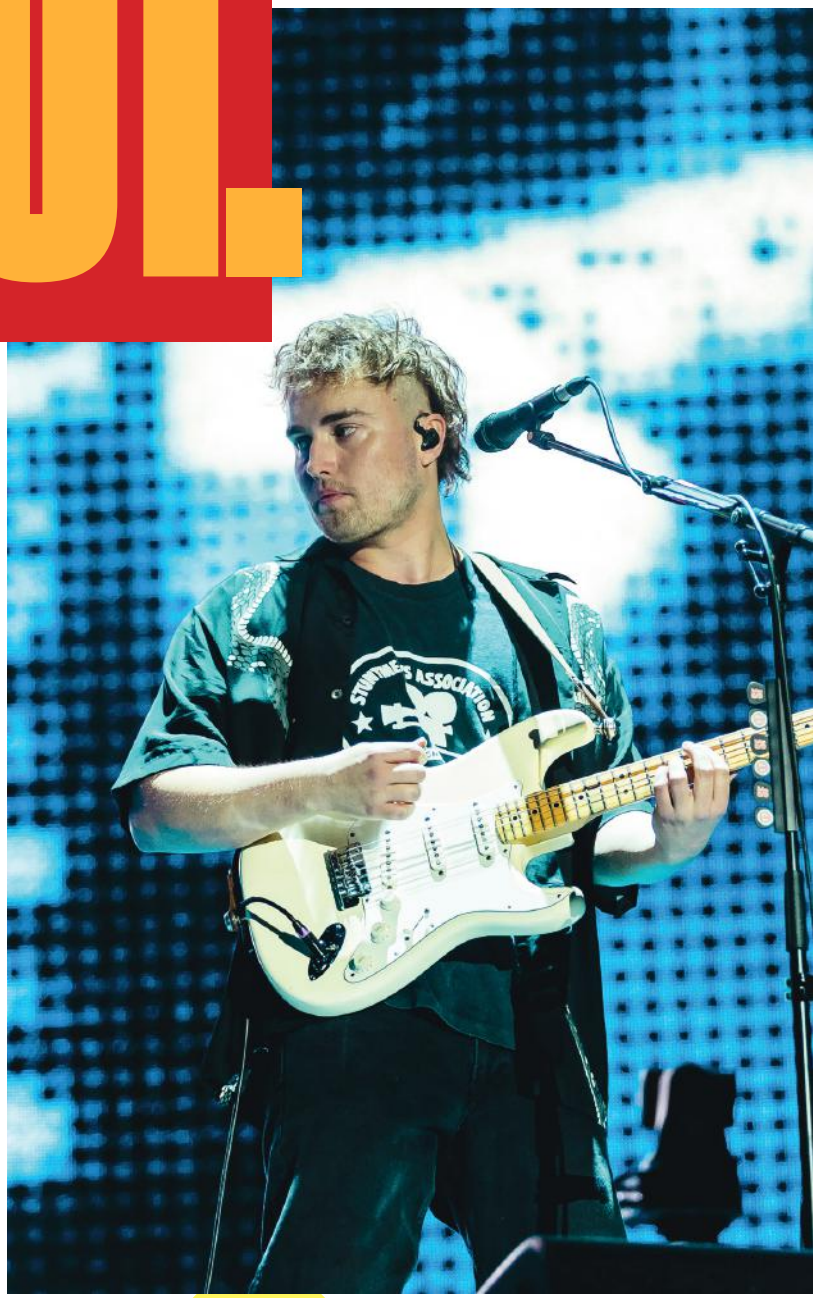
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koyo
WOULD YOU MISS IT?

GET OUT.

LIVE MUSIC, FROM THE FRONT

READ -ING 2023



It's the time of year again, when both long-time faves and buzzy newcomers come together for an August Bank Holiday weekend bash.

Words: **Abigail Firth, Ali Shutler, Finlay Holden, Jake Hawkes, Jamie Muir.**
Photos: **Frances Beach, Patrick Gunning.**



YARD ACT
Main Stage East, Friday

→ On a stage bedecked in trenchcoat-clad mannequins, singer James opens with a crowd-pleasing shout of "This doesn't mean as much to us as Leeds will!" Luckily the insult is soon forgotten as 'Land of the Blind' kicks in. Months of shows have made the band into a tightly wound machine. James struts the stage and talks, yelps, shouts and sings his way through the tracks, while the rest of the band power through each song. They even have a saxophone now, which is the kind of nonsense we're on board with. They're not going to have any issues keeping the momentum going. **JH**

A QUICK CHAT WITH...

YARD ACT

→ Yard Act may say that playing Leeds will mean more to them, but making your main stage debut at the legendary Reading Festival is nothing to be sniffed at. As they approach their second full-length, and with recent single 'The Trench Coat Museum' still ringing in our ears, we pinned them down after their set for a quick catch-up. Turns out, they'll be headlining the whole thing next year. Who knew?

Two years ago, when we chatted, you said that you'd be fourth from the top of the main stage in five years. Do you think you're still on track for that?
James Smith: I reckon now I'd say we'll headline. Not in five years though, next year.

'The Trench Coat Museum' obviously dominates when you only get a half hour slot, how do you work with that?
James: I think the ending allows it to work. It's such a bop that it feels easy to incorporate. Having backing dancers on stage for it also helps – that was an inspired idea from our manager. Then he started to backtrack on it after we agreed it was a good idea! But of course it's a good idea, you've always got to try new stuff.

'The Trench Coat Museum' isn't going to be on the new album. Why was it left off?
James: It was left off because we had more songs and it felt like it stood alone. There were other songs that felt more important to the sentiment of the album. The second album definitely has a lot of 'Trench Coat' in it, in parts. There are more electronic and dancey elements. But it's not a sole indicator of the album. The album's got a lot more variety on it than 'The Overload'. ■

READ -ING 2023

SAM'S TOWN

SAM FENDER
MAIN STAGE EAST, FRIDAY, 9.50PM

Proving he's ready for the headline slot at the very biggest of festivals, Sam Fender's status as a natural treasure is assured.

→ In a year of new-found heights for the Geordie songwriter, today might be Sam Fender's most significant step up the ladder yet; a headline slot at one of the UK's two biggest festivals. And what a moment it is – kicking things off with 'The Kitchen', a declaration of rowdiness is immediately established before the usual intro of 'Will We Talk'. A small decision, but one that proves intent. Calling back to his North Shields roots during 'Dead Boys', Sam declares tonight to be a milestone, and he's bang on the money – never mind how far he carries his legacy, the local roots and truth in this song will always follow.



'Mantra' once again inspires a message of defiance and identity, which seems like a strong start – Sam soon retorts, "That's the chill ones out of the way, now let's get everyone jumping."

The introduction of debut EP callback 'Spice' quickly satisfies that request, but Fender himself isn't satisfied: "Can we do that again?" With 'Howdon Aldi Death Queue' up next, the only feasible answer is yes.

At this point, the reality of the accomplishment currently in motion is apparent, although flames and fireworks are already in the rearview mirror, but assuredness and catharsis are bolstered further by 'Alright'. This is the kind of artist where even a b- c- or d-side is more powerful than you could ever anticipate, as a faux finale of 'The Dying Light' evidences once more.

SAM FENDER'S MOST SIGNIFICANT STEP UP THE LADDER YET

An encore of 'Saturday' proves just how much Fender has left in the tank, admitting on behalf of his band that, "we feel stupid headlining anything." If the iconic melody of 'Seventeen Going Under' and ever-relevant lyricisms of 'Hypersonic Missiles' prove anything, it is the absurdity of that statement.

Not only pushing the ever-moving goalposts of his own career but continuing to cement his acclaimed status each step of the way, Sam Fender has little left to prove – but he's giving it all anyway.
FINLAY HOLDEN

Wet Leg
Main Stage East, Friday

→ Few bands have been on as stratospheric a rise as Wet Leg, and today is a grandstand demonstration of the breadth and brilliance of their self-titled debut; a popping-candy bag of fun. Whether it's the knowing wink of 'Wet Dream' and the playful chops of 'Oh No' or the whipping fuzz of 'Being In Luv' and 'Supermarket' – Wet Leg thrive. By the time 'Chaise Longue' lets rip, it's an undeniable Reading moment, putting an exclamation point on everything Wet Leg have embraced since the very beginning. **JM**



Foals
Main Stage West, Sunday

→ Taking to the stage with technicolour displays, Foals lay their intentions out from the very start. 'Wake Me Up', along with a variety of cuts from latest album 'Life Is Yours' such as '2AM' and '2001', are the perfect ingredient for summer headline nights – and they act as a fuse for a firework display of effortless hits.

'Mountain At My Gates', 'Olympic Airways' and 'My Number' is the sort of opening salvo most bands would dream to have to close a set, never mind serve as an appetising starter for the full feast to come. The sheer scale and prowess Foals possess is one that commands attention: the widescreen club-drop of 'In Degrees' landing as a perfect capsule for a crowd whose weekend jumping between genres is only just beginning.



Tonight is a reminder of just what Foals represent. Not just a band beloved, but a band with the arsenal to back it up – it's the riotous rock show that defines what a festival headliner should be. **JM**

Bombay Bicycle Club
BBC Radio 1 Dance Stage, Friday

→ Opening up Reading is quite a responsibility. It's lucky then that there may be no sturdier shoulders than Bombay Bicycle Club – who take to the BBC Radio 1 Dance Stage (yep, you read the right – Ed) for a special set that puts front and centre what a beloved band they remain. Immediately surging through an opening wave of 'Eat, Sleep, Wake (Nothing But You)' and 'Shuffle', it feels the perfect setting for a band whose credentials stand apart from most. Wistful and gripping in equal measure, it's a swooning cocktail that demonstrates the broad spectrum of Bombay's journey to date. 'Lights Out, Words Gone' sparks singalong masses, while the title-track from new album 'My Big Day' revels in a sun-soaked Reading crowd. Recalling how when they first played the festival, they performed to an empty tent because the gates hadn't even opened yet – it gives today a homecoming feel, for a band who cut their teeth working up the bill. 'Evening / Morning' punches with electric kicks, 'Carry Me' fizzes with effortless ease, and the dizzying warmth of 'Luna' overflows into pure euphoria. By the time a closing 'Always Like This' brings their bite-sized secret set to a close, Reading sits firmly in the palm of their hands. **JM**

The Last Dinner Party
Festival Republic Stage, Friday

→ To say there's a lot of hype around The Last Dinner Party is an understatement. Selling out shows before any music was even released, they still only have two songs on Spotify but play the Festival Republic tent as if they were born to be there. Dressed in flamboyant costumes and bringing a theatricality that most bands could only dream of, they more than justify the impact they've made in such a short period of time.



Vocalist Abigail Morris belts out every word, pitch-perfect throughout, even when she's dancing and spinning around on stage. The rest of the band are just as good, delivering Bridgerton-esque visuals and astoundingly tight instrumentation. It's rare to see a new band give so much depth to each song, especially when so many are basically unknown to the majority of the audience.

Ballroom-pop energy runs right through the set, with big choruses and moody lighting dominating. The real magic, though, is the sense of fun they maintain through it all, landing more like the Rocky Horror Picture Show's glorious glam pastiche, rather than the buttoned-up tuxedo of a national opera performance.

There's growth on show, too. Early sets were anchored around 'Nothing Matters' and 'Sinner', their two released tracks, but here the energy never flags – especially impressive for an early afternoon set on day one of the festival.



ASHNIKKO
Festival Republic Stage, Friday

➔ "If you peel off my skin, you'll find a colony of ants living just here," says Ashnikko. As stage banter goes, it's different but they've built a career on being fantastically honest. Today's short, sweet but sensational set sees Ashnikko deliver a clutch of their most beloved anthems. It isn't long before the trap-infused purge of 'Worms' causes chaos, the chirpy 'Slumber Party' is a relentlessly good time while 'Stupid' has the entire tent singing along to the rapid-fire lyrics of self-empowerment. "Let's do it together," invites Ash. A surprise set means there's none of the production that made Ashnikko's Coachella performance earlier this summer the talk of the Internet, but who needs fighting robots when you've got a menacing reworking of breakout hit 'Daisy' while Ash attacks the stage with everything they've got? See you at the Main Stage next year, eh? **AS**

A QUICK CHAT WITH... ASHNIKKO

➔ Ashnikko had quite the Reading weekend. On Friday, debut album 'Weedkiller' arrived – and on the same day, they hit Reading for a surprise set on the Festival Republic Stage. All very exciting stuff. We caught up for our special Reading Festival edition of our radio-show-slash-podcast Down With Boring, which you can check out on readdork.com now.

It's the start of the festival and your debut album's release day. How are we feeling?
Good. I'm really hungover. Yesterday I got a little a little drunk. I had an album release party. It was super cute. We were eating fairy food and just galloping around, frolicking, having a silly time.

Now that the album is out – and looking ahead to the tour in particular – have you got an idea of exactly how you want present everything?
Yes. Drama. High drama. That's how I want it to be presented to the world. I'm going back to rehearse in a week. I'm doing two weeks of rehearsals. But we're putting a lot into it. We're trying to approach the set with a narrative through it, because the album is kind of a concept album. There's a lot of musical theatre. I want it to feel like an experience, not just a gig. I need to get me a sugar daddy though. I want to go further.

What's it been like seeing the reaction to the album?
Strange because I've been writing this album for a couple years now. And now it's out in the world for people to consume and tear apart and love. And do whatever they want with it. The reaction has been really positive.

Are you already looking even further ahead?
Yeah, I mean, the annoying thing about albums – I've said this time and time again – is that once you put it out, you're already past it, because it takes ages to put out. So long. There was so much admin and label politics. I already pushed the album back three months. I'm already writing the second album. I've been living with this record for like a year. I turned it in, like, October of last year. I was strictly told I wasn't allowed to add anything else onto it. I actually had it remastered, like twice, because I'm a demon. ■

Mimi Webb
Main Stage East, Friday

➔ As eclectic as the Reading line-up is, unapologetic, sugary pop still remains something of an outsider amongst the indie, hip-hop and dance. However, Mimi Webb looks right at home as she bounces onto Main Stage East for a shimmery afternoon set that's giddy, fierce and a load of fun.

Fans clamber onto shoulders from the opening stadium roar of 'Freezing' and stay there for the duration, while the field just gets busier and busier as Mimi showcases songs from brilliant debut album 'Amelia'. With bangers like 'House On Fire' and 'Red Flags', it's an easy choice for the Reading faithful.

Typically, even the most seasoned bands struggle to slow things down without losing the crowd but today, the field screams along to the slow burning '24/5' and has a collective moment for the emotional reflect of 'Dumb Love'. On paper, this should be a tough set for a pop star but in the field, Mimi Webb absolutely smashes it. **AS**

As their all-too-short set ends and they walk off stage to deafening cheers, it's clear that The Last Dinner Party are only going to get bigger with each new track. Hype or no hype, we can't wait to hear what's next. **JH**

IT'S INDIE ROCK'N'ROLL

THE KILLERS
MAIN STAGE EAST, SATURDAY, 9.50PM

Festival veterans, The Killers might have little left to prove, but that doesn't mean they can't bring a set laced with anthems to cap off Saturday at Reading 2023.

➔ When you look at this year's headliners, The Killers occupy a unique space. For over 20 years, they've remained as a definitive band for a generation – the stuff of indie disco dreams. Their history with Reading is equally renowned. Headline slots and landmark sets have sat at the heart of their career, launching them beyond these stages and to stadiums across the globe. Where do The Killers sit at Reading in the year 2023? On tonight's evidence, the answer is simple. A living, breathing jukebox of headline-grabbing heavyweight anthems.



"Let me introduce you to The Killers," welcomes Brandon Flowers. "This used to be the Reading rock festival... let's turn back the clock." A frankly ridiculous opening run which includes 'When You Were Young', 'Jenny Was A Friend Of Mine', 'Smile Like You Mean It', 'Somebody Told Me' and 'Spaceman' is the sort that most bands build their whole set around, but for The Killers is different. It is undeniable star power pouring out of every turn. They can let loose on a track like 'Caution' and the towering 'Read My Mind' but still find time to welcome eager fan Ozzie from the front row to take over drum duties on 'For Reasons Unknown'. Even with time to drop brand new track 'Your Side Of Town' and its Pet Shop Boys flair, tonight is a Hollywood-dazzled spectacle that puts Reading at its core.

Taking a moment just before a ground-shaking 'All These Things That I've Done' to note how that track is now 20 years old, it gives a beating heart to

IT'S A STADIUM SIZED SATURDAY NIGHT PARTY

every widescreen turn tonight. "The boys that wrote that song got swept up in a whirlwind and now stand before you today," glancing across a crowd that runs for as far as the eye can see. As 'The Man', 'Human' and the towering national anthem that is 'Mr Brightside' (mashed between the famed Jaques Lu Cont electro remix and the licking original) rips Reading into a final confetti-soaked crescendo, The Killers leave the festival with a world of emotions. A band whose DNA has flowed with British music returning to remind everyone why there's no show quite like it and no better band to point to when you ask to define stadium-sized champions. Bombastic. Brilliant. The Killers prove they're Reading royalty and more on a Saturday night of Las Vegas swagger. Stick another dime in the jukebox, yeah? **JM**

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THE 1975

MAIN STAGE WEST, SATURDAY, 8.15PM

The 1975's current era may be laced with drama, controversy and endless discourse, but for one night only they're turning the clock back to a simpler time.

→ "Uh oh" says Matty Healy before launching into 'The City'. It's the collective emotion as The 1975 take to Reading's headline slot for the second (surprise) consecutive year. These days, booking the band tends to involve hoping Matty Healy won't manage to find a way to create a new point of collective outrage in his continuing headline-grabbing narrative, a promise he manages to keep tonight.

With that in mind, it's clear why, after the events of the last few months, they'd want to go back to a simpler time, this year's headline set honouring (most of) their debut album 'The 1975' from a decade ago. The album played largely in order, not stopping at the tracks but bringing back the old logo, rectangle imagery and stage manner (cue Matty swigging from a bottle of red wine sporadically throughout).

Back in 2013, the group still divided opinion, the albatross they never quite managed to shake, but the people who 'got' it back then still get it now. Despite everything, it's undeniable that every bit of the debut still goes off. The tracks that usually make up the encore like 'Chocolate' and 'Sex' arrive in the first half, but there's no energy dip afterwards. Songs that have remained locked away or only occasionally given an outing since the debut years like 'M.O.N.E.Y", 'Menswear' and 'Pressure' are played to a crowd who've either been hungry for them for a long time, or missed them the first time around.

THE PEOPLE WHO 'GOT' IT BACK THEN STILL GET IT NOW

While the debut wasn't sonically groundbreaking, it laid the foundations for the bangers that'd come in their more experimental records as the years went on, proving that if they just wanted to do big pop bops, they could. That proof comes in the second act as they run through a similar greatest hits set to the one they've been touring since they jumped in at Reading this time last year.

'It's Not Living (If It's Not With You)' catapults The 1975 into another set of back-to-back bangers, including the usuals like 'Happiness' and 'If You're Too Shy (Let Me Know)'. Sincerity may be scary, but Matty does rustle up a bit of it to shout out friend of the band Lewis Capaldi and his well-deserved break, the reason the boys are here tonight. It's refreshing to watch a whole show without any major Matty tangents and a dropping of 'the act' that's dominated the maelstrom of opinion around the band of late for at least a couple of hours.

A lot has changed in ten years, but as Matty mentions, the internet has done its thing, and the album still resonates now. It was the start for a band always destined for huge things and one of the few from the early 2010s crop who've clung onto their relevance, regardless of how many hiccups there've been along the way. So as 'About You' kicks in, the thematic callback to self-titled's 'Robbers' that went as viral on TikTok as it's predecessor's lyrics and neon rectangle did on Tumblr, it does feel like The 1975 could pull it back, if the turnout tonight isn't proof that they have already. **ABIGAIL FIRTH**

HotWax

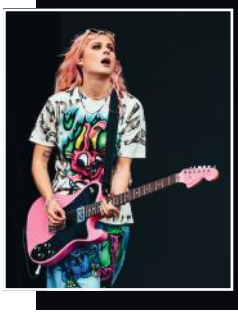
BBC Introducing Stage, Saturday

→ As the evening picks up steam, HotWax touchdown on the BBC Introducing Stage with a lightning bolt of intensity. Furious riffs and immediacy follow, proving just why so many are paying such close attention to every move that the trio make. That purpose and drive which has taken them to this stage sees fans turn up draped in merch, and by today's bitesize set – HotWax are only going to pick up more attention over the next year. Today is but a taster, but the main course is ready to land. Get ready to be fed well. **JM**

Baby Queen

Main Stage East, Saturday

→ Kicking off with 'Internet Religion', Baby Queen smashes out some hits in her hybrid pop-rocker style; she necks champagne, riffs on real and air guitars, and slaps some cymbals, but the hook-rich melodies rule all. Advising her crowd that "the best hangover cure is to drink more," you can't always trust her advice, but you can trust her to hype up a crowd. 'Raw Thoughts', 'Buzzkill' and the cloud-opening closer 'Want Me' are sung back word-for-word, while 'DREAM GIRL' and 'We Can Be Anything' look set to join their ranks soon. Emphasising how important this day is for her, Baby Queen reflects on her first-ever UK festival experience and setting her gaze on the exact spot she's now sharing with her excellent live band. Based on the intimacy she shares with familiar faces on the front row, it's important to many others, too. Her coronation may be waiting just around the corner, but Baby Queen's kingdom has long been letting its presence known. **FINLAY HOLDEN**



James Marriott

Main Stage East, Saturday

→ If you think Reading was shaking off hangovers come first-thing Saturday, then James Marriott makes sure they're quickly banished to the side. With "We want James" chants ringing out from Main Stage East, his arrival is greeted like the Next Big Deal he already is. Building out the sort of devoted fanbase that most bands spend years trying to capture, the sheer size of the Main Stage feels perfectly in line with the skyscraper ambition that echo from his every move. Screams ring out, songs are sung back like they're the moment people have been waiting for all weekend – this is James Marriott putting the world on notice. He's ready. **JM**

Arlo Parks

Main Stage West, Saturday

→ Lyrically detailed, sonically sharpened and critically appraised, Arlo Parks' Mercury prize-winning debut established her as an artist not to be underestimated. May's follow-up took her artistry in a new direction entirely, leaning into hazy, colourful, assuring sounds as she seeks to be less self-critical and more generous with what she calls 'My Soft Machine'.That same sentiment seeps into the crowd even



as the rains pour hesitantly over the fields of Reading. Arms sway, groups huddle together, and the storm is banished by the catharsis of 'Oh Caroline'. Contrasting this with the indie-rock musings of 'Devotion', Arlo expresses a passion for Deftones and Arctic Monkeys – there's a range of influences in her palette, but she offers something entirely of her own creation. **FH**

Holly Humberstone

Main Stage East, Saturday

→ There's something poetic about the fact that the rain falling on Reading Saturday stops, and the sunshine returns as Holly Humberstone takes to Main Stage East. As her journey builds to the release of debut album 'Paint My Bedroom Black', she makes a statement of intent in a big way.

Blending the ripped raw and the euphoric in equal measure, it's a set that pulls from across her career so far. Early cuts that have become beloved favourites, such as 'The Walls Are Way Too Thin', 'Overkill' and 'Falling Asleep At The Wheel' are the sort of tracks that don't just become favourites on a playlist but are scribbled on tattoos and notebooks. Cuts from 'Paint My Bedroom Black' fit perfectly in the world forming around her – 'Antichrist' and 'Superbloodmoon' are stunning in their presence, and an added dose of unmissable is added with 'Room Service', seeing Holly joined onstage by Arlo Parks for a spellbinding performance. Reading 2023 may be remembered for many reasons, but Holly Humberstone controlling the elements to bring the heat will certainly be one of them. Forecast now? The very, very top **JM**

Inhaler

Main Stage East, Saturday

→ Inhaler have long been festival sweethearts and are no newcomers to R&L or its main stage, but this time they come back with fresh material from February's





WELCOME BACK

SOFT PLAY

FESTIVAL REPUBLIC STAGE, SATURDAY, 7.45PM

A greatest hits show which looks to the future as well as reminding people just why they're such an unstoppable force.

→ Comebacks are weird – especially when you haven't been away that long. What do you do to acknowledge your absence? How much nostalgia do you lean into to announce your return? Soft Play's answer to both of those questions is to give 40 minutes of absolutely blistering energy that can probably be heard two towns over. Their secret set at the Festival Republic stage is absolutely rammed for a greatest hits show which looks to the future as well as reminding people just why they're such an unstoppable force.

Foundational track 'Where's Your Car Debbie' gets an airing within the first ten minutes, a concrete statement that the name may have changed, but the bangers aren't going anywhere. Any worries about a band trapped in the past are unfounded, though. New single 'Punk's Dead' gets an absolutely huge response, with mosh pits, people on shoulders, and even a couple of people on shoulders in mosh pits.

Isaac gets in on the fun for 'Beauty Quest', descending into the crowd as he screams the lyrics. The biggest response is reserved for 'Cheer Up London', but the band's rendition of Skepta's 'Shutdown' is nearly as raucously received, with Laurie reprising his role as "outraged member of the public" as if it hasn't been several years since he last had to hit a vocal register that high-pitched. The whole set has a sense of anarchic fun that was always the beating heart of Soft Play's live shows – it's a joy to have them back.

A pause in the chaos for Isaac to say a few words: "My name's Isaac and this is my mate Laurie" he says, dripping with sweat and dripping from ear to ear. No matter what Soft Play are called, or what they do next, that's all that really matters. **JAKE HAWKES**

CHECK OUT THE READING 2023 EDITION OF OUR PODCAST DOWN WITH BORING, FEATURING ASHNIKKO, JAMES MARRIOTT, THE AMAZONS & LUCIA & THE BEST BOYS. SCAN THE QR CODE TO LISTEN.

A QUICK CHAT WITH...

NIEVE ELLA

→ Earlier this year, Nieve Ella followed up her debut 'Young And Naive' EP with rocking new single 'Big House' ahead of a busy festival season. "It feels so confident," she told us at the time before admitting she was a fake it until you make it kinda person. Four months and a whole bunch of festivals later, Nieve explains how Reading Festival changed her life, new music and inspiring others.

Since 'Young And Naive', you've been writing songs for the big, cathartic festival moments that we saw today at Reading. How was today for you?
Being able to do that in front of that many people is everything I ever wanted. When I sit in the studio, I write songs imagining playing them at a festival, and today was exactly how I wanted it to feel.

Are you starting to think debut album yet?
I need more time. I want to keep exploring new sounds and find something that feels like me. I love acoustic music, but I'm also into Sam Fender. I don't always know which way to go but I just want to keep writing. I want to get into the studio as soon as these shows are done because I'm so inspired right now. I feel as though it's just the start for me. Today has changed a lot for me though. Just seeing that many people turn up to watch me perform and sing along, that's made me believe that I can just do it, because it's not easy to believe in yourself all the time. But seeing that response, it makes me want to do more.

Sam Fender obviously headlined Reading on Friday night. Was that inspiring for you?
The reason I love his music is because he's stayed exactly the same, it's just more people are listening now. I want that for myself, so seeing him at the top of the bill at Reading is so inspiring.

At the same time, you must be at the point where you're like, 'Oh, maybe I'm inspiring other people'?
Yes, somebody came up to me after my set today and said I inspired them, because they were writing songs but not doing anything with them. We ended up having a big chat about how I did things and it was such a lovely experience. All I want to do is affect people's lives in the best way possible, and encourage them to do whatever it is they want to do. Anyone can do this, because I'm just a normal person. ■



'Cuts & Bruises', a record that took the euphoric anthems of their 2021 debut and honed that approach into something even more sharp and addictive. Confident, free and not afraid to indulge, Inhaler's second stab at a Reading performance is a belated victory lap for a band achieving their highest ambitions. **FH**

Scowl
Festival Republic Stage, Saturday

➜ "If you don't know who the fuck we are, you'll about to find out," grins Scowl's vocalist Kat Moss. Seconds later, the five-piece hardcore band from California launch into a slinking instrumental number that quickly morphs into a slab of pure, untethered rage. As you might expect, a sprawling circle pit quickly breaks out. Alongside bands like Militarie Gun, Scowl are part of a breaking new wave of hardcore who are proving there's more to the scene than bludgeoning riffs. In the process, they're opening the door for a new generation of fans to get caught up in the cathartic, community-first scene. By the end of the set, there's clearly some new fans in the audience. **AS**

KennyHoopla
Festival Republic Stage, Saturday

➜ After tours with Blink-182 and Limp Bizkit, KennyHoopla has evolved into a formidable force onstage. He twirls about the space like a whirlwind, crumples into a ball screaming the lyrics to his cathartic, rage-fuelled anthems and trusts the crowd to sing the words back at him. It makes for an electric show. "I'll give you all I got if you give me all you got," he promises before the closing snarl of 'Estella'. "Don't let me down," he adds. Diving into the crowd for one more moment of connection, it's another stunning performance from an artist who continues to exceed expectations. **AS**

Sleep Token
Festival Republic Stage, Saturday

➜ For every Sleep Token fan who's versed on the lore of Sleep and the band's mysterious frontman Vessel, there's many more who just like the big, catchy songs that regularly blow up on Spotify. Today at Reading Festival those worlds collide. Sleep Token are still impossible to pin down (Bastille meets Slipknot, via The Phantom Of The Opera maybe) and their continued success has inspired more questions about where the lines of pop, rock and metal are actually drawn. There's no time for those lofty debates today though, as the carefully curated set hits hard, then harder. It's both ridiculous, and emotional as Sleep Token prove that the secret to their success is writing bangers, and nothing more. **AS**

Hot Milk
Main Stage West, Sunday

➜ Sunday lunchtime and a scrappy punk band are opening Reading's Main Stage East. If there was a spot that spelled almost certain doom, it's this one. True to legacy, Hot Milk explode onto the stage in a flurry of electric guitar, ready to kickstart a chaotic party, but none of their mics are working. They call it before the song is over, and leave the stage. This set has all the makings of an absolute disaster. Hot Milk have built their career turning negatives into a more communal euphoria, though. "Let's try this one again," smirks the band's Hannah Mee when they return to the stage minutes later and launch into the snotty rebellion of 'Party On My Deathbed'. From here on out, it's an all-out victory. Hot Milk leave the stage with the crowd chanting their name. From here the only way this band are going is up. **AS**

MUNA
Main Stage East, Sunday

➜ Thoroughly warmed up from a summer of playing stadium shows with Taylor Swift, a Main Stage slot is no problem for MUNA, and there's no better way to shake off the Sunday cobwebs than with a turbo run of sad bangers. Bounding out to 'What I Want', the trio bring only the biggest smashes for their debut Reading performance. There's silliness and sexiness in equal measure (Stacy





Caity Baser
BBC Radio 1 Dance Stage

➜ If one pop star has dominated this festival season, it's Caity Baser. Flying out every weekend, she's climaxing at this full circle moment at Reading. Last year she played at the BBC Introducing stage, now she's graduated to the Dance tent, packing it to the rafters and bringing the bangers she's spent all summer warming up. Releasing singles consistently all year, she swaps out tracks to pull in the newer ones. Where for some artists that'd be a risk, it's those fresher tracks that pop off most for Caity, like recent smash 'Why Can't I Have Two'. Still, the well-worn numbers like 'X&Y' and 'Pretty Boys' remain, with no signs slowing down momentum. If you've not caught Caity this summer, there's sure to be many more to come. **AF**

A QUICK CHAT WITH...
CAITY BASER

➜ Of all the popsters with potential around at the moment, Caity Baser might be the most fun of the lot. With a big serving of personality and the bops to match, she's been building up a catalogue of should-be-smash-hits over the last year or so. We caught up with her before her performance for a quick festival catch-up.

You Loud LDN lot have absolutely smashed festival season to bits this year.
We really have, and it's so nice to have a group of girls doing the same shit that you're doing. They understand everything you're going through, all the highs, all the lows. It's just nice to have people that you actually get along with that are doing what you're doing.

You have been quite consistently releasing throughout festival season?
Oh my god, yeah, it's been studio sessions plus festivals. Plus, like testing stuff online and seeing what works. But today I'm actually debuting another single for the first time.

Can you tell us about 'Disco Shoes'?
It's all about me having a problem going out and having so much fun all the time. I texted in the group chat saying, 'Let's go out. Let's go out again tonight'. And one of my friends was like, 'You've got a problem, Caity'. So I made a song called 'Disco Shoes'. And now whenever they don't want to go out I say, 'Put your disco shoes on. We're going out'.

What else have you got coming up for the rest of the year?
I'm going to Australia. I'm also going to be announcing something really cool. Really, really cool. Around October-ish time, and then I'm going to Australia.

Does it start with "a" and end with "lbum"?
It rhymes with "shalbum". I have to say, twist my arm, album. It's only right. I'm just announcing it. I don't know when it's going to come out, but it's almost finished. ■

SEE HER IN A CROWN

BILLIE EILISH

MAIN STAGE EAST, SUNDAY, 10.00PM

If the modern Reading & Leeds needed one headliner to sum up the evolutionary path the festival has been on over the last few years, Billie Eilish is most triumphantly it.

→ In the time since Billie Eilish last played Reading Festival, a lot has happened. She's gone from being a promising young pop star on the verge of exploding to a bonafide superstar. Her 2019 set, played at tea time on a Saturday, shut down the field, and there was no doubt that the next time she'd be back, she'd be top billing.



So here we are in 2023, her headline set arriving after a lengthy tour for second album 'Happier Than Ever' that included six nights at The O2 and a headline slot on Glastonbury's Pyramid Stage, amongst topping numerous other festivals. It does feel a bit like Reading is the last to get her back.

THANK GOD READING EMBRACED POP

Still, the show doesn't feel tired or overdone. The punters in the front rows have been firmly parked since the gates opened, and the screams from down there when she takes to the stage are visceral. Opening with her first proper hit 'bury a friend', she's electric. Once baffled by the huge crowds, she now embraces them, pacing the runway and running up the backlit ramp that fills the stage without ever losing her breath, as she rattles off 'I Didn't Change My Number', 'NDA' and 'Therefore I Am'.

The balance between these rumbling dark electronic numbers and quieter bedroom pop adjacent moments is perfect, with just enough time to catch your breath before being thrust into another banger; 'idontwannabeyouanymore' before the prophetic 'you should see me in a crown', the tender Barbie soundtrack hit 'What Was I Made For?' before an 'Oxytocin' and 'COPYCAT' medley.

Only two albums in and becoming the youngest headliner the festival has ever booked at only 21, it's sometimes hard to believe what Billie Eilish has achieved in just a few years, but when the final act of this set rolls in, there's no denying her status is warranted. 'bad guy' remains roaring fun, but the star of the show is closer 'Happier Than Ever', boiling the essence of the show down to one track that starts small and slow before crashing into a pyro-laden scream-a-long in its second half. A festival legend in her own right, Billie gives us the ultimate closing set. Thank god Reading embraced pop. **ABIGAIL FIRTH**

Declan McKenna
Main Stage East, Sunday

→ Having recently dropped his first new material in two years, we all knew Declan McKenna was about to make a big return, but a huge main stage showing at Reading reminds us of the true scope of his work. Eclectic, grand, adventurous, rapturous; there simply aren't enough adjectives to pin down this born performer. Having launched his career straight into the stratosphere with THAT early single, cemented his abilities with the debut album to follow and then completely reinvented himself for 2020's otherworldly 'Zeros', McKenna remains dynamic as he moves into a new era. Stumbling on stage with a repurposed metal detector, Declan falls straight into the guitar lines of 'Why Do You Feel So Down?' and the adoring arms of his "spiritual home". A flock of toy seagulls fly the sonic skies of current single 'Sympathy', but amongst the sea of faces their numbers are dwarfed. Already conquering the world aged 24, the path ahead is for Declan alone to carve out. **FH**



Ethel Cain
Festival Repiblic Stage, Sunday

→ Opening a festival set with a seven-minute-long song is a brave move, but Ethel Cain is the kind of artist whose fans are devoted enough to endure every minute. For a half-hour set, it only comprises of five songs, each one making a different impression. "This one's a little yeehaw", she notes before 'Thoroughfare', already a stark contrast from the indie pop of 'American Teenager' and wailing emotional ballad 'A House In Nebraska'. But ending on her first hit 'Crush', she's back to the bangers, and solidifying her place as one of the most eclectic and exciting artists the festival has to offer. **AF**

Rina Sawayama
Main Stage East, Sunday

→ Rina Sawayama ticks all the boxes. She's practically an entire festival lineup in one pop star. A staggering production, she manages six costume changes and a setlist that does its best to crystallise her diverse discography into nine songs. An extravagant finale that finishes off Rina's triumphant UK festival run with a bang and puts her in incredible stead for the next phase of her career. **AF**

Becky Hill
Main Stage West, Sunday

→ Reading Festival has flirted with big, mainstage pop moments in recent years – Dua Lipa in 2018, Mimi Webb earlier this weekend – but today's Becky Hill set feels like a huge moment for both her and the festival. Today's set clearly means a lot to Becky, and she takes a moment after each song to take in the sheer spectacle of this sunset slot. "This set has gone far too quickly for my liking," grins Becky, and she's not the only one hungry for more. **AS**

Lovejoy
Festival Republic Stage, Sunday

→ Playing at the very end of the weekend, up against Billie Eilish, barely a year into their career, and Lovejoy are still expected to bring in one of the biggest crowds of the weekend.



Headlining the Festival Republic stage, it's one of the smaller tents, but that didn't stop fans lining up all day in the front rows. It's been a mammoth year for the boys, getting out on the road properly to do their first festival season sandwiched between two tours, Reading closing out the run that's seen them cut their teeth on some very big stages. And it's the perfect ending; the late 2000s indie scene Lovejoy sonically pull from has always been welcome at Reading, frontman Will noting playing the festival is a dream come true. With a clear ambition to climb up the ranks of a festival like this, the top spots will be within easy reach if they keep on at this pace. **AF**



Photo: Patrick Gunning.

FLOW FESTIVAL OFFERS A DIVERSE MENU

HELSINKI, FINLAND, 11-13 AUGUST 2023

With a wide range of sounds and ideas, Flow Festival manages to offer up the unexpected too.

➔ Finland is a country of extremes in a lot of ways. Obviously, there's the contrast between the freezing, dark winters and the pleasantly light and relatively warm summers, but that's not all. It's a nation of health-conscious sauna lovers, but also one where a late-night burger place (which inexplicably sells pear-flavoured milkshakes) is full to the brim at 4am on a Thursday.

Fitting neatly in the middle of these contrasts is Helsinki's Flow Festival. Taking place amid spectacularly stark industrial buildings, it's one of Europe's most eco-friendly events – even removing red meat and poultry from its menus to cut down on its environmental impact. It also makes a strong bid for being one of the continent's most musically diverse festivals. At any one point, Gabba-esque dance music will be pounding away in one corner while avant-garde jazz draws an equally large, if much more serene, crowd in the other.

Between the two are the stages which play host to most of the recognisable names. Even here though, there's plenty of variety. Kelela's polished R&B draws a tent-filling crowd from the very start, while Jockstrap's genre-hopping setlist shows exactly why they're currently up for the Mercury Prize.

Headlining the festival's first night is Afrobeat superstar Wizkid. It's a set which is light on surprises, but high on energy, with the amount of pyro matched only by the number of water bottles he throws into the air.

Finishing up Friday is Shygirl. Relaxed and conversational, she strolls on stage at midnight and talks to the crowd as if she's known them her whole life. Occupying the same slot the next day are Amyl & The Sniffers, who seem similarly happy with their booking. "We got that fucking midnight slot!" shouts lead singer Amy Taylor before launching into a set which feels like the audio-equivalent of a hand grenade.

Just under two years since the release of 'Solar Power', Lorde's set sees a genuine pop star owning her headline slot. Massive hits get new instrumentation and those new songs get another airing after a debut at Boardmasters a couple of days before. Throughout it all, Lorde has the crowd in the palm of her hand. "Your language is complicated, how do you say thanks so much?" she says with a smile. Judging by the screams from the crowd, the sentiment is more than reciprocated.

Sunday is a similarly eclectic experience, with Finnish trap artist Sexmane working the tent into a frenzy, complete with a full live band and a guitarist whose solos would put some rock bands to shame. From Scandinavian rap to something more familiar, Caroline Polacheck puts in a dazzling performance on the main stage.

Topping the bill are Britpop icons (and Dork cover stars, dontcha know – Ed) Blur. Alex James starts things off reclining in an armchair for some reason, Damon struts about in a feather boa, and the whole band seem genuinely thrilled to be there.

Songs from new album 'The Ballad of Darren' are gamely received by the crowd, but Damon and co. know what everyone's really here for. The hits go down a storm, and no matter how many times you've seen Blur play, you've never had a thrill quite like the one you'll get when you hear 30,000 Finnish people shout the words to 'Parklife' in unison.

As Blur walk off stage and the festival site closes, talk starts of where to go next. Like any inner-city festival there are late night bars and afterparties on offer, but in possibly the best expression of Flow Festival, the real hot ticket is a community-run sauna, open 24 hours and free to everyone. Whether or not a steam cleanse after a night of drinking is the best idea is up for debate, but hey, when in Helsinki...

SZIGET IS A CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE

BUDAPEST, HUNGARY, 10-15 AUGUST 2023

Sziget really does live up to its reputation as The Island Of Freedom.

➔ Sziget Festival is often called Europe's answer to Glastonbury, and with 1000 performances across 50 stages alongside a string of pop-up gigs and travelling raves, it's easy to see why. Away from the music, punters can attend Hungarian dance masterclasses or ride the world's smallest Ferris wheel. The Magic Mirror tent puts on a daily drag brunch, an impressive series of light installations offer escapism via post-rock, or you can try your hand at bungee jumping. There's even apparently a hidden nightclub in a portaloo, but we're not falling for that one again.

While Glastonbury is driven by a furious urgency and that inescapable sense of FOMO, Sziget is a choose-your-own-adventure that lets the punter experience it all. Mornings are reserved for the more cultural experiences, the bigger stages don't kick off until the afternoon while dedicated arenas for dance music come alive at night. It's hectic, but relaxed with it. That carries over to accommodation as well. With 50 per cent of punters coming from abroad, Sziget offers a range of camping and glamping options alongside partnerships with hotels like the IBIS Budapest Castle Hill, for those who prefer their festival experience to come with a buffet breakfast, comfy beds and a warm shower. It also serves as the perfect jumping off point for those who want to see the sights of Budapest. Sziget really does live up to its reputation as The Island Of Freedom.

That eclectic, purposeful approach extends to the music as well, with each stage meaningfully curated. The Petőfi Stage gives local bands a big platform, right in the centre of everything, The Dropyard focuses on hip-hop, while the Tribute Stage closes out every evening with joyous, familiar singalongs. If there's a better way to end a day than bellowing along to ABBA, we haven't found it. The FreeDome tent houses a range of new and underground artists that are poised to breakout. 070 Shake already feels like a superstar as she delivers an hour-long set of cathartic, crunching R&B-infused rap, Confidence Man continue to offer sheer elation with a sleek, spirited performance while Hannah Grae is rapidly growing into a festival powerhouse. Around the corner, the IBIS X All Europe Stage brings together rising talent from across the continent, including optimistic Austrian indie outfit Freekind., experimental French rapper Awir Leon and brilliant Spanish pop star Queralt Lahoz.

All of the wonderfully disparate elements of Sziget seem to come together at the Main Stage, though. There's a familiar comfort in Mumford & Sons' Sunday night headline set, while Macklemore makes his fourth Sziget appearance on the Monday, with a show that's furious, funny and surprisingly wholesome. It feels like the entire festival turns up to experience the gigantic intimacy of Billie Eilish's Tuesday night headline set, while the festival also brings beloved artists like Caroline Polachek and Lorde to Hungary for the very first time. Their back-to-back appearances feel like a real moment for both pop stars as they seem taken aback by the joyous reception, and they return their favour by teaming up for a euphoric take on Lorde's eternal party-starter 'Green Light'. It's a moment of surprise, wonder and glee – perfectly suited for this island of freedom.

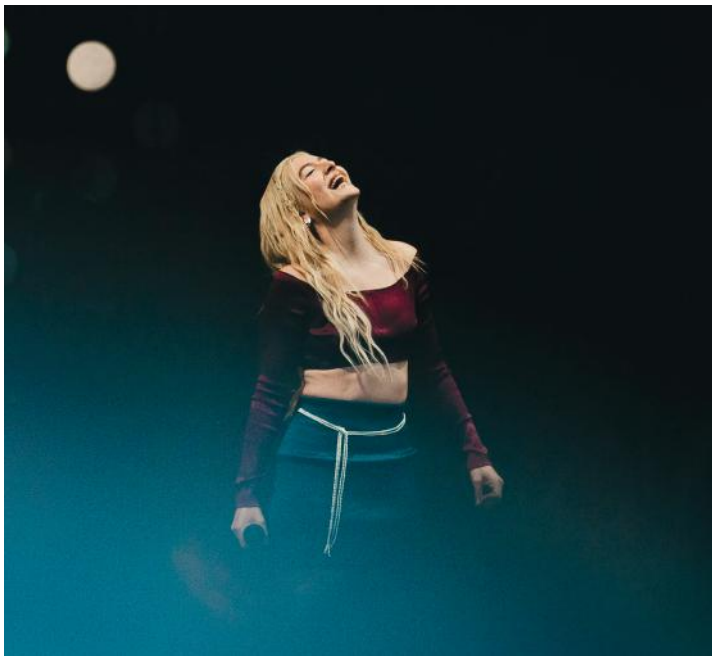


Photo: Frances Beach.



Photo: Frances Beach.

BOYGENIUS ARE THE WORLD'S GREATEST SUPERGROUP

GUNNERSBURY PARK, LONDON, 20 AUGUST 2023

At their biggest sold-out headline show to date, Julien Baker, Phoebe Bridgers and Lucy Dacus cast a little bit of magic in West London.

→ boygenius start their first-ever UK show huddled backstage, singing 'Without You Without Them' into a shared microphone. The stripped-back song of gratitude makes way for the snarling '$20' as the trio bound onto the stage of Gunnersbury Park to kick things off properly. It's a dramatic, confident opening to the biggest sold-out headline show the world's greatest supergroup have ever played, but Julien Baker, Phoebe Bridgers and Lucy Dacus have already shown their hand. At the end of MUNA's utterly joyful support set, The Boys crash the stage for the euphoric pop mastery of 'Silk Chiffon'. It goes against the unspoken rules of big rock and roll shows, but boygenius have always favoured friendship and chasing joy than sticking to what's come before.

That's not to say tonight's gig isn't an impressive rock spectacle. There are killer riffs and bellowing singalongs, all underpinned with gut-led emotion, but it's cut with boygenius' own, self-assured rebellion.

That same attitude flows through debut album 'The Record'. Released earlier this year, the album pushed all three members of the band to be more fearless, more slick than their respective solo projects. It might be full of complex songs about hyper-specific moments, but it was delivered with such raw, untethered emotion that it feels universally intimate. Tracks about doom also poke fun at rock star cliches, with boygenius able to be sincere and silly in the same breath. It's little wonder they're such an adored band.

A trio of songs allow The Boys to show off their individual talents, with Lucy leading the soulful surrender of 'Please Stay', Julian embracing the fragile angst of 'Favour' before the jagged escapism of Phoebe's 'Graceland Too'. Later, she asks for phones to be put away, so she can look people in the eye while singing the intense 'Letters To An Old Poet' before a massive, jubilant 'Not Strong Enough' feels like a purge for the entire field. Breakout track 'Salt In The Wound' closes out the night, backed by a flurry of fireworks, as MUNA rejoin the party. In the words of Phoebe Bridgers, "what a sick show". **ALI SHUTLER**

HAIM DELIVER AT ALL POINTS EAST

VICTORIA PARK, LONDON, 28 AUGUST 2023

The most exciting thing about Haim isn't their sprawling legacy, but where they take things next.

→ According to Alana, there are three things everyone needs to do at a Haim gig. Dance your heart out, sing your heart out and "have the best fucking night". The band make that really easy, with a glorious set that's a little nostalgic, a little sentimental and a whole lot of fun. Coming onstage after Fergie's hammering 'London Bridge', the trio launch straight into 'Now I'm In It' with its big communal singalong and three-way drum breakdown. Este cracks up at just how loud the reaction is from the crowd before the dreamy 'I Know Alone' morphs into a sax-laden, pop-belter, complete with a smirking dance routine.

The band are in London to kickstart the ten-year anniversary celebrations for their debut album 'Days Are Gone', with Haim viewing the city as their unofficial hometown since an early gig at Dingwalls was the first place they ever heard fans sing back their lyrics. Tonight's set is littered with those early classics, from the warmth of 'Want You Back' to the vicious rage of 'My Song 5'. Every time she talks about their journey to tonight, Alana is on the verge of tears, while Este seems more concerned about where the after-party is happening. She even leaps down onto the barrier during a sleek '3am' to get suggestions from fans.

It makes for a wonderfully heartfelt, giddy show. There's a real sense of celebration in the fiery 'Gasoline' while a closing run of 'Falling', 'Forever' and 'The Wire' acts as a triumphant victory lap for an astoundingly confident debut. Still, there's more to this show than sugary nostalgia. 'Summer Girl' is an intricate burst of joy, 'I've Been Down' turns gloom into a cry for community, while the closing 'The Steps' finds optimism and determination through pain. The most exciting thing about Haim isn't their sprawling legacy, but where they take things next. Whichever direction they go, London will be along for the party. **ALI SHUTLER**



Photo: Frances Beach.

ANY OTHER QUESTIONS?

FIZZ

Yes, Dear Reader. We enjoy those 'in depth' interviews as much as anyone else. But - BUT - we also enjoy the lighter side of music, too. We simply cannot go on any longer without knowing that Martin from **FIZZ** would hide something "up" his "arse". (*Actually, we could go on without that - Ed*)

What did you last dream about?
Dodie: I have dreams about this immersive show called The Burnt City - which is a real place - but in my dreams, it grows ten times in size and cast and becomes monstrously busy.

If you won the lottery, what would you spend the cash on?
Orla: Barbie Dream House with Barbie Dream House Studio.
Greta: Building FIZZVILLE.

What's the weirdest thing you've ever eaten?
Martin: I've eaten crocodile.
Dodie: That's so weird.

Have you ever seen a ghost?
Greta: I've definitely FELT a ghost.
Martin: How can that be true? They just go through you.

What is the best present you've ever been given?
Greta, Dodie, Orla: We wrote and made a huge birthday song and video with all of Martin's best friends and family for his 30th
Martin: Oh yeah, man.

If you could be best friends with a celebrity you do not know, who would you choose?
Greta and Dodie: Any of the cast from The L Word.

What was the first record you bought?
Orla: Busted - 'Year 3000' the single.
Greta: Same!
Martin: 'Elephant' by Black Eyed Peas, my favourite band.
Dodie: 'We Started Nothing' - The Ting Tings.

If you could have a super power of your choosing, what would it be?
Martin and Orla: Flying, straight-up flying.

What do you always have in your refrigerator?
Martin: Leftover food, haha.
Greta: Pickles.

What's the stupidest lie you've ever told?
Dodie: I told my class I was allergic to bee stings for no reason.

How would you handle someone who wants to destroy you?
Orla: Serenade them.
Dodie: Eat them.

What's one thing you can definitely beat the other members of FIZZ at?
Martin: (without hesitation) Rocket League.
Dodie: Knitting.
Gret: Speaking Welsh.
Orla: Speaking Irish.

Have you ever been thrown out of somewhere?
Dodie: I was thrown out of Popworld (I was completely sober) because I was climbing on the railings.
Martin: I was thrown out of school for two days for climbing on the roof.

Do you believe in aliens?
Dodie: 100000000%.
Gret: Yes.
Martin: I don't believe in humans.

What was the last thing you broke?
Martin: Wind.
Orla: Hahahhahaha.

What's the best jam?
Greta: 'Strawberry Jam' (track 4 on 'The Secret To Life').

If you could bring something extinct back to life, what would you choose?
Dodie: Dodos because that was my school nickname.
Greta: Woolly mammoths because they're cuddly.

What's the biggest thing you can jump over?
Orla: The patriarchy.
Dodie: Can you?
Orla: Trying.

If you could learn one skill instantly without needing to practice, what would you pick?
Dodie: Guitar-shredding.
Greta: Sign language.
Martin: Stocks and shares. So pencil.

What did you have for breakfast today?
Orla: Nothing. I'm hungry.

What's the best reality show of all time?
Greta: Big Brother Season 1.
Dodie: The Traitors
Orla: Oh yeah, I agree.

What's the best way to cook a potato?
Orla: As the resident Irishman, I say roast.

What's your biggest fear?
Dodie: Any bugs, even butterflies.

When was the last time you were late, and what was your excuse?
Everyone: We are always 5 mins late to our weekly Zooms, and we're usually making an emotional support tea.

What's one thing you've always wanted to try?
Dodie: Skinny dipping.
Martin: You've never done skinny dipping?
Dodie: Not like, in the sea.
Martin: Just in the bath, is it?

Which supermarket do you shop at?
Dodie: LIDL is underrated.
Everyone: (agrees)

If you had to hide something so nobody ever found it, where would you hide it?
Martin: Up my arse.

How punk are you out of ten?
It's really unpunk to say that you're punk, so we refuse to answer this question.

What strength Nandos sauce do you order?
Dodie: Lemon and herb.
Martin and Orla: Medium.
Gret: I think Nando's is weird.

What's the silliest thing you own?
Martin: Mrs :) (our cat).
Dodie: A handmade doll of a character from The Burnt City.

When you picked your band name, what were the other suggestions?
Scanfile, Drew Bandymore, Housemates, My First Band.

Have you ever had a crush on a fictional character?
Dodie: Shane from the L Word and L from Death Note.
Martin: The mum on the Incredibles and Kim Possible.
Greta: Meg from Hercules.
Orla: Harry Potter in the second and third film.

What is the most irrational superstition you have?
Dodie: I clap twice after I sneeze, and I've done it for so long that I can't stop.

Why are you like this?
Everyone: Generational trauma.

FIZZ's album 'The Secret To Life' is out 27th October.



Photo: Em Marcovecchio.



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