Sprawl

MAGAZINE

music art culture

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Spring '25
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BITE THE HAND THAT FEEDS YOU

Sprawl MAGAZINE

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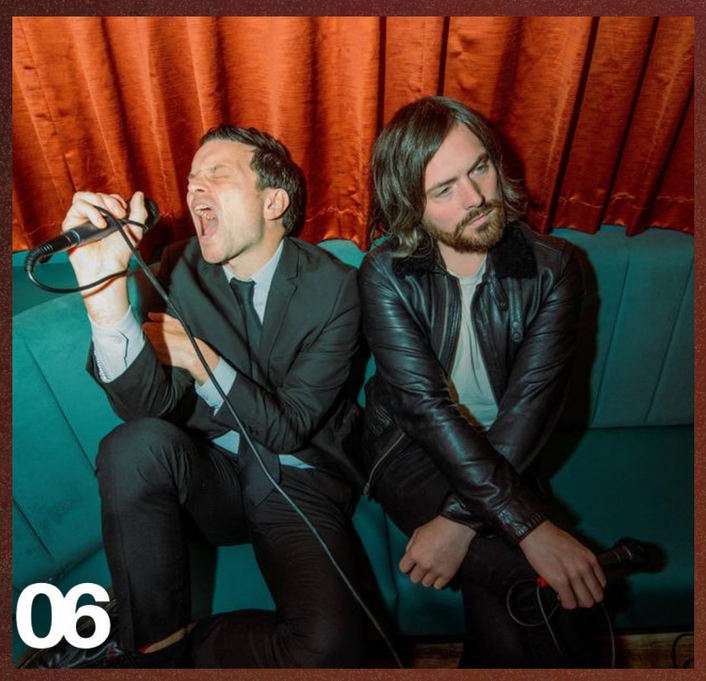

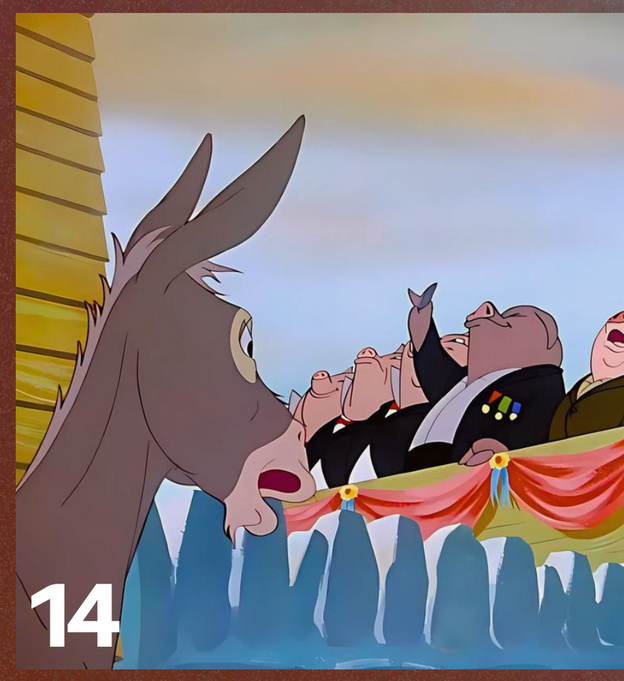

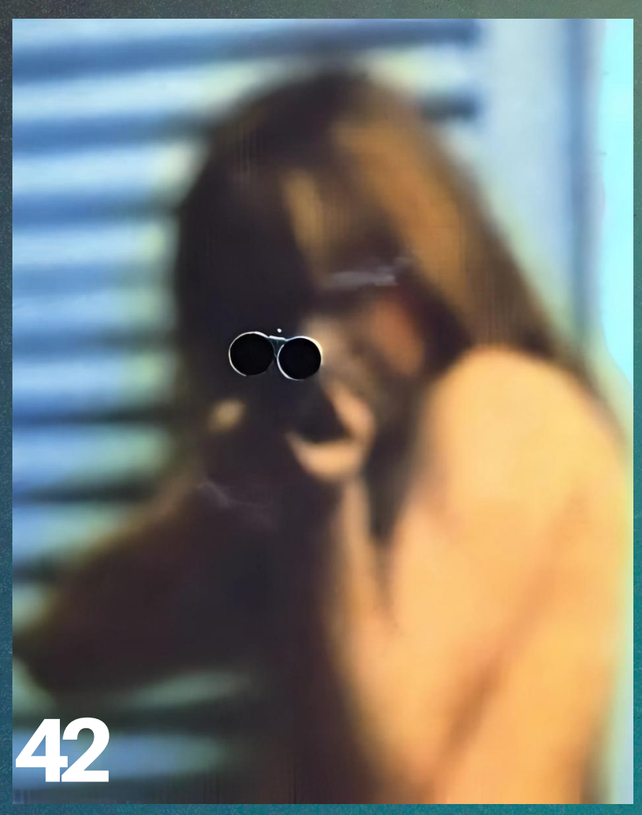

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THE SPRAWL,
ISSUE TWO

WELCOME BACK, I TIP MY HAT

SPRING ROUND UP

AVOID —

DROSS PODCASTS
MASS ADVERTISING
THE PRICE OF EVERYTHING
ALWAYS NEEDING SOMETHING
FOOTBALL SHIRT PHILOSOPHERS
GOOD ADVICE
NETWORKING
DICKHEADS QUOTING OSCAR WILDE
HIGH COST WARS
LOW COST KILLING
24-HOUR TV RE-RUN NEWS CYCLES
LOW RENT DEMOCRACY
HIGH RENT LANDLORDS
BAILIFFS
COWARDS
WORK
EVERYTHING
NOTHING
ME IN THE MORNING

DON’T AVOID —

ANYTHING OF PHYSICAL USE
SHIT VENUES
UNDERVALUED ART
ANY FORM OF BAD ADVICE
BEING SKINT AND STILL MAKING SOMETHING
ORIGINAL DECOR
STARING AT THE MOON
WASTING TIME
LAUGHING AT GHOSTS
PURPOSEFUL DRINKING
EXISTENTIAL DREAD
DOING NOTHING ABOUT IT
ISSUE 2 OF THE SPRAWL
GOOD SLEEP

NIGHT!

BOTHER?

CONSTANT NOISE

Teesside noise outfit Benefits made an explosive debut with Nails—a furious collision of abrasive electronica amongst aggro spoken word, ripping into the rising tide of toxic nationalism in Brexit Britain.

Led by Kingsley Hall and Robbie Major, the ever-shifting collective now returns with Constant Noise, a bold dive into ’90s beats, indie sleaze, and ambient electronica.

The album sees them team up with Zera Tønin of electro-pop provocateurs Arch Femmesis on lead single “Land of the Tyrants” and indie royalty Peter Doherty for “Relentless.”

We caught up with Kingsley and Robbie to chat about their new direction, recording process, and why you should never write songs for Zane Lowe.

Words: Jimi Arundell

Benefits have now been whittled down to just two members. What prompted this move and how has it affected the band's dynamic?

Kingsley: It’s not by design. It's not like some Machiavellian plan or anything like that. Benefits, essentially, is just me and Robbie, and looking back, it always has been.
When the pandemic hit, we weren't allowed to leave our house other than to go out for our one walk a day or go to the shops, or whatever the fuck it was; we didn't have the outlet to get together anymore. So, we had to find our own solution to that problem for a psychological release. Despite the fact that you're sitting in your loft eating baked beans and stuff, thinking vodka was a cure for COVID—which wasn't a clever thing.

Eventually, we started sending each other electronic music and spoken word stuff. That's kind of the embryo of what we wanted it to be. So, in a way, what we’ve become now is just us going back to the original idea.

Has it streamlined the sound at all?

Robbie: I think in some ways it has, because the recordings that we did for the last album—a lot of those were done remotely. I would send ideas between me and Kingsley, so it was sort of a progression of that. On Constant Noise—everything that's on the album that I’ve recorded has been done in this room.
Whereas when I get to a studio, I just shit myself. You just think, “Everything I'm doing is costing money, and everything I'm doing is shit.” Whereas when you're just in your house, it's free. The only time wasted is Kingsley's time when he's got to listen to ten minutes of unlistenable noise, but he's quite happy doing that.

Kingsley: I don't think we're musicians. Robbie, obviously, is very good at playing synthesisers and making noise and playing the violin, but we're not proper musicians, and I think we use that to our advantage where we can. And I know that'll piss off people who make real music because we don't do that.
We've done the whole sitting in grotty practice rooms, smoking endless amounts of cigarettes, listening to the same fucking song for two hours, and then loading everything back in the car and going home. We just haven't got the patience anymore to do that.
Now, Robbie will send me an email on a Thursday afternoon, and I'll go, “That's pretty good,” write some lyrics to it, and then it'll be done by Friday. And if I think it’s shit, I just delete it.

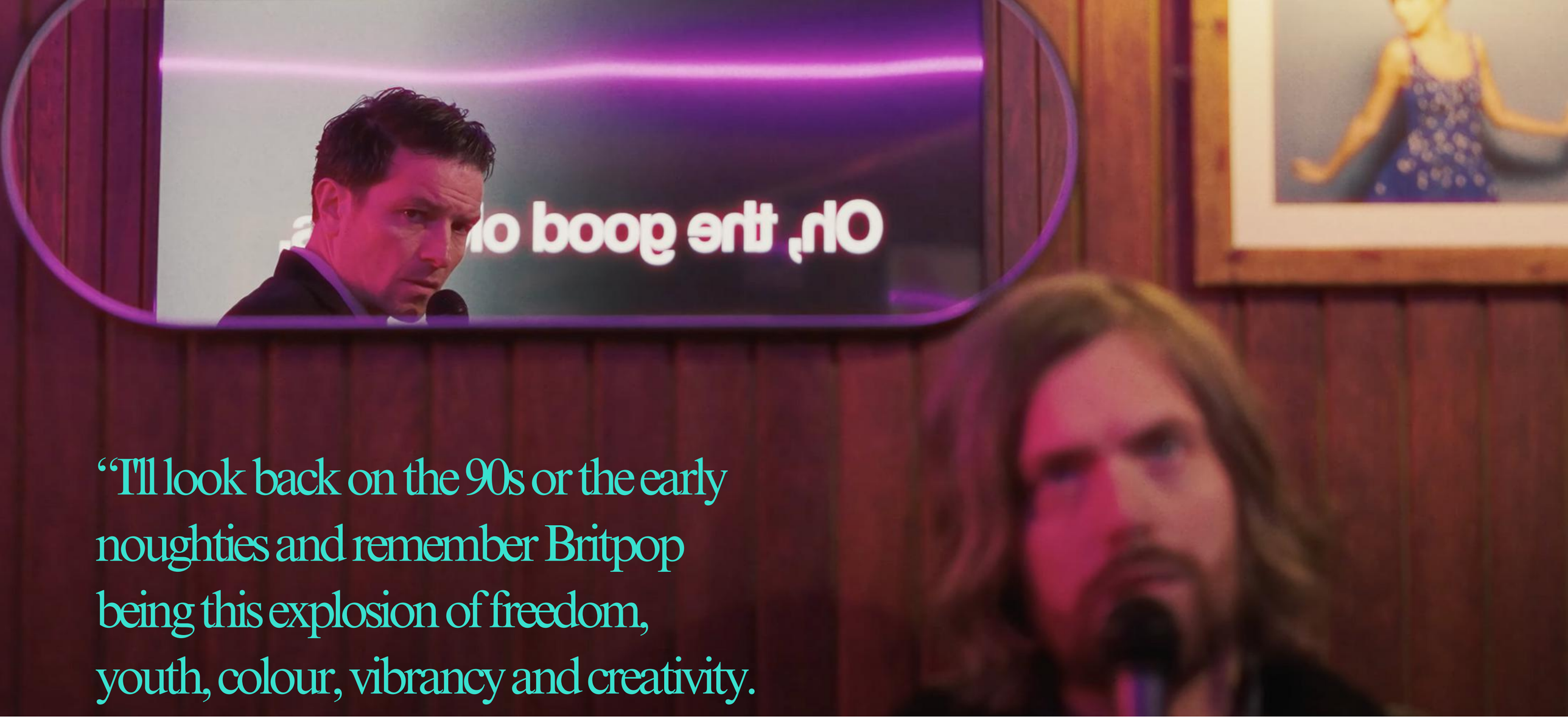
It sounds like you've had the opposite experience to the difficult second album trap. Removing all those things that might cause imposter syndrome, stressful or financially expensive. You’ve just said “Fuck that. This is us!” and you've been able to completely focus.

Robbie: The imposter syndrome is still very much there. But I think that's there with everyone, isn't it? If you haven't got that, then you’re probably a deluded maniac.
Financially, we've still spent all the money, even though we don't have any big costs. Everything's still very expensive, even with a no-frills way of doing it.

Kingsley: James Welsh and James Brown have been invaluable to creating this as well. They understand our way of working. They have become collaborators, and we've never even been in the same room together. They're virtual collaborators, in that sense.
With the second album thing, you’ve got to understand that, as successful as the first record was—with critical acclaim in certain circles (because I know in other circles it was derided)—we're still not a massive band, we're not a big deal. So, we haven't got to appease a huge audience that would be expecting a certain product.

"We’ve done the whole sitting in grotty practice rooms, smoking endless amounts of cigarettes, listening to the same fucking song for two hours. We just haven’t got the patience anymore."
— Kingsley

benefits



“I'll look back on the 90s or the early noughties and remember Britpop being this explosion of freedom, youth, colour, vibrancy and creativity. But forget about all the misogyny.”
—Kingsley

With this album, it sounds very 90s-centric. Particularly the dance music and the club scene at the time. Where did that come from?

Kingsley: It's an intentional nod, but I don't think it's a completely '90s thing. I don't think you could have picked it up after buying fucking Be Here Now or something.
A lot of the lyrical themes on it are to do with reminiscence, to do with looking back. Nails was about how the right-wing romanticised the past of Britain—when it was jumpers for goalposts and no foreigners. Whereas this is kind of different. This is about how pretty much anyone romanticises their own past. We're all guilty of it. I'll look back on the '90s or the early noughties and remember Britpop being this explosion of freedom, youth, colour, vibrancy, and creativity—but forget about all the misogyny.

I've got stacks of NMEs from the early noughties and late '90s. The interviews are really revealing—like, terrifying—what these usually young, white, lad bands said. It's all homophobia and sexism. Certainly, how they treated women and girls. It's fucking sickening. You forget about that.

You're totally right about that. If women were ever spoken about during Britpop, they were referred to as ladettes, they couldn't even be accepted as women. They always had to be in the male shadow somehow.

Constant Noise sees you team up with some great artists. You've got Zera Tønin of Arch Femmesis in there and Neil Cooper from Therapy? How did those collaborations come about?

Kingsley: They're just friends. We played with Arch Femmesis at the Rescue Rooms at the end of 2023. Zera came out—it was all shadows and strobes—and she was wearing this white wedding dress veil thing. It started off as this sort of heavy, horrible techno, and she just gave out this awful scream. It was satanic—this otherworldly thing came out of her mouth. And it was just amazing. Absolutely incredible. I was just like, “How can we nick that?”

I was working on this song, Land of the Tyrants, and I think me and Robbie both liked it, but no one else liked it. Certainly, no one thought it was a single or even that it should go on the album. But hearing that was like, “Hold on, we could utilise something like that to take it to another level.” Sometimes songs need either a hook or a motif or something special or weird to make them stand out. And that was the exact thing—with this primal rage. Plus, it's nice having a female voice on it as well to counteract this white male monstrosity that’s all over the record.

Neil from Therapy? has played drums for us. He's great. He's a nice friend. He bought a T-shirt from us via Bandcamp, which was how we first met. He’s very loud.

You’ve also teamed up with Peter Doherty for the single “Relentless”. How did that come about and how much was he involved in the writing of that track?

Kingsley: (Laughs) Not a major deal. He'd heard us on BBC 6 Music doing some spoken word and decided that he liked it. A friend of mine, Jimmy, who runs a bar called Kubar, messaged me one afternoon saying, “Pete Doherty is here. Do you want to come and meet him? He keeps banging on about your band.” And I was like, “Really?” So, I did.
He was frighteningly nice—very tall, like a giant, like six foot fucking four or something. He was dead canny and said, “You know, we could do a collaboration.” I was like, “Nah. Come on. You're like a huge superstar. That's never gonna happen.” But this theme of reminiscence was starting to grow, and if we could get him to do something on this song, that would square the circle. We were writing about reminiscing on our past, and then, all of a sudden, this hero from your own past comes in and he's going to sing on your song.

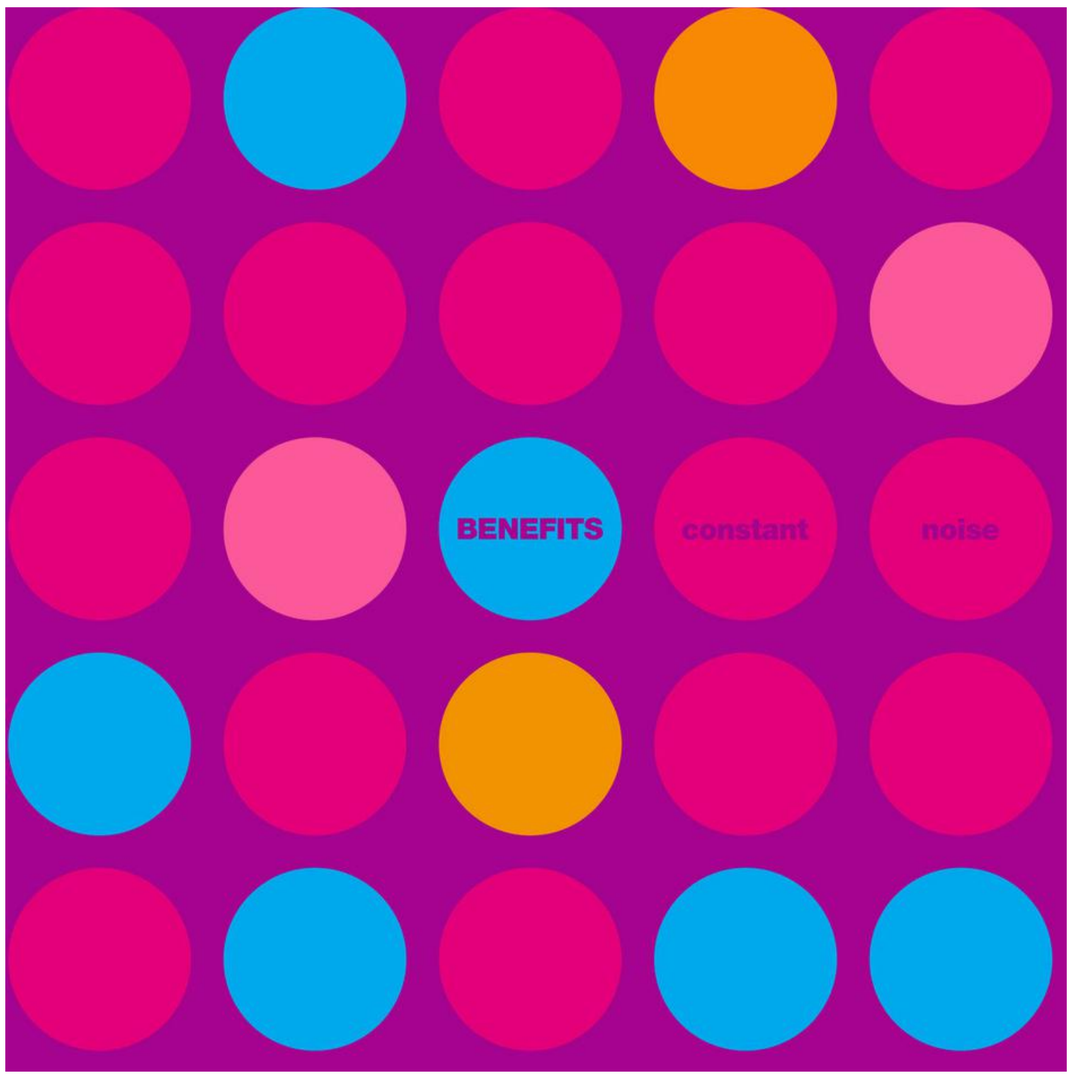
Afterwards, we had to track him down and make the schedules match. Eventually, we cornered him at a gig he was five hours late for in Manchester.
We tried doing it in this quiet, empty dressing room, but in the end, we had to do it in a room that was full of people, in a venue that was already packed, with a band playing in the next room. Not ideal. I wanted him to do something that he doesn't necessarily always do—almost like jazz scat over it. In the end, he just kind of rambled over it, but it was cool.

Do you feel unfettered from any expectations of what you “should” sound?

Kingsley: Even before lockdown, we were doing this fairly formulaic and traditional song-structured stuff in practice rooms and making a kind of noisy, IDLES-ish sound. It wasn't until I got this strange sense of freedom to write how I wanted to write that it clicked. You've kind of got to teach yourself not to give a fuck. We certainly never write to pander to an audience, be popular, or try to be careerists. We've had these accusations thrown at us, which always fucking baffled me.
When a song like Flag started getting a bit of traction, people were saying, “You’re jumping on the bandwagon!” I'm like, “What sort of fucking bandwagon is that?” It must be the shittest-looking bandwagon you could possibly think of to jump on.

I remember having a pep talk from Tom Robinson—the 2-4-6-8 BBC 6 guy. I messaged him, feeling a bit depressed. He got back to me with, “I'll give you a call, we'll have a chat.” He gave me bits of advice on how to keep your mind active, be more creative, and write more. He was great, and on the back of that, I started writing without any lofty intention or formula. Just writing with freedom and not worrying that “I need two choruses, a middle eight, and something that will work for radio, and I can't swear here, so I'll have to put this in instead.” Absolute nonsense.

Back in The Chapman Family years, we had success with the song Kids. It was on MTV, Radio 1, NME, and things like that, but once that waned, you really struggled. I remember our management going, “You need to write a song for Zane Lowe,” and we were like, “What the fuck does that mean?” Then being in these practice rooms in Stockton, fucking full weekends, just sitting there. It played into everyone's brain. “What would Zane Lowe like?”



You've explored the darker side of national identity on both records. Can you guys ever see an acceptable form of patriotism or nationalism or a positive form of it at all?

Robbie: It's just really hard to feel proud to be English, isn't it? And I think that's another problem in itself, really, isn't it? Because we are very lucky to live in this country, rather than somewhere else.
I don't think I ever feel patriotic, but then you see things and you go, "God, that is pretty good!" If you go to London and see the sort of communities they've got there, where it's just completely normal that people from anywhere in the world can go to London and they fit in. That's amazing. But yeah, it's tricky, isn't it? Because there's just, so much bad stuff that comes around from nationalism.

Kingsley: It depends on what you define as patriotism.
It's just so fucking grim. Any Prime Minister now—whether it's Johnson, Sunak, Truss, Starmer, or whoever—it doesn't fucking matter which side of the line they're on, they still have to be flanked by Union Jack flags. Everything has to be thrown in your face. It's just marketing. People have done studies on this shit. Everything has to be polarised now. You can't have a nuanced take or debate. You have to have one thing that's bad and one thing that's good. If you're truly patriotic, you've got to have a Union Jack flag planted in your garden.

I can't stand nationalism. Obviously, I can't stand nationalism. I can't stand patriotism. It doesn't mean shit to me. I don't give a fuck. You are lucky, in a way. You are a chemical accident that happened to be born in a certain place at a certain time. That's all you are. You're a chemical reaction. It doesn't fucking matter. Like, borders don't exist. They don't exist, apart from on a map. It's so stupid. I HATE the whole concept of it.

"It doesn't fucking matter which side of the line they're on, they still have to be flanked by Union Jack flags. Everything has to be thrown in your face. It's just marketing".
—Kingsley

Constant Noise is a real confessional record. Do you ever worry about revealing too much of yourselves through your music?

Kingsley: Just as much as anyone else. Surely everyone who puts something out there does that anyway. I don't think we're revealing anything. It's just about honesty and decency. That's all it is. It's not about anything else.

Robbie: I think it's also that thing where you don't want to lose the opportunity to do it because you're afraid that some people might not like it, or they might end up laughing at you. You've got the opportunity to create art, and then you dumb it down because you're embarrassed by it, because at some point you'll be lying on your deathbed and you'll be thinking, "I could have written a load of really good albums, but I was just a bit worried that someone who I don't even know or like has decided that it's shit." You'd might as well just get on and do it anyway.

I think that's one of the benefits of getting older—is you start to learn that nothing really matters, what people say on the internet. And if someone's got a Google alert set up, ready, that means they're always going to be the first person to comment on our YouTube videos saying that it's shit, it's fine, who cares? It doesn't have to ruin your day.

Last year saw you complete a European tour where we caught you at Left Of The Dial Festival. Did you have to tailor your sets to be less orientated around English and more about the music?

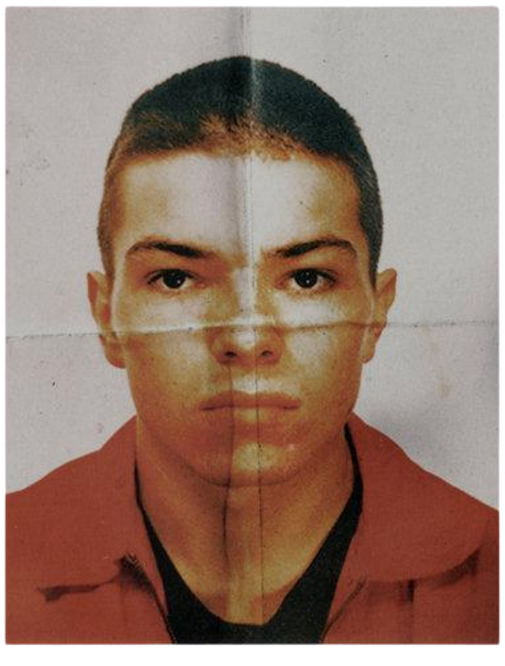
Kingsley: There's nothing tailored about our sets, Jimi. Christ!
Europe's class. It's amazing. Rotterdam, that festival, is a little bit different because, obviously, there is quite a big British contingent in the audience, so it's maybe a little bit warped. But we absolutely love playing abroad. Over here, what tends to happen is this political band nonsense that we always get, where people will turn up to the gig, stand, and fold up their arms and think, "Yeah, I agree with this politically," instead of getting into the music.
It's fine, I get it, but over there, they may well agree with us in a political sense, because they're kind of fiery over in Europe—I don't know if you've noticed, they're quite the opinionated little madams—but they also tend to just get into it more and fucking go for it. They don't get overly hung up on the "Ah, political music! I need to sit back and listen to it in a considered manner."

Robbie: They seem less self-conscious. Which is a sweeping generalisation. But when we were in Italy, they understood the lyrics to the songs, and we had an amazing, beautiful connection with the people at that festival. It was in the middle of nowhere, far from airports, in the countryside, and had this incredible festival put on by a group of proper anti-fascists. It didn't even have security or anything. Getting to go to places like that is pretty cool. Plus, you can eat pizza for free!

How do you recall the sheer length of lyrics and are there any times you think "Shit! My mind has gone blank".

Kingsley: Yeah! My mind has gone blank numerous times during this interview! Sometimes I have to rely on muscle memory. I don't necessarily revise them, I just hope for the best. Others, I've got little trigger notes written around my keyboard and stuff, as there's certain points I know I'm gonna forget. A word scribbled here and there, so I know that's the first line of the second verse of this song.

Some of the songs from the next one, obviously we've not played too much, so they're going to be interesting live. My memory's shit. I haven't resorted to making it up yet, but at some point, that might happen. By the third album, we'll just have one-word choruses. No big lyrics. Just confrontational single words shouted loudly, and a single button on the keyboard to hit.



RAW WRITE FOR THE SPIRIT

shortstraw.

Hailing from Coventry, shortstraw. have begun to leave a lasting impression on the British music scene in recent years, landing support slots with the likes of Sleaford Mods and Soft Play, thanks to their fuse-blowing mix of synth-punk style and frontwoman Erin's passionate flows of rapping and spoken word poetry.

Many of shortstraw's lyrics are diatribes against a Kingdom that can scarcely be considered United, coming from the inside. The incendiary sod's law evokes familiar images of a life spent endlessly wandering in and out of pubs with paisley brown walls and carpets, hours upon hours spent waiting for a different life to appear, while the invisible hand of austerity caresses the only world you know. Similarly, clean up and smile more use layers of pulsating synthesisers to create a soundscape that buzzes with the emptiness of the world depicted in the lyrics.

It's an impressive feat, which, as a lifelong resident of the country's strange middle stretch myself, feels recognisably Midlands for reasons I struggle to articulate, but certainly feel. The standout good for nothing is more introspective, a meditation on the experience of growing up somewhere with very little to do. It's anchored by an ending featuring samples from news reporters monologuing on the eternally rising cost of living, placing the song firmly in the context of the reality in which the boredom exists.

shortstraw's music is perfect for anyone who feels at odds with the experience of growing up, or more generally existing, at this frustrating interval in history, with tracks that feel custom-designed to generate some sense of catharsis.

So, if someone's never heard shortstraw before, how would you describe your sound?

Erin: I always find it hard to describe our sound because it's a mix of so many things and switches up a lot. But I usually go for the punk/grime/electronic kind of description— inspired by many, sounding like none of them. I always reference bands like The Prodigy, but if they chatted a bit more shit in their songs. Hahahaha. Whether it's from growing up with hardcore punk or when I first discovered grime and raves, I feel like I feed off the energy of it all rather than just one specific person or song.

Given Coventry gifted the world 2-Tone, The Specials, and an entire genre, how has the city influenced your own sound, attitude, and sense of identity?

Yeah, 100%. I'm definitely proud to be from Coventry because of the history it has with 2-Tone— that's always been an important genre to me. And because Coventry's so small, it kinda drives me to do this even more, to be able to say I came from this little city with not much going on since then, you know? Everyone I know left Cov at the first opportunity. But saying that, there's still a mad sense of community here, even if it doesn't always seem like it. It's a big part of my identity. When people assume I'm from London or Manchester or something, I'm always very quick to correct them.

Yeah, there's something really special about repping where you're from, especially when people assume otherwise. It's like proving a point, you know? Speaking of energy, anger has always been a driving force in punk and UK rap. Do you see your music as a modern extension of that?

Yeah, definitely. Doing this is like therapy for me— for both the good and bad emotions. Punk and rap are such expressive genres, so it's easy to channel all of that straight away. Not even necessarily in angry ways—just dancing about on stage is a release, you know? That's why I love raves so much—just a happy release of anything intense. I keep my lyrics pretty honest and raw for a reason—it feels good to get it out, and it feels even better when it speaks to someone else, but in a positive environment. Because, at the end of the day, we're all just shaking ass.

"Grassroots venues mean the most to me. They're literally the centre of it all. Everyone and their mum starts off in them. None of us would be doing any of this without them."

— Erin West, shortstraw.

You've been on the road with Soft Play—that must've been an experience! What was that like? Any moments that really stood out?

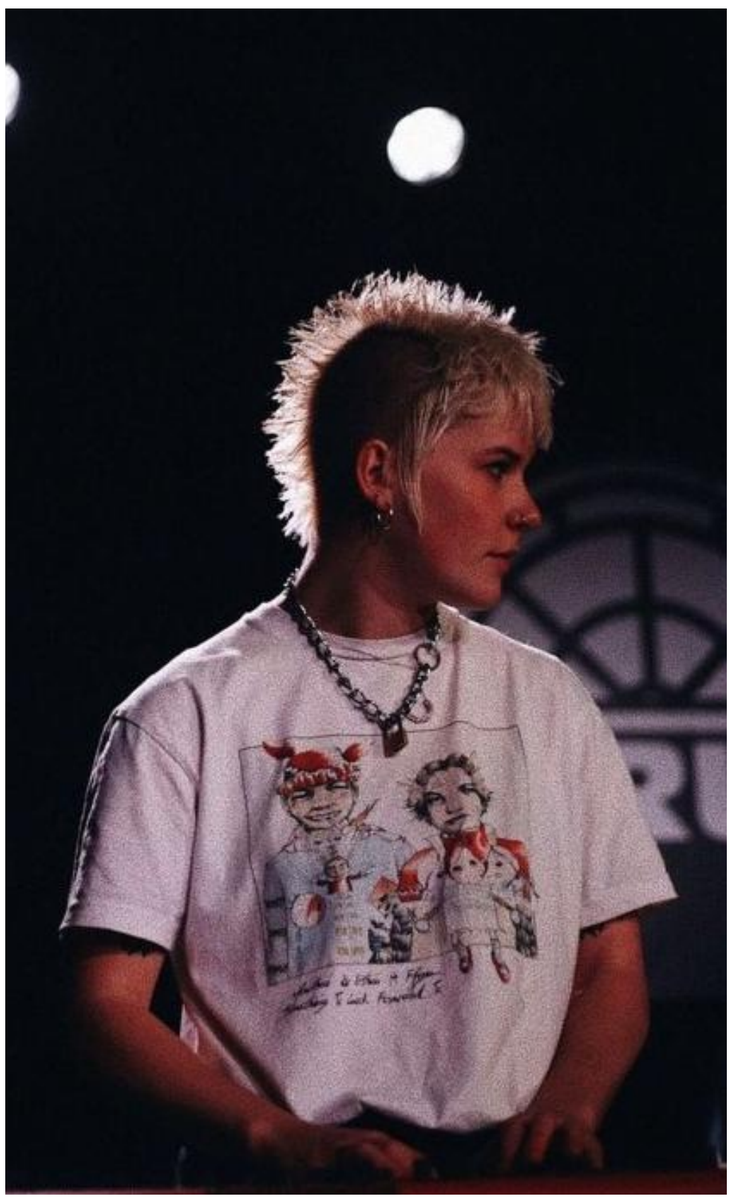
Yeah, I love Soft Play. They're both so great. I'd say the whole thing is memorable. As you can imagine, I looked up to them for a while before I got to know them, and obviously still do now. Sharing a stage with them is mad—I get more and more grateful every time it happens.

Sweet! You also played Sleaford Mods' 'Divide and Exit' 10-year anniversary tour—what was it like sharing a stage with them? Do you feel a kinship with their approach to music and storytelling?

That was wicked. Again, I looked up to them way before that tour, so I was just insanely grateful and gassed about it. Definitely think there's a kinship with the approach—their music and attitude resonate with me a lot. I love the intensity and grittiness of it all. But then you see them live, and there's this whole unexpected camp stage presence, and I love it. If you can't camp it up, I don't wanna hear it!

Your live setup is really unique—just you on vocals, a backing track, and a drummer. It's raw, minimal, but so striking. What led to that decision, and what do you think it brings to your performance?

Thank you! Honestly, we did it because it just felt right. It's literally just me and Leo in a shed in his back garden making these tunes, so we thought, why should it be any different on stage? We work really well together, and I'm so grateful to have him around. I like to think it makes us stand out a bit more—people see us and think, "WTF is this gonna be? They look like they shouldn't be here at all." Then two songs in, they're into it. Plus it makes touring life in my Ford Fiesta a whole lot easier—just the two of us. Hahaha. The graft is real. I don't think I could do a 10-hour drive from Edinburgh to Southampton with a full band, so thank God I get along with Leo. Hahaha!



You've played a lot of independent venues across the UK. What do they mean to you, and where do you think the UK music scene would be without them?

Grassroots venues mean the most to me. They're literally the centre of it all. Everyone and their mum starts off in them—you know, the clue is in the title. None of us would be doing any of this without them. They're so important. I've had some of my best memories ever in little independent venues, and I plan to keep making them there. I think we all owe a lot to them.

Your song Sod's Law paints such a vivid picture of modern life in the UK. What's your writing process like—how do you build those images?

I don't really have a specific writing process, to be fair. I'm constantly jotting things down in my notes—taking things from conversations, thoughts I have throughout the day, or things from my past and turning them into lyrics.

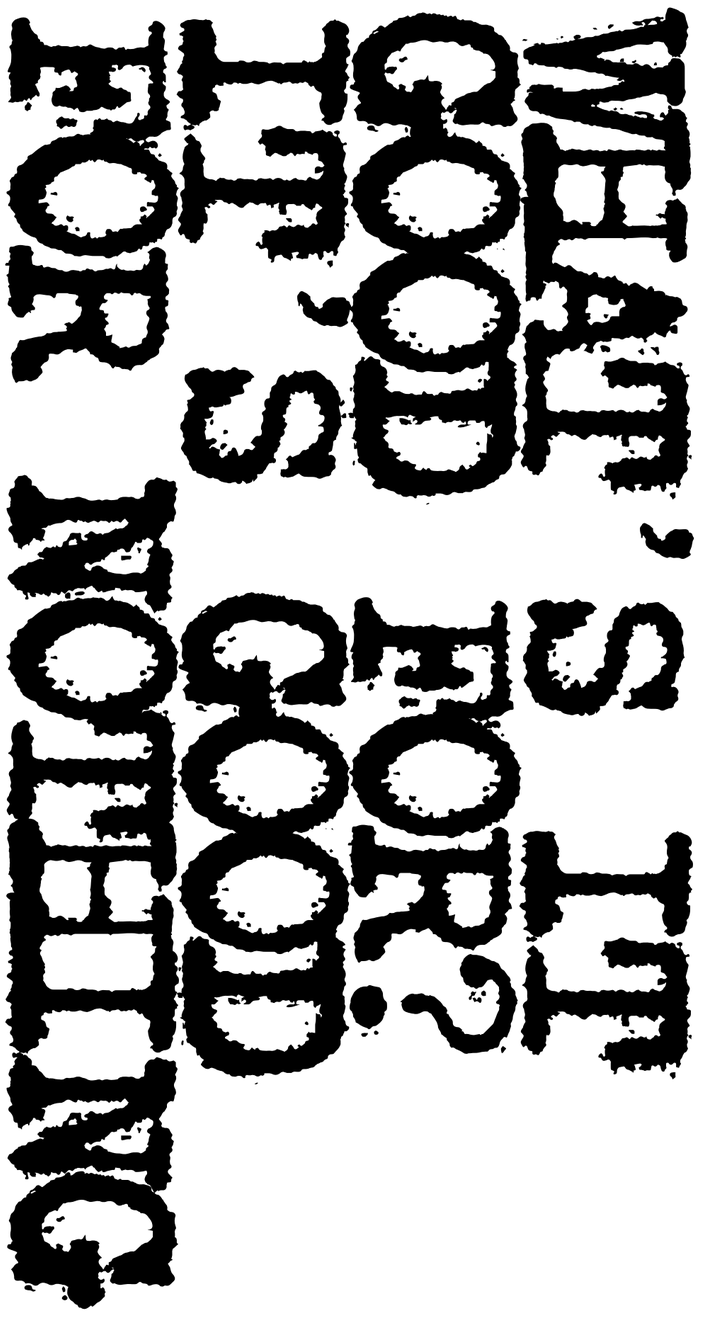
So then, as soon as I get sent a beat, I just piece all these weird sentences together. Hahaha. I love British idioms and sayings as well—hence the name—so I take from them too. I think I just build the images through my feelings. I'm quite a passionate person. My brain doesn't really stop ever, which helps in this sense. Hahahaha.

Your latest track, Good For Nothing, has a more subdued feel compared to your previous releases. What inspired that shift?

Ermm, I don't really know, to be fair. I just wanted to give a slower song a go. I really love King Krule and wanted to channel that into something. I also wanted to do a song about Coventry and growing up here, and that slow guitar just felt right for that. It's kind of a mix of that sickly nostalgia feeling—thinking back to growing up and also the conflict of loving and hating Coventry throughout my life.

How has being fully DIY and self-releasing shaped your approach to music? Any challenges or unexpected benefits?

The approach has always just been: I want this so bad and always have...



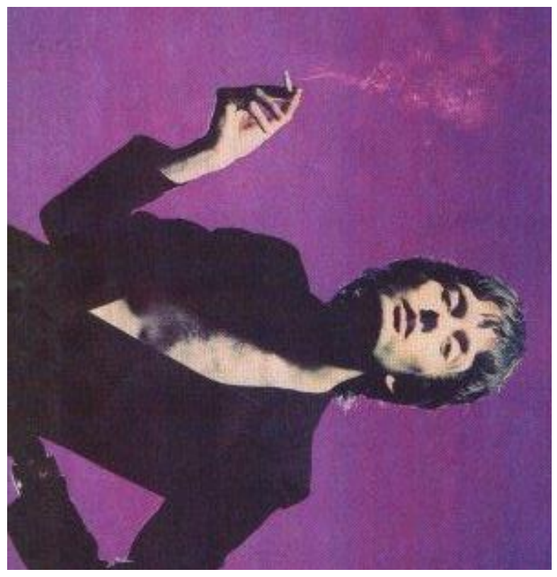
SEARCHING FOR SATORI THROUGH A STARBUCKS STRAW

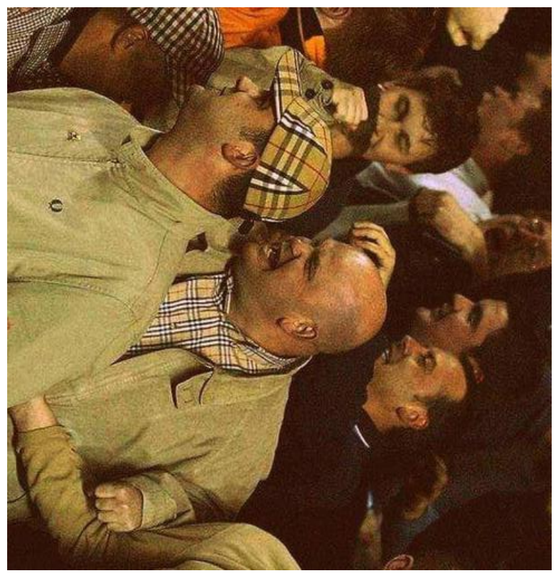
Words: Dave Thomson

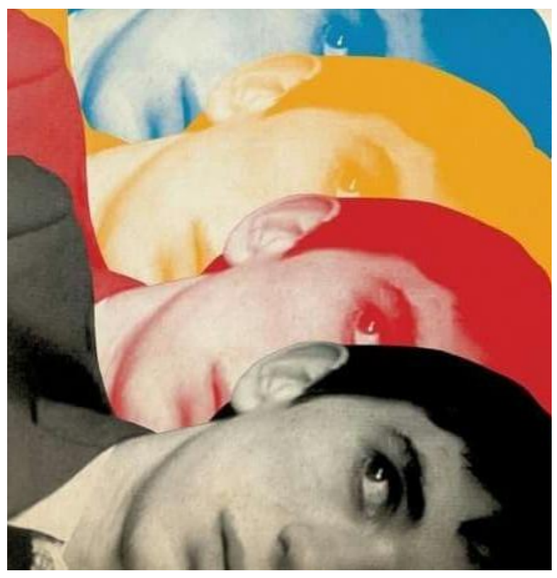
You've probably had a mate or partner who believes it won't happen to them, they're too smart, they can handle it, but over time their concept of moderation adjusts, their definition of normality adapts, and it isn't long before they've decoupled from reality. The once charming cerebral confidence begins to harden into self-serving arrogance, their sense of reason becomes increasingly skewed, mainly transmitting, rarely receiving, empathy having long since left town. The new normal, along with the come-downs, the mood swings, the hatred of humanity, including themselves—especially themselves—and there's only one quick fix; the cause itself, using, abusing, raiding the brain's medicine cabinet, giving nothing back, and it isn't long before the person you loved, whose company you once cherished, has transformed before your very eyes into an almighty cunt.

It also struck me that when describing a typical cokehead, particularly the city-boy-rugger-bugger variety, it's hard not to think of Boris Johnson, and when you consider his entire reign in this context it all starts to make sense. Prolonged cocaine use would certainly shed some light on the driving force behind this self-serving narcissist; the man who proclaimed "*Let the bodies pile high*" during Covid; who bullied his own staff; who tried to create a dictatorship by proroguing parliament; who sold dodgy Covid contracts to his mates and mistresses; who gaslit the care sector and then the entire nation with lie after lie after lie, and when questioned on cocaine use, claimed he'd once had a "*sniff*" though he "*may have been doing icing sugar*."

The cops discovered cocaine in eleven of the twelve parliamentary toilets, including Johnson's private facilities. There was no inquiry, no drug tests, no arrests, no follow-up, so no one ever concluded the former occupier of No.10 was harbouring a cheeky coke habit. If the cops had found the same evidence in some student halls during lockdown, would they have shrugged their shoulders and walked away? Didn't they say democracy ends when police and state become one?







Johnson was not alone, a few years back the socials were awash with footage of then cabinet minister Michael Gove munted off his chops, dancing like a gibbon in an Aberdeen nightclub. Search the words George Osborne, Cocaine and PMQs and you'll find a video from the heady days of the coalition with Osborne on the front bench, dead-eyed, bedraggled, like he'd had his nose to his phone all night. Douglas McWilliams, adviser to Osborne and Johnson, was found sucking on a crack pipe in a north London drug den bust. A friend of my brother's attended Oxford Uni same time as Osborne, said he had a reputation for procuring top-quality gear. I thought it was another urban rumour until a story (and photo) of him doing lines with a dominatrix hit the tabloids. I'm not saying the former Chancellor of the Exchequer was a dealer whilst at Oxford Uni, I'm just saying…

But all this is just the tip of the snowberg, because this cheeky little habit's ubiquitous within the chambers of government and corridors of power; they're all at it, okay not all, but a fuck of a lot. So, if you've been wondering where all the good shit's been going, there's your answer. A political aid going back way further than Johnson's imbecilic government, indeed it was the high-octane fuel powering Blair and Campbell's neoliberal embracing project 'Cool Britannia PLC', as Jarvis Cocker describes in Pulp's epic number 'Cocaine Socialism'; arguably 'Common People's spiritual successor, but Jarvis bottled it and rewrote it as 'Glory Days', which he's since admitted "*was about nothing really*."

In good conscience, you might have switched your banking to one of the more wholesome online alternatives, or chosen an ethical fund for your Workplace Pension investment, trying to navigate a more virtuous way of living within the supply/demand machinates of neoliberal capitalism. But apart from the diamond trade—indeed, any business involving human miners—the free market doesn't get much uglier than the journey this pure white powder has been through en route to the zippy pocket of your wallet. No, this ain't no fair trade enterprise; it's one seriously high-risk, high-stakes economic sector resulting in over 7,000 deaths per year, and this is before anyone's even had a toot.

The UK is now snorting twice as much as it did twenty years ago, and despite having a Labour government, is still drifting to the right. Is this just coincidence? Undoubtedly the go-to Class A for your average far-right fuckwit. Check out any Wetherspoons pub on Saturday night, or the ragbaggle of thugs and gammons following the likes of Tommy Robinson—a man who posts videos spewing moronic bile whilst chiselled off his nut, who boasts of scoring wherever he travels, edgelording over some lines he snorted inside a Saudi mosque.

Not a recent right-wing habit either—the lines can be traced all the way back to the Führer himself, who preferred to administer his marching powder through an aerosol, which is novel if nothing else. Much like your typical Hollywood A-lister, Hitler had a private physician on tow, catering to his every chemical whim. Still, he may have been the evilest human to have ever existed, but he cannot be accused of being selfish with his stash, because in 1940 he authorised the distribution of 35 million methamphetamine tablets to his troops and sent crates of chocolate bars laced with the same to their Panzer command and the Flieger division, including the pilots. These were not decisions made sober.

But what truly makes cocaine right-wing is more than just the company it keeps—it's the effect on its user: pumping the ego, amplifying the individual, the bedrock of right-wing neoliberal thinking. Thatcher famously once said, "There is no such thing as society," as she ushered in the 'me, myself, I' culture; survival of the fittest; each to their own—her blind devotion to the Hayekian principle that, in some strange magical way, selfish pursuit will translate into collective success. She convinced the nation, the US President, and the rest of the world followed. The philosophical cause of the largest shift of wealth in human history, from the poorest to the richest.

Don't get me wrong, I'm on no moral crusade here—far from it. I've done it many times, perhaps too many, and quite possibly was a bit of a cunt too. But it's in my rear-view now—a lockdown realisation it's a bullshit drug, taking way more than it gives. And when you're on first-name terms with various members of the Albanian mafia, it's probably time to have a fucking word with yourself.

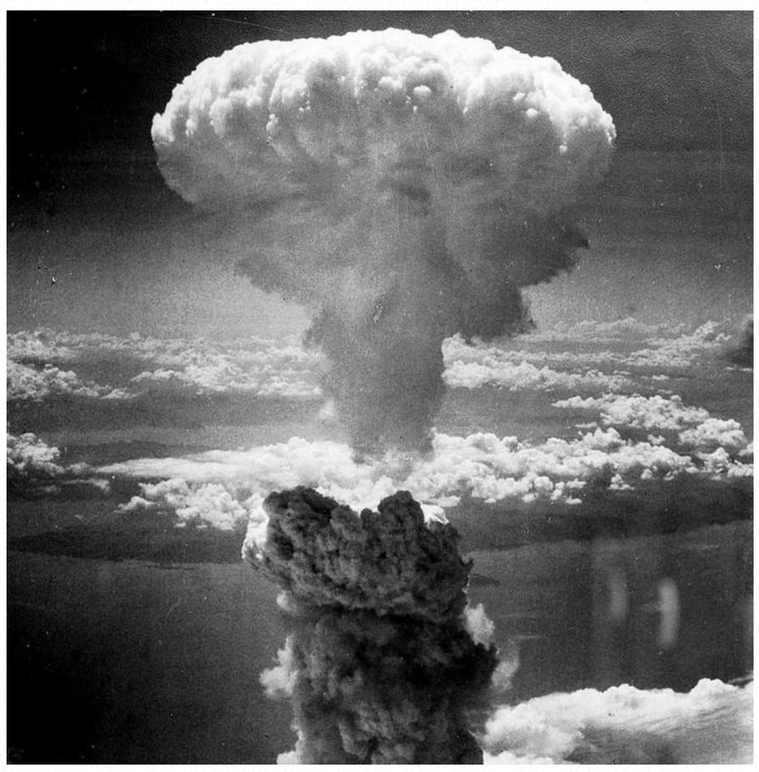
"Cocaine pumps the ego, amplifies the individual, and fuels the 'me, myself, I' culture—its users chasing chemically enhanced self-belief while the world shifts further to the right."

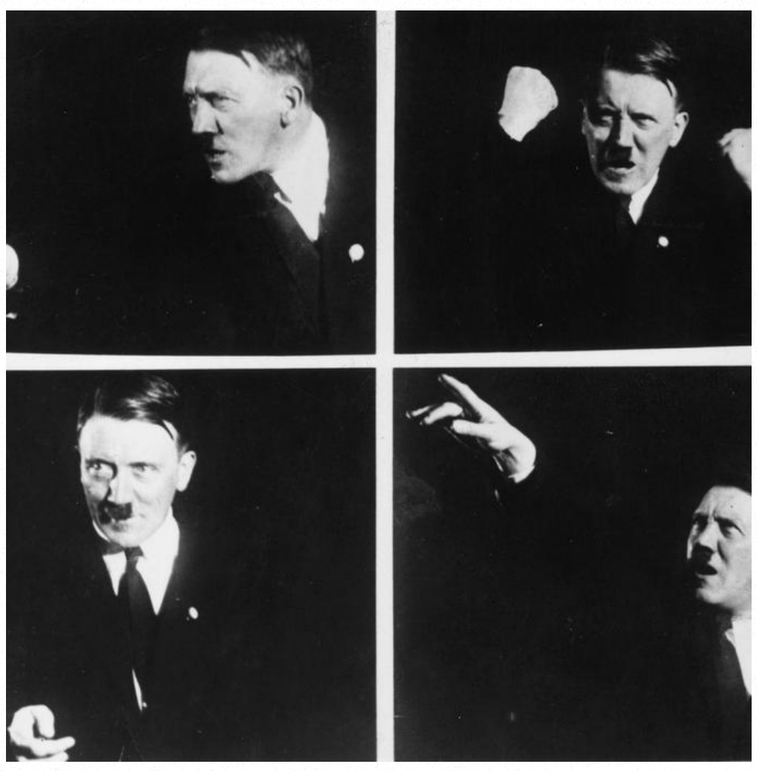
As drugs go, the perpetual aftermath accompanying cocaine use surely gives it one of the lowest scores on the pleasure measure? Waking up soaked in sweat, alcohol-pickled, blood-poisoned, heart palpitating, serotonin depleted, all meaning sucked from existence, and you ask yourself: "What's the fucking point of all this?" But it isn't long before you're itching for a reason to get back on it, one that allows you to convince yourself you don't have a problem—it's a communal thing, the crowd you hang with, they all like a toot, it's normal, like a cup of tea, the perfect quick-fix social aid, not to mention the go-to reset when peaking on the booze, 'cos when you're on the powder you can drink like a fucking sperm whale. Unable to stand or speak, a bump or two later you're back on your feet, right as rain (kind of), gabbering like a gibbon 'bout any old shit. Matters not—no one's listening, except to themselves, because each and every one of us is all that matters, the reason for existence itself, the universe's epicentre.

I cannot deny, some of my best memories involve cocaine, but when I really add these up, they're the exception, not the rule. And therein lies the problem—we crave that place but rarely find our way back, addicted more to euphoric memory than the drug itself. Grinding teeth and chatting shit with randoms, feeling little more than its ability to keep us awake and prevent nihilism creeping in, because who the fuck wants that? Another line to push the darkness away, searching for satori through a Starbucks straw.

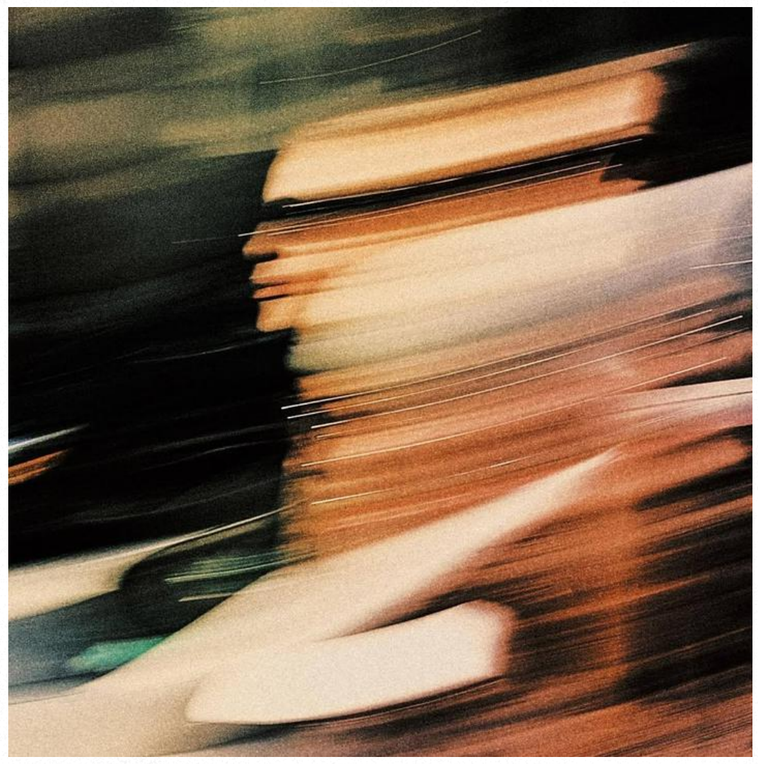
Whether you suck it from an aerosol, sprinkle it on your cornflakes, or sniff it through a cane on a supersonic train, it can sometimes make you feel invincible, like you're gonna live forever—well, more like an hour, until the feeling fades. So, rack up another, let's keep this shit going: chemically enhanced self-belief, augmented opinions, world-changing bullshit, and perhaps the real reason politicians aren't fucking listening—because they're not. I mean, what the fuck do we know anyway? Look at what we vote for.


LIE






Cocaine



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MORE TALK

FIRST RATE


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STAR
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Syd Shelton Q/A

photographer

FEW IMAGES CAN HOLD UP A MIRROR TO BOTH THE PAST AND PRESENT QUITE LIKE THOSE CAPTURED BY SYD SHELTON. HIS WORK—HELD IN THE COLLECTIONS OF TATE, THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY, AND THE VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM—INTERROGATES HISTORY AND DISPLAYS A RAW AND UNCOMPROMISING LANDSCAPE. THROUGH SHELTON'S WORK, WE ARE FORCED TO RECKON WITH THE ECHOES OF BRITAIN'S LATE '70S, WHERE RACIAL TENSIONS, LEFTOVER LUFTWAFFE BOMBER RAINWATER CATCHERS, AND WORKING-CLASS RESISTANCE PLAY OUT IN STARK MONOCHROME. FAST-FORWARD TO NOW, AND LITTLE TO NOTHING—AND YET EVERYTHING—HAS CHANGED.

- Words: Kieran T. Poole -

SHELTON'S WORK, NOW HITTING THE 50-YEAR MARK, IS MORE THAN AN ARCHIVE; IT CAN BE PERCEIVED AS A WARNING, A CALL TO ARMS, OR A VISION OF WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN—DEPENDING ON HOW MUCH 24-HOUR NEWS RE-RUN CYCLES YOU'VE INGESTED ON THAT GIVEN DAY.

THE BOARDED-UP SHOPS, FRACTURED COMMUNITIES, AND CORRUGATED IRON THAT PLAY OUT IN STILLS FROM LIFE ARE NO LONGER JUST HISTORICAL ARTEFACTS—THEY ARE A REFLECTION OF THE UK TODAY. MASS EXODUS FROM SILVER-CLADDING-RIDDLED CITY CENTRES, A POLITICAL LANDSCAPE LURCHING EVER FURTHER RIGHT, AND THE EERIE FAMILIARITY OF HISTORY REPEATING. ONLY THIS TIME, WE'RE IN HIGH DEF, GNAWING AT THE HEELS OF YESTERDAY. THE SAME PICTURE, BUT IN DIFFERENT FRAMES.

THESE EVER-PRESENT CYCLES OF DIVISION AND HATRED FOR ONE ANOTHER STILL EXIST, ONLY NOW LOST IN THE VACUUM OF MASS ADVERTISING, DAILY POINT-SCORING, AND AN "IT'S NOT AS BAD AS IT USED TO BE" VICTORIAN WORK SLUMP MENTALITY.

THROUGHOUT SHELTON'S WORK, YOU WILL FIND HIM FIRING HIS "NIKON WITH A BIG NORMAN FLASH" TO A FUSION OF PUNK AND REGGAE DESIGNED TO CUT ACROSS RACIAL AND SOCIAL LINES. AMONGST THE LOOMING THATCHER-LED CESSPIT, AT THE HEART OF IT ALL IS HOPE AND COMMUNITY. HOPE THAT THROUGH ART, PHOTOGRAPHY, AND MUSIC, WE CAN ALWAYS DOCUMENT, SHAPE CULTURE, AND PUSH AGAINST THE PEOPLE THAT SEEK TO DIVIDE US. IT WAS PARTICIPATION IN MOVEMENTS THAT UNDERSTOOD THE POWER OF MUSIC TO UNIFY AND DEFY.

IT'S A REMINDER THAT THE FIGHT AGAINST RACIAL AND CLASS INJUSTICE ISN'T OVER—NO MATTER HOW MUCH DOUGH YOU'VE GOT OR HOW BIG YOUR FINANCE BEAMER IS. ART AND CREATIVITY REMAIN AMONG OUR MOST POTENT TOOLS IN THAT CONVERSATION."

SIF SHELTON'S WORK SHONE A SPOTLIGHT ON THE ISSUES OF YESTERDAY, IT'S TIME WE DOCUMENT TODAY AND HELP SHAPE TOMORROW.

- Words: Kieran T. Poole -

SYD SHELTON

Your artistic journey began in fine art at Wakefield College of Art before transitioning into photography in Australia. What led to picking up the camera, and how did it bring together your political views and visual obsessions?

Syd: I guess I was slow at joining up my passion for composition, the visual magic of the relationship between objects and people, and my political view of the world. The obvious became reality when I bought my first camera in ‘73. After I left art school, I came down from Yorkshire to London and almost immediately got a job as a studio technician in the painting department of St. Martins School of Art, which I did for three years. During that time, I worked on a series of very abstract hard-edge paintings, which even at the time felt a bit ‘ivory tower’ and left me without a creative voice for my political and social views. It wasn’t until I left St. Martins and began traveling that I started seeing photographs in my head. That’s when I bought my first camera, and it was life-changing. I felt empowered—I could put forward my radical ideas while pursuing my visual obsessions.
Magic! I had found my voice.

From capturing Rock Against Racism (RAR) to pivotal social events, your portfolio is vast. Is there a particular photograph that stands out to you this week, and what’s the story behind it?

Earlier today, while looking for vintage images for The Atlas Gallery, I came across one of my favourite shots—West Runton Pavilion Rock Against Racism gig in 1979. The Ruts were playing, the venue was rammed, boiling hot, and electric. Everyone was pogoing, fists in the air—mayhem.

Near the front, I saw a girl climb onto the stage and strike a reclining pose between two monitors. One of those adrenaline-driven moments where nothing matters but the shot. I scrambled over heads onto the stage in front of Malcolm Owen, two Nikons around my neck, big old Norman flash—pop. A second later, I was airborne, then flat on my back in the audience. The bouncers had thrown me off stage. I still have those cameras—one with a big dent from that night.
After the big RAR carnivals in London, we wanted a “circus comes to town” approach, taking a rogue show of bands across the country.

I’d no idea where West Runton was but volunteered to drive a VW Kombi packed with Temporary Hoarding copies, camera gear, lights, and more. When we arrived—nothing. Just a massive shed on the beach.
No houses, no queue, no people. We thought we’d hit the end of the earth. Bands arrived, PA was set up, soundchecks done—still no punters. Then, suddenly, like the cavalry, a fleet of double-decker buses came over the headland, packed with the entire audience. I shot a lot that night—portraits, studied moments—but this image captured punk, especially outside London. This wasn’t King’s Road, Vivienne Westwood, or Malcolm McLaren’s idea of punk—this was DIY punk.

The late ’70s saw punk and reggae fuse under the RAR banner, challenging norms and confronting racism. How did art and photography influence public perception at that time?

We never had a grand plan. We were lucky that the chemistry, which was the fusion of the new music of UK reggae and punk, emerged out of the same inner-city despair, and bringing them together was explosive. RAR had a momentum of its own, and once the genie was out of the bottle, it was unstoppable.

You witnessed the unifying power of music and art firsthand. Can you share a moment that encapsulates the spirit of RAR?

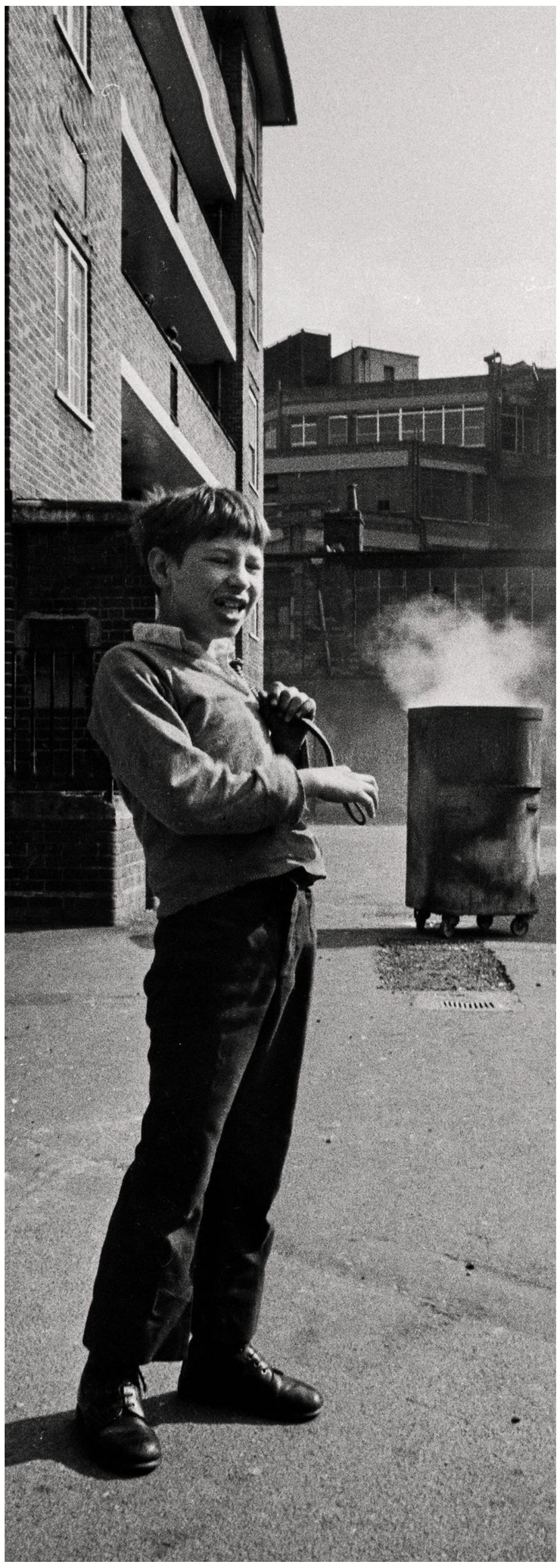
The first RAR Carnival in Victoria Park, 30 April 1978. X-Ray Spex, Steel Pulse, The Clash, Tom Robinson Band—we wanted to take over London for the day. We booked Trafalgar Square, seven flatbed trucks, and Victoria Park. It was an anti-racist street party stretching eight miles. By 9 AM, Trafalgar Square was packed with 50,000 people—punks and dreads from all over the UK. Virgin Records had given us 100,000 whistles. The noise was deafening. Billy Bragg later said, "It was the day my generation took sides." It really was.

"ART AND PHOTOGRAPHY HAD A MOMENTUM OF THEIR OWN. ONCE THE GENIE WAS OUT OF THE BOTTLE, IT WAS UNSTOPPABLE."

"RACISM ISN'T A NATURAL PHENOMENON—IT IS LEARNED BEHAVIOR, PERPETRATED BY YEARS OF VICIOUS PROPAGANDA."

With today's garbled minds of the 'Pound-Shop-Powell'—Tommy Robinson & co—what role should art and photography play in documenting our times and inspiring change?

Tony Benn said, "There is no ultimate victory; the struggle just goes on." Racism isn't a natural phenomenon—it is learned behaviour perpetrated by years of vicious propaganda, either via the crude rhetoric and intimidating street confrontations of the National Front in the 1970s or the more disguised lies of the likes of Trump and Farage in more recent times. It's the same message of divide and rule.



In a world where daily battles rage on and offline, are there any real parallels between today's response and the fightback of the late '70s? Or is the past more of a light attracting attention rather than a model to be replicated?

I think there are always parallels but the world has changed and that collective empowerment led by youth isn't the same. It is a mistake to look at the past as a model which can be easily replicated it cant and as the mantra we borrowed from the Surrealist 'All Power to the imagination' lead us to find a solution which worked, contemporary resistance needs an even bigger dose of imagination.

Your latest book, *Stills from Life*, spans over fifty years of your photographic practice. What led to compiling this collection now?

After the success of the exhibition and book Rock Against Racism, I wanted to show the journey of that aesthetic and politics. When I started putting the book together, it didn't have a consistent narrative, and it was only after it got bigger and bigger that I could see that thread spreading over 50 years.

The book opens with your dream of hope that the struggle for racial and class justice will prevail. How do you see this dream reflected in the images you've chosen for this collection?

So many of the images in Stills from Life I chose because they helped make up a whole, a lot like I imagine composing a large piece of music. Every piece is a part of a visual and political jigsaw. As the great photographer Gordon Parks once said, "The camera is my weapon of choice." For me, it is the visual voice that weaponises my point of view. It is a story told by ordinary people through the magic relationship between photographer, camera, and subject.

You've always used the term "graphic argument" to signify a deeper meaning in your work, can you expand on that?

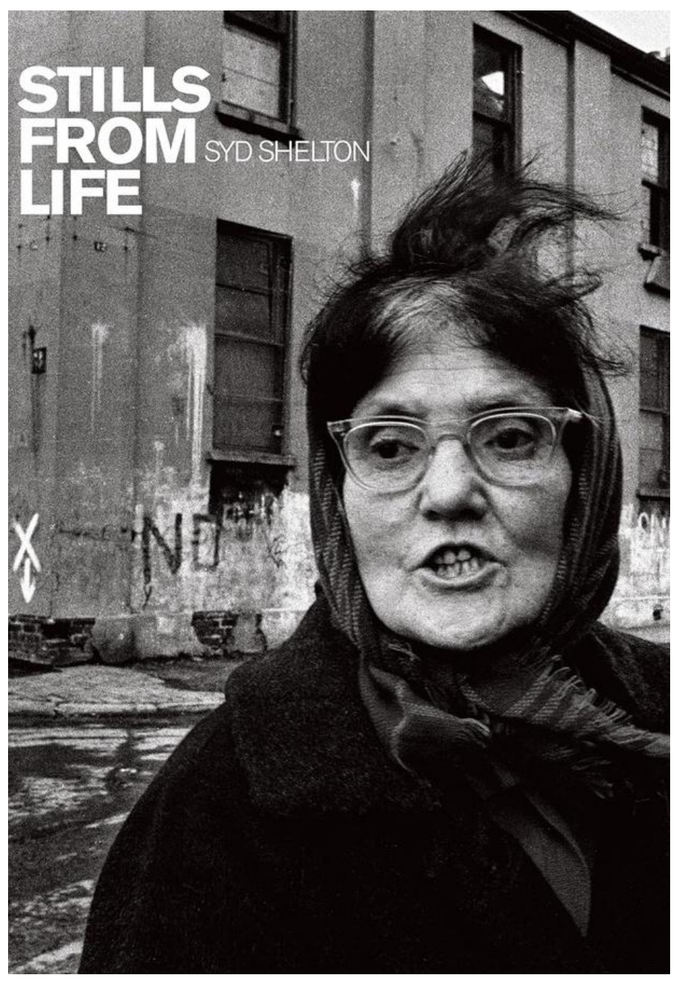
The graphic argument is a recognition of the subjective point of view of the photographic voice.

I try to always remember that the photographer is not an objective mirror but very much a subjective witness. Trying to understand how photography both deliberately and unconsciously expresses our point of view and contributes to the conversation.

I hope in my photographs that the image is primary and tells its own story which is why I have restricted the captions to place and date everything else is in the picture. This is visual communication not illustrations of a written story.

With an overwhelming amount of visual content we are constantly exposed to, how do you think artists can still contribute meaningfully and not get lost in the ether?

Thats a tough question which I ask myself so often and especially in the era of plethora of visual diarrhoea which the mobile phone bombards us with. Its a sort of non stop diet of visual information disguised as photography and finding the real meaning of photography in this sea of snaps is hard.

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SMASH RA


BLESS
CISM

37

Guilt-barbed dreams of petrol-ghosts
shame awakened monotony fractured
your thoughts are horses in a stable
& the stable has been torched
haphazard shark-tooth-smile
rebuke of weekend trench session mirror
flipped-out on that subconscious gas
like you've any control over such issues?
domesticated as feral city rat landfill pigeon
those branches won't house earthquakes
even when hacked-up
search tremors for answers slipped into land
drunk gullies historical roadmap
won't fathom new horizons
enter digression stage end of life treatment
vacuous landscape fist clenched at modernity
natural reaction brother
take it in your stride
wear that tyre-marked expression
fixed across the smile like braces
you know where you've been
you know every inch of these pavements

*****

The problem with perfection
lies within its discourse.
Perfection is often assumed,
or agreed upon.
Perfection is often hegemony in a suit.
The problem with perfection arises,
when its concepts and values,
are bestowed upon a kingdom of animals.

RENT-FREE

floss teeth with tourniquet
love-life an all-day bender
waltz down polemical path
who invented your curse?
speech of cacophonic plagiary
wheels that ain't round
subtext grounded beneath pavement
stone kicked down a drain-lid
misplaced hopeful pass
drudge on through displacement
face a sea of polaroid negatives
outdated rotting away
there's brail on the traffic-lights
about time you learned to read it
you are delusion's king grandeur
servant of hubris infinite
Lord Pebbledash bonking the cleaner
misanthrope on-the-ropes Buckfast
session-head B&H-blocked-heart
cursed-frog lodged in a dead-man's throat

FERAL

- Words: Jamie Thrasivoulou -

PUNCH U IN

THE FACE!

HOUSE ARREST

House Arrest by name, House Arrest by lifestyle.

A band so shambolic, so gloriously grotesque in both sound and presence, that they've somehow weaponised mediocrity into a form of spiritual warfare. You don't listen to them as much as survive them. And honestly? I'd rather be ankle-tagged in a damp council bedsit than endure another night of their pub-circuit psychosis. But then again—there I am, again, pint in hand, waiting to be traumatised anew.

Each member is a walking cautionary tale with just enough talent to keep you questioning your own sanity. A Frankensteinian ensemble cobbled together from the ashtrays of Britain's basement scenes, they stagger into formation like a group therapy session with no therapist, no hope, and no exit plan. But frontman Jasper Eade, or Jas to those who know and regret him, leads this cracked cavalry with a conviction bordering on religious mania.

Spawned somewhere in the grey womb of South East London before scuttling off to Norwich—where he should've been locked up permanently—Jas has now returned to his old stomping grounds to both dazzle and confuse. There's something distinctly medieval about him—a sort of ale-drenched troubadour meets feral busker. One minute he's vomiting poetry about Marilyn Monroe and South American cartel logistics, the next he's dry-heaving into a floor tom while the rest of the band tries to remember which key they're not supposed to be in. Also moonlighting with The Children of the Pope and Ringards, because of course he does. Man can't sit still long enough to be institutionalised. Consider yourself warned.

Fresh off a UK tour that followed a flight path eerily similar to Amelia Earhart's (but sadly, they came back), House Arrest somehow traveled from Brighton's skaggy beachfronts to Sheffiield's brutalist sadness and hit iconic venues like The Windmill in Brixton—a venue where dreams go to either bloom or blackout—charging £7 a ticket, mostly to fund whatever sentient entity lives inside their tour manager's coat pocket. Their continued existence raises a very valid question: how? Just… how?

Let's dive deeper. Their sound—a sonic cocktail of punk, rage, and probably unresolved childhood trauma—manages to terrify and intrigue in equal measure. But there's intent, buried under the distortion, somewhere in the beer-glazed, carpet-stained rehearsal rooms of South London.Their rehearsals, while debatably effective, seem to be paying off—if by "paying off" you mean giving the audience just enough Stockholm syndrome to return.

Their lyrics are a fevered transmission from a brain marinating in late-night conspiracy documentaries and leftover ketamine. "Marilyn Monroe" howls like a necrophiliac love letter to fame, envy, and that forever-lost American fantasy. "Dead Baby Delivery Service" is part cartel exposé, part punk satire, the efficiency and business ethics behind the modern day methods of drug delivery. Looking at the juxtaposition of old-fashioned methods compared to the modern-day knowledge and technology that would be more preferable. Why isn't there Uber Pickup? Swans, meanwhile, is… actually good? Featuring a thumping bass and guitar work sharp enough to file your nails on, it gives Jasper a moment to howl existentially into the void: "Why won't society understand me?".

The crowd? An ecosystem of deranged disciples: crust punks with philosophy degrees, bored art students, and randoms who wandered into the venue trying to find a place to piss. At live shows, you can expect a full sensory experience: sweat, feedback, philosophical dread, and occasionally someone dressed as a pigeon.

There's no safe space when House Arrest is on stage—just a chaotic communion of noise, nodding heads, and one bloke in the back shouting "play the one about the swans!" They're not just performing; they're conducting a very loud exorcism.

So here they are: House Arrest. The band you didn't ask for, but now can't shake. They aren't trying to be good. God no. They're trying to be felt. In your guts, your ears, your sleep paralysis dreams. Whether you walk away humming one of their tunes or just trying to remember your own name, they've done their job. Sort of.

House Arrest may not be the band we asked for—or even wanted—but they are certainly the band we now can't unsee. They're a middle finger to sonic order, a chaotic slap in the face to musical convention, and possibly a cult in disguise. Whether they leave you with tinnitus or a new lease on nihilism, one thing's certain: you'll never forget them. Or stop asking yourself: was that a gig… or a cry for help?

And if you're still asking, "Was that a gig… or a cry for help?" The answer is yes.

HOUSE ARREST

- Words: Bo Keller -

JOIN THE

SPRAWL

Where's North

MANCHESTER HAS LONG BEEN A CULTURAL POWERHOUSE, RENOWNED FOR ITS ABILITY TO INNOVATE AND PRODUCE ART THAT RESONATES FAR BEYOND ITS CITY LIMITS. FROM THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION TO THE MADCHESTER ERA, THE CITY HAS CONTINUALLY REINVENTED ITSELF AS A HUB OF CREATIVITY. ITS MUSIC SCENE, IN PARTICULAR, HAS BEEN A DRIVING FORCE BEHIND CULTURAL SHIFTS, BIRTHING ERA-DEFINING MOVEMENTS WHILE CONSISTENTLY FOSTERING FRESH, EXCITING TALENT. TODAY, THAT SPIRIT OF INNOVATION CONTINUES, WITH A NEW WAVE OF ARTISTS REDEFINING THE CITY'S SOUND AND PROVING THAT MANCHESTER REMAINS AT THE FOREFRONT OF MUSICAL EVOLUTION.

From Here?

Exploring Manchester's Breakthrough Artists

WESTSIDECOWBOY

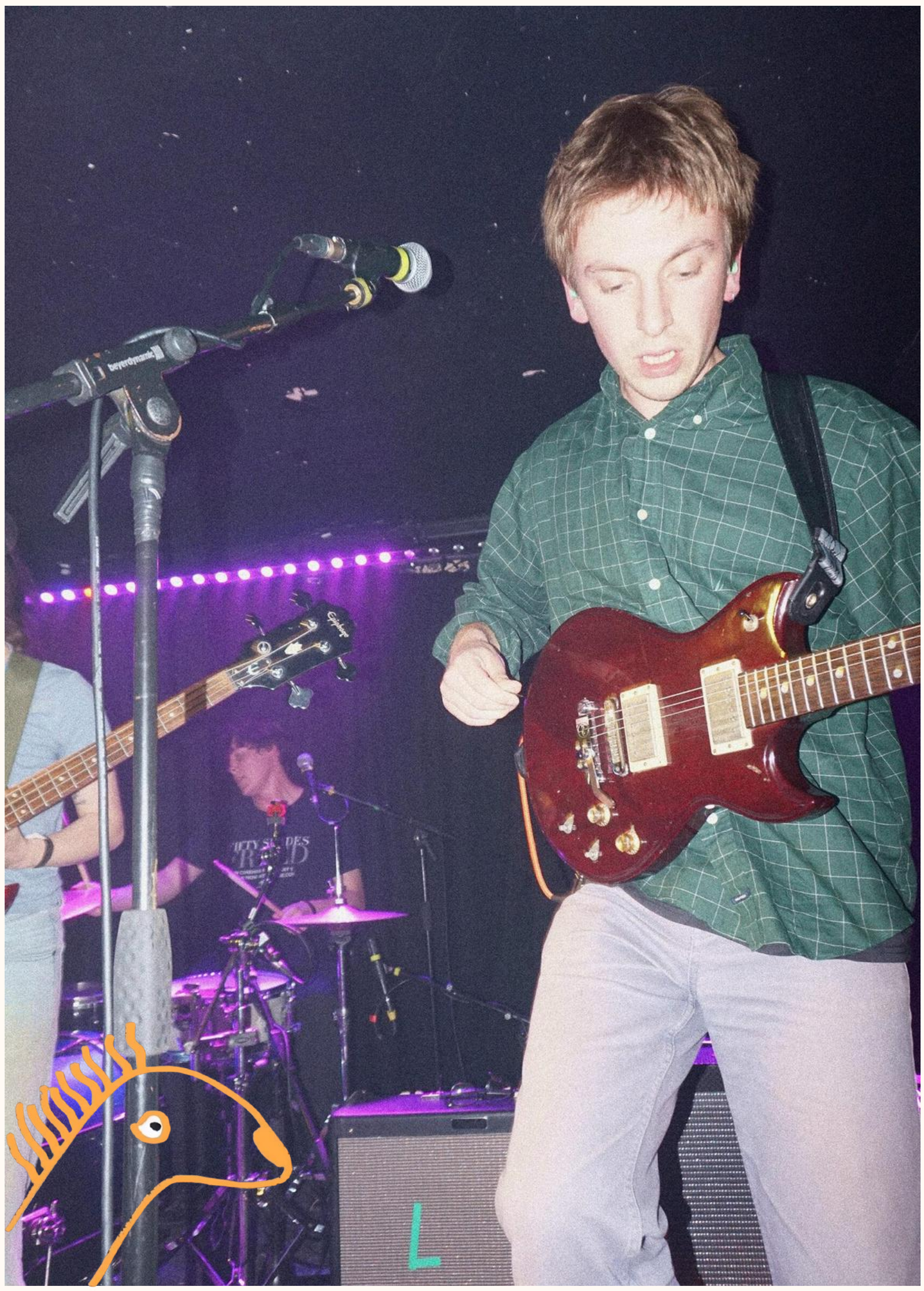
Leading the charge in this new wave is Westside Cowboy, whose debut single, I've Never Met Anyone I Thought I Could Really Love, is a confident first step that perfectly encapsulates their sound.

It carries a warm touch of 90s Americana nostalgia, wrapped in a light shoegaze haze, creating an atmosphere that feels both familiar and refreshingly original. The band dubs their style *BRITAINICANA*—a self-coined term signalling a bold break from the expected lineage of British punk. In its place: a slack, fuzzy embrace of Americana tones, filtered through a distinctly Northern lens.

Like their aesthetic as a whole, the track thrives on subtle intricacies. The guitars shimmer with understated charm, providing a firm yet unintrusive base that lets the vocals float front and centre without dominating the mix. It's a sonic tightrope act—balanced and spacious, drawing listeners in with nuance rather than volume.

Crucially, it's a sound far removed from any tired 'Madchester' revivalism; instead, it feels like a natural evolution—rooted in tradition but unafraid to drift.

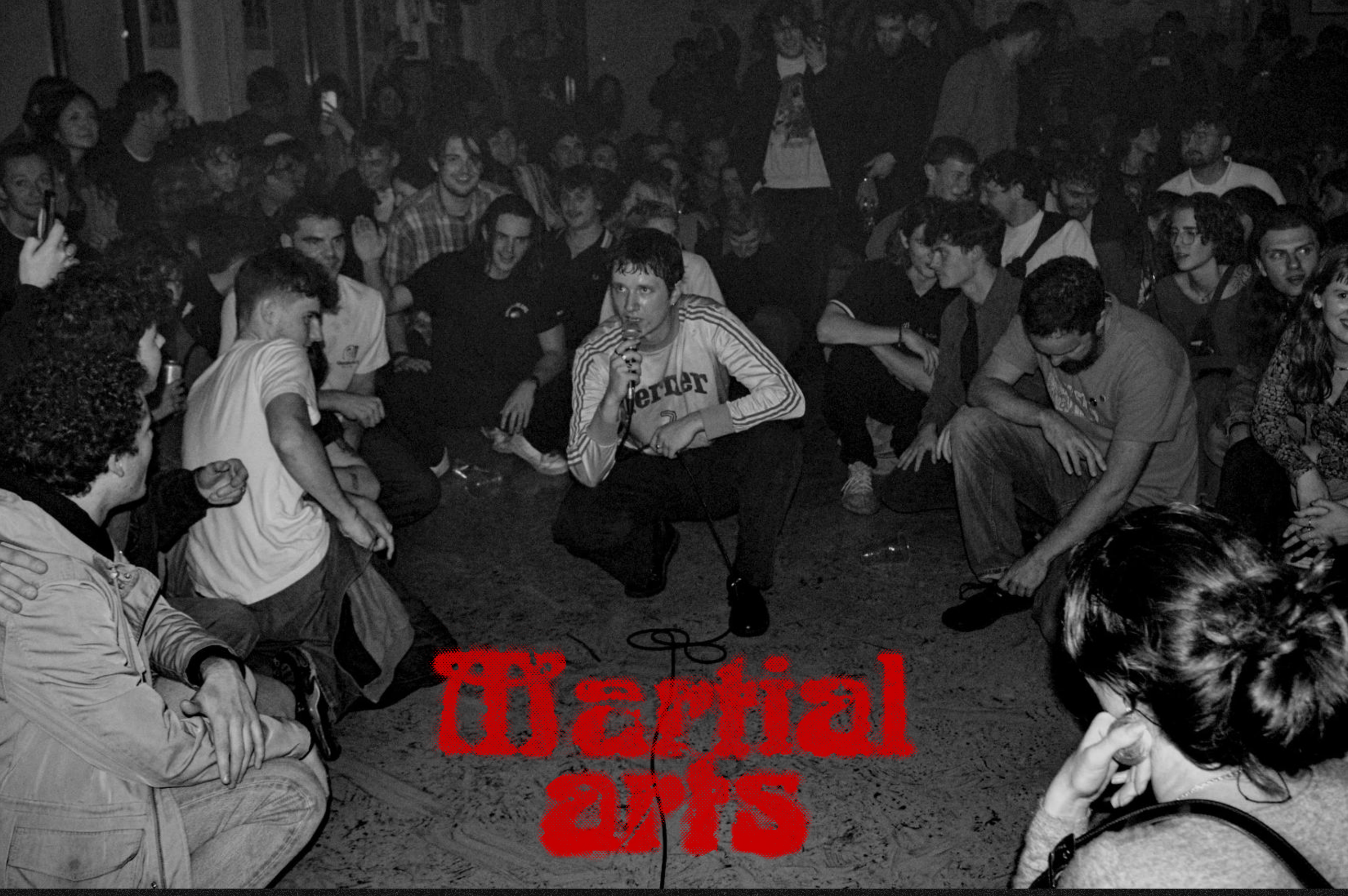
A glance at their gig history reveals a band steadily building something real. Manchester's iconic venues form a breadcrumb trail of their journey—from intimate backrooms to more prominent stages—each show a stepping stone in a growing narrative of creative confidence. These local stages haven't just hosted them; they've nurtured their individuality and helped crystallise their identity.



Now signed to tastemaker label Nice Swan Records (home to the likes of Pip Blom and Opus Kink), Westside Cowboy seem poised for a major leap forward.

Their live sets have already generated serious buzz, supporting some of the UK's most exciting rising acts, including Mary in the Junkyard and Blondshell.

With only a single release to their name, they've already attracted over 14,000 monthly online listeners—a number that feels more like a foundation than a peak. Blending post-punk sharpness with a bittersweet lyrical edge and an irresistible male–female vocal interplay, their sound lands somewhere between Honeyglaze and English Teacher—intricate, thoughtful, and emotionally resonant. Westside Cowboy aren't just riding a wave—they're crafting their own lane, and 2025 is already shaping up to be their breakout year.



Martial arts

The not-so-secret fuel behind most successful bands is promoters, and luckily for Manchester, they are in no short supply. Promotion labels like *Now Wave*, which runs £5 events showcasing the city's best emerging talent, play a crucial role in bringing new bands into the public eye. The duo behind *Now Wave* also owns *YES*, an independent music venue that has become a proving ground for Manchester's rising stars.

Another key player is *Akoustik Anarkhy*, a cult Manchester label and gig night that has been a rite of passage for local musicians for over 25 years. Known for discovering raw, unfiltered talent, the label has built a strong reputation in the scene. Their recent backing of the band *Martial Arts* has propelled the five-piece into the mainstream spotlight.

Amassing fans before even releasing a single track, *Martial Arts* have been on a solid trajectory from the very beginning. Describing themselves as *'socially literate punks'*, the five-piece have rigorously toured the UK's best grassroots venues, even making their way to Paris for a performance at the renowned *Supersonic Club*. Their music is raw, unfiltered, and unapologetically engaged with the world around them.

Their latest release, *Triumph,* recorded at the *Factory Kitchen* in South Manchester, is their heaviest yet. Brimming with societal commentary, the track digs into themes of conformity and self-worth—"I breathe my iron lung". The nod to *Radiohead's My Iron Lung*, a metaphor for the sell-out songs necessary for a musician's survival, isn't just a coincidence. Frontman Marson puts it simply: "It questions the true cost of conformity to our own potential and values." As a young band, they've felt the suffocating pressure to conform to industry norms, to churn out predictable tunes rather than stay true to their artistic core. But with *Martial Arts*, any hint of mediocrity is swiftly booted aside as they barrel forward with sharp insight and undeniable flair.

Their earlier track, *Warsaw*, offers a glimpse of another side to the band. It teases, it lures, pulling the listener into its trap. Aggression meets affection in a strange yet perfect harmony, capturing the very essence of indie rock. The explosive chords of *Warsaw*, paired with the commanding vocals, craft a sound that's equal parts urgent and cathartic—utterly addictive.

It's hard to ignore the familiar echoes that ripple through *Martial Arts*' music, like an old friend whose influence never quite fades. You can hear it in the transient bridges, the sharp, unwavering vocals from Marson and Matty—each track a tribute to the sounds that have shaped them. The band's chemistry with the other acts they share stages with is undeniable, with support slots and headline shows creating a revolving door of collaboration, cementing a shared ethos of mutual respect and camaraderie. Martial Arts don't just exist within the tight-knit underground circuit; they're carving their own lane with a daring refusal to settle. In a world where carbon-copy bands are often celebrated, the band serve as a welcome slap in the face to the status quo—a pure reminder that authenticity still packs the punch.


TTSSFU

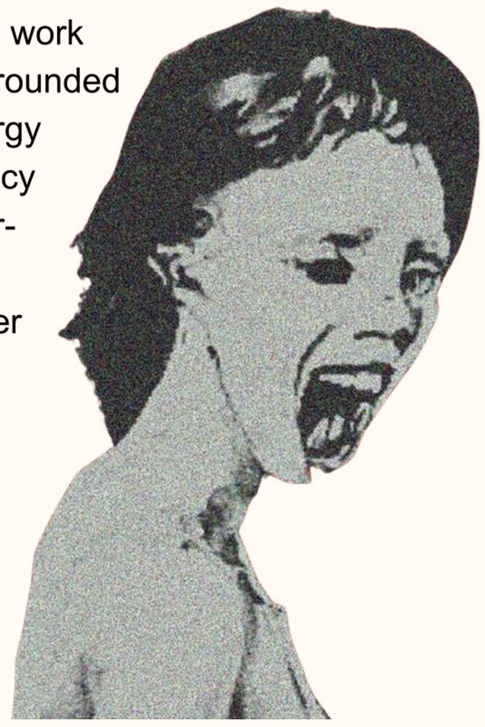
Authenticity has always been at the heart of Manchester's music scene, shaping its identity across generations. *Factory Records*—the legendary label behind the rise of *Madchester* and the punk movement—ignited a cultural revolution, proving that raw creativity and independence could thrive far from the mainstream.

Though *Factory* and *The Haçienda* are long gone, their spirit lives on through the city's independent venues, carried forward by spaces like *The Deaf Institute.*

Known for championing alternative and underground acts, this historic venue—first opened in 1846 as the *Manchester Institute for the Deaf*—remains a cornerstone of the local scene. Its 300-capacity main room is always packed, sweaty, and buzzing with energy, preserving the atmosphere Factory once cultivated. Even *Johnny Marr* briefly called it home in 2011, a nod to its enduring magnetism for Manchester's musical greats.

Its club nights, like '*Whip-Round*', serve as modern remnants of the past—a collaborative melting pot where the city's indie community gathers, reinforcing the same DIY headspace that the city has provided headroom for decades now.

This DIY ethos is embodied in *TTSSFU* (aka *Tamsin Stephens*), a new face in the modern shoegaze scene, bringing an ethereal femininity to well-refined soundscapes. With multiple headline tours across the UK and US, her self-polished demos create cathedrals of reverb and distortion that resonate with a wide range of listeners. Over a steady three-year solo career, *Tasmin* has released a string of tracks culminating in her latest EP, *Me Jed and Andy*—a meditation on the 12-year love affair between renowned artist *Andy Warhol* and film director *Jed Johnson*. The record captures the allure of New York City's high society and the addictive infatuations that come with new love. Yet at its core, *TTSSFU*'s work remains grounded in the energy and intimacy of the ever-evolving Manchester scene.



"Manchester has such a cool little community of bands," she explains. "Shows are small and special… a full room that's quite small because you can see the reaction to your music better."

It's this DIY spirit that connects her to *Fear of Missing Out Records* (*FOMO Records*), the independent label that supported her music alongside other Manchester bands like *Duvet* and *Umarells*—until recently, when the label sold her EP to *Partisan Records*.

Her sound leans into the more introspective side of shoegaze—less performative punk, more immersive walls of sound, distortion, and synth. Baggage, from her most recent EP, exemplifies this, exploring the obsession of new love and the unease that comes with transition—the brief intermission of solitude before becoming fluent in a new language of intimacy.

This summer, *TTSFU* is playing some of the biggest independent festivals across the UK and Europe, further proving her distinction in an increasingly saturated scene.

HOLLYHEAD

Manchester's music scene has always thrived on reinvention, from modern shoegaze to *Britainicana*, and Holly Head is the latest band pushing its evolution forward with their gritty groove and political edge. Rooted in post-punk energy with a sharp, radical twist, the group refuses to be just another name following in the footsteps of Manchester's greats. While *Oasis, The Smiths,* and *The Stone Roses* laid the foundation, *Holly Head* is carving out something new—fusing groove-driven rhythms with an urgent, unfiltered voice.

Their recent *BBC 6 Music* Live debut and gig at *YES*, alongside *Martial Arts,* solidified their place within Manchester's thriving alternative circuit. Signed to the local label *Akoustik Anarkhy*, the two bands have frequently toured together, deepening their connection to the city's underground scene. Their sound is shaped by drummer *Oscar*, whose interest in Afro rhythms adds a level of technicality that elevates their post-punk roots. Whilst their influences—*Happy Mondays* and *The Stone Roses*—are clear, Holly Head twists those inspirations into something modern, sharper, and politically charged.

Their singles, *Whatever Drags You Through It* and *No Gain*, explode with ferocious intensity, driven by a deep, pulsing bassline that anchors the melody. The opening line of *Whatever Drags You Through It* was penned in a jail cell—a raw moment of frustration that perfectly encapsulates the band's activist spirit. *Holly Head* isn't just making music; they're making statements, using their art as both a cathartic release and a powerful tool for change. This political consciousness runs far beyond their lyrics.

Recently, *Holly Head*, alongside *Martial Arts*, *TTSFU*, and *Westside Cowboy*, hosted 'No Band is an Island,' a fundraiser for Palestine, offering a potent show of solidarity. "We have to push for justice," they state plainly, reinforcing their belief that music must challenge, provoke, and inspire. By prioritising community over commercial success, *Holly Head* stands apart, proving that Manchester's next generation won't settle for imitation—they're carving out a bold, unique space where groove, grit, and activism collide.

THIS COLLECTIVE OF TALENT IS UNDENIABLY DESTINED FOR GREAT THINGS, AND THEIR SUCCESS FEELS STRONGEST WHEN PURSUED TOGETHER. SUCH DEEP-ROOTED COLLABORATION IS RARE, YET IT FUELS A CATALYTIC EFFECT ON THEIR INDEPENDENT CAREERS, REINFORCING THE CYCLICAL CREATIVITY THAT KEEPS MANCHESTER'S MUSIC SCENE RELEVANT IN A LONDON-CENTRIC SOCIETY.

HOWEVER, THE ONGOING DECLINE OF GRASSROOTS VENUES IS A GROWING CONCERN; WITH YEARS OF UNDERFUNDING AND NEGLECT, AN ESTIMATED 35% HAVE CLOSED IN THE PAST TWO DECADES. BY CHAMPIONING EMERGING ARTISTS AND ACKNOWLEDGING THE VITAL ROLE OF THE SPACES THAT NURTURE THEM, MANCHESTER'S INDEPENDENT VENUES COULD CONTINUE TO THRIVE, ENSURING THAT THE CITY REMAINS A POWERHOUSE FOR MUSICAL INNOVATION, ACTIVISM, AND COMMUNITY.

I WAS TOO BUSY CHECKING THE ODDS ON A THREE-LEGGED HORSE.
CLINGING TO LIMESTONE
WASHING THE SHIT OFF THE PAVEMENT
THE PETROL STATIONS, LIVING ROOMS,
SINKING CITY STREETS, TILE-FRONT PUBS,
ART GALLERIES, SHOOTING GALLERIES,
MANORS, CASTLES AND SHIT HOLES.
TIME BEGINS TO SLOW,
LINKS ARMS AND STARTS REWINDING
SHELTER IN THE GLOW OF THE 3 AM HALOGENS,
WATCH THE BIN FIRE SPARK FLICKER LIKE A DYING STAR
LOOK UP AT THE SCREEN
AH SHIT, MY BETS JUST COME IN!

SOMEWHERE, A CAT LANDS ON ITS FEET
SOMEWHERE, THE RAIN SMELLS LIKE HOME.
SOMEWHERE, SOMEONE LAUGHS AND ACTUALLY MEANS IT

fuckin long, innit?

- Words: Kieran T. Poole -

I'M A VISITOR HERE

Though many albums summarise their themes and ideas in their opening lyrics, few succeed like short-lived Scottish band Life Without Buildings' seminal 2002 record, Any Other City, in communicating their pure feeling just through a few words. "No details, but I'm gonna persuade you" is the opening statement of PS Exclusive, and this is the conviction which is carried through the album as it traverses the many sounds of indie, post-punk and math rock intent on evoking the contrasting, competing feelings of euphoria and stagnation. The cryptic yet impassioned lyricism, elevated by Sue Tompkins' electrifying vocal performances, is easily applicable to the circumstances under which the album finds you, with the meanings found within the elaborate tangles of repeated phrases and shimmering guitar riffs being easily variable from one to another, like a particularly beautiful inkblot designed to test what it is that is inspiring equal passion and frustration in your soul at present.

I can't claim to remember exactly when I first listened to the album. The retroactively unproductive method of binge listening I often employed in my early teens meant that it was likely lodged between two disparate records which I could not connect to, and whilst I was immediately enthralled by Tompkins' vocal style, sadly much else initially passed me by, amidst the onslaught of constant consumption. However, in early 2021, probably two years after I first heard the album and at a time when my life consisted of very little beyond constant scrolling, I heard about something which fascinated me: a large volume of people from my own demographic of teenage girls posting short lip sync videos to the fourth track on the album, The Leanover, on TikTok.

The trend was seemingly unintentionally started by the British singer-songwriter beabadobee, and there's a sense of adventure and curiosity in both artists which sets them apart from contemporaries. Both take recognisable indie instrumentation and instill it with cross-genre influences which, in both cases, lead to a sonically engaging and unique experience, making it natural that fans of Bea's work could find common ground even just with a snippet of a track.

Reactions to The Leanover were marked by curiosity regarding the track, and specifically how the whispered, playful, unaccompanied "If I lose you, if I lose you, if I lose you, uh-huh" from the beginning of the song seemed to many commenters to be an entirely new way of singing, which took on meaning not just from the words, but from the shape of the words and how they cheekily fizzle and pop on Tompkins' tongue. The rest of the song journeys through references to shoegaze legends My Bloody Valentine and a metaphor rooted in high heels to evoke the image of a distant and uncommunicative lover, whose presence and perceived coolness "leans over" the narrator in an absence of contact or emotional warmth.

The initial giggly playfulness builds to the point at which it has engulfed the narrator. She begs the "shaker" to retain any sort of connection with her - the isolation is palpable, and yet the love is still itself unshakeable, and Tompkins' voice leads this.

It makes sense that the song would become popular when it did: it seemed to mirror how, by January 2021, my initial joy at getting what I thought was an extra school holiday in April 2020 had given way to my own form of suffocation which was coming to lean over me with similar desperation for air.
From this point forwards, the song and the whole record became favourites, with its ability to communicate so many contradictory and changeable emotions at once being exactly what I needed.

What's also interesting about the record and, particularly, its contemporary reclamation, is how anachronistic the band seemed during their brief career at the beginning of what has retroactively been dubbed the "indie sleaze" era. Beyond an, in their words, "accidental" support slot for The Strokes in London at the beginning of their meteoric rise to icon status, LWB enjoyed little mainstream success, which can likely be attributed to their preference for a more angular approach and proclivity for complex structures, which transcended the barriers of the danceable 4/4 rock song that defined alternative culture in the early 2000s. Today, however, their style and attitude would not have been out of place amongst the myriad "Windmill Scene"-adjacent bands that have become cultural icons, such as black midi, Squid, and most particularly Dry Cleaning, for whom LWB can be seen as a clear predecessor.

RETROSPECT: LIFE WITHOUT BUILDINGS / ANY OTHER CITY

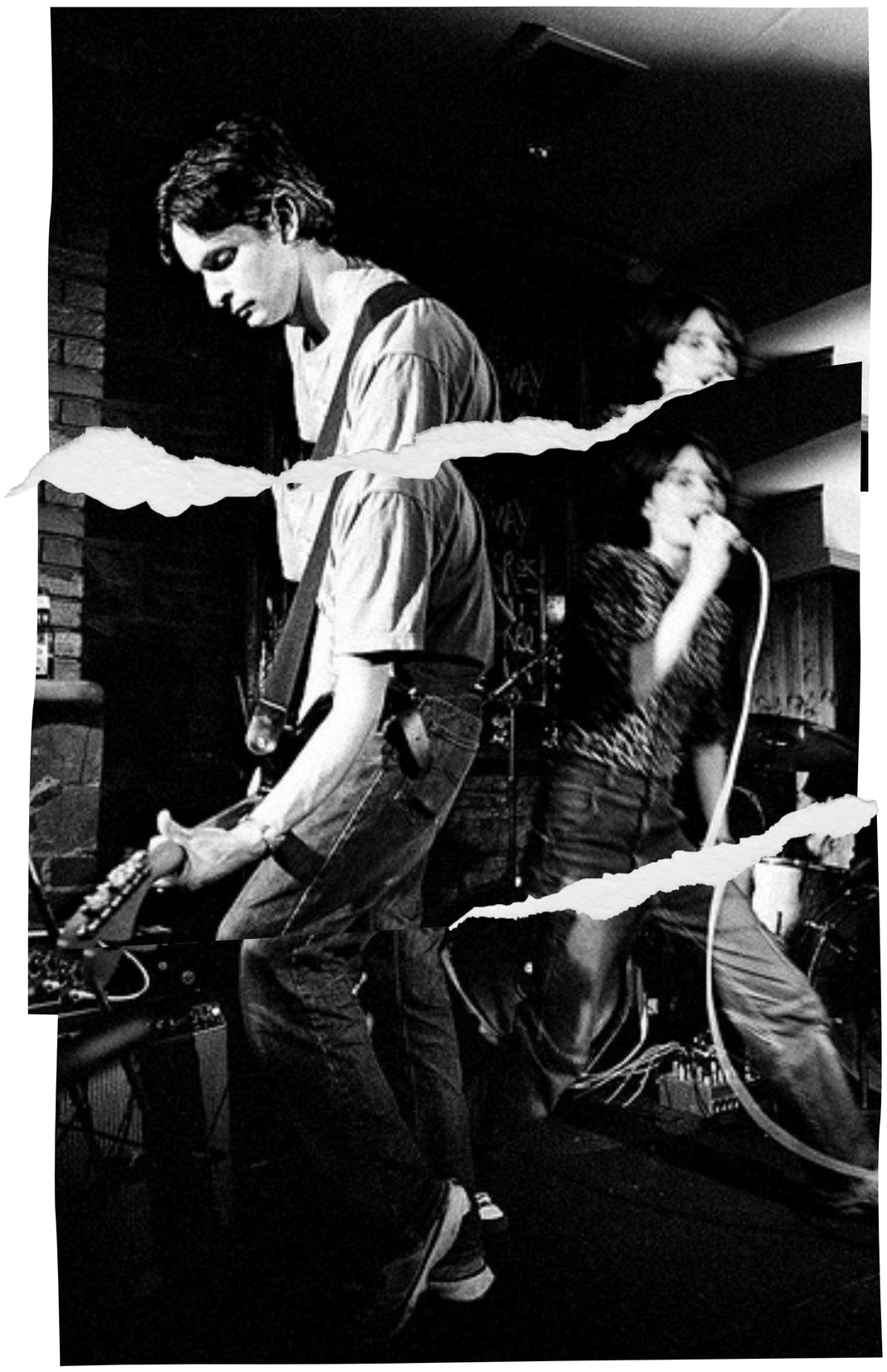
Words: Elizabeth May Clark

“Ultimately, the beauty in this album is that it can adapt and change to whatever somebody wants to feel from it”

Sorrow, the mournful and subdued closing track of Any Other City, would not have been out of place on Dry Cleaning’s fantastic debut album New Long Leg. The track employs a sprechgesang vocal style, drifting through a free-flowing poem with the same sense of resignation, regret, and wry humour that runs through Dry Cleaning’s work. In stark contrast to PS Exclusive, which opens the album with fervour, bite, and intent, Sorrow offers a far more subdued ending. It uses a quiet drum and guitar line with lounge-inspired sensibilities to gradually bring the listener down from the record’s bursts of theatricality. In this sense, Any Other City proves that sometimes, good things take time. In a world where trends and influences are cyclical, there’s beauty in LWB’s insistence on following their instincts at a moment when it was the opposite of the zeitgeist. Undeniably, this has paid off, with recent interviews highlighting the joy of learning that the right people have come to adore and be influenced by their work—without the need for a half-hearted reunion tour.

The stellar Juno incorporates melancholic guitar work and a sense of familiarity with the Midwest Emo of the late ’90s, yet it transcends this label due to the immediacy that permeates the album. Rather than wallowing in after-the-fact hopelessness, LWB place you directly in the room where the narrator contemplates a character who could be seen as a mystical, distant crush, in line with the track’s title referencing the ancient Roman goddess of marriage. Again, Tompkins’ vocal style is a defining factor here: as she yelps, “I wonder you—are you real?”, there’s a sense that this thought has spontaneously occurred to her for the first time, expressed with genuine curiosity and fascination that blurs the line between singing and, for a brief moment, acting. Will Bradley’s drumming is magnificent too; the cymbals flutter rapidly, mirroring the manic energy that the song’s seemingly unknowable subject seems to inspire within the narrator, as the feeling of possibility fills the air.

LIFE WITHOUT BUILDINGS
ANY OTHER CITY



Similarly, New Town epitomises the masterful blend of joy and neuroticism that defines the album’s sound. Euphoric bursts of energy contrast with a pending sense of dread and discomfort: whilst the warm guitar tones found on the track sound like the heartbeat of young love, this is counterbalanced by Tompkins’ voice being used here as a site for anxious rumination from a brain running through love with uncertainty, as she yells “I’m looking in your eyes” repeatedly. The associations that this track can develop in people’s minds are, again, variable, but for me it is impossible to separate it from its title: all of the excitement of finding a literal or metaphorical New Town for yourself, as somebody currently experiencing the joy of finally being understood as myself for the first time, is on display here. The entire song sounds like running through empty streets, enthralled by freedom and yet cautious of its intense allure.

LWB embodied creativity that extended beyond music. Lyrics plucked from a thought mid-formation, a combination of jagged instrumentation and blurring the boundaries between disciplines may explain why the band was never fully absorbed into the mainstream indie scene of the time—while their contemporaries adhered to rock’s conventional structures, LWB’s output felt more like an avant-garde performance piece. An exhibit of emotion and language in motion.

Ultimately, the beauty in this album is that it can adapt and change to whatever somebody wants to feel from it: it’s impossible for me to talk about it without it eventually feeling extremely personal, and this seems to be the case for many people that I’ve spoken to in the past, too. The unique vocals and the band’s ability to convey rapidly shifting moods through rhythm and melody, even just within one song, transform the often cold and dispassionate genres of math rock and post-punk into something so warm, loving, and truly unique, and if you have not heard the album before it should absolutely be upon yourself to change that and to see what you uncover from within it. No details, but you can consider myself and so much of the current musical landscape to be persuaded.

- Words: Elizabeth May Clarke -

True Crime Podcast

“Wow”

This dark alley Thursday
Sounds like
A cross-state road trip
A heartbeat hitchhiking
Shotgun in a thrift store halter top

“It's such a great, horrifying story”

When the amber hours
Of Californian coastline
Stretch easy on a therapist's couch

“It's like, the most not chill fucking thing I've ever heard”

Through
Sun-brewed mouths
Filler words bump like the shoulders of ice cubes
It would never happen to you
With this burnt butter accent

“She used to say it was like living in a Norman Rockwell painting”

Jaywalking across our mild winter
Each vowel bruised into kinship
Threaded on a zip tie

“Jiggling doorknobs until one finally opened”

Your wrist remembers
We walk here willingly

Weekly
Weakly

ONCE DRIVEN BY THE BELIEF THAT THE ARTIST WAS CENTRAL TO ITS IDENTITY IN MODERN BRITAIN, NOTTINGHAM—NOW, MUCH LIKE ITS COUNTERPARTS—HAS ABANDONED THAT IDEAL, TRADING ITS CREATIVE INDEPENDENCE FOR THE QUICK CASH GRAB OF COMMERCIAL MONOTONY, WHILE THE FAÇADES OF 19TH-CENTURY GRANDEUR AND DESIGN ROT QUIETLY ABOVE.

IN THE PAST FEW DECADES, THE CITY HAS RESTED ON PAST GLORIES —NEW LOCAL ARTISTS TEND TO DISAPPEAR FOR A FEW MONTHS, GRAFTING IN OTHER CITIES, HUSTLING IN LONDON BASEMENTS OR GRIMY EUROPEAN SQUATS — THEN RETURN, MOMENTARILY TRIUMPHANT, REBRANDED AS LOCAL HEROES. CROWDS SWELL. PEOPLE POINT AND SAY, “I WAS THERE WHEN THEY WERE SHIT.” WERE THEY, OR WERE THEY JUST NOT LISTENING? WHO CHANGED — THE BAND, OR THE IDIOT?
THE MODERN CREATIVE LANDSCAPE OFFERS THESE IDEAS MUCH MORE HEADROOM. THERE ARE ALWAYS OTHER CITIES. OTHER VENUES TO PLAY. OTHER SHITHOLES TO LUG HALF A GRAND’S WORTH OF EQUIPMENT THROUGH THE DOORS INTO A DANK ROOM, WHERE THE BAND GOES, “AHH SWANK DIGS, MATE.”

BUT WAIT — (OUT COMES THE TIN HAT) ARE THERE REALLY THAT MANY INDEPENDENT VENUES STILL GOING? IT’S TRUE, THE DIALS HAVE SHIFTED. BUT WHO’S MOVING THEM?
ON THE DIY SCENE, IT COULD GET A LOT WORSE THAN IT CURRENTLY IS… BUT THEN AGAIN, EVERYTHING COULD, RIGHT?

LET’S BE CLEAR, YOU CAN STILL GO AND WATCH SOME GUY LOBBING A LOAD OF REVERB ONTO A ONE-NOTE MIDI KEYBOARD WHILST SOMEONE SCREAMS OVER THE TOP OF IT ON A TUESDAY NIGHT IN A TINY SPACE. THAT’S NOT THE PROBLEM. I THINK THE CROWDS ARE, AND NOTTINGHAM ISN’T ALONE.
PUNTERS GOING TO SMALLER SHOWS IS ALWAYS DROPPING. PEOPLE KEEP OPTING IN FOR THEIR ONCE-A-YEAR “ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME” (UNTIL NEXT YEAR’S ANNIVERSARY TOUR ROLLS AROUND) BARCLAYCARD EXPERIENCE WHERE YOU CAN DO KARAOKE IN A FIELD WITH A BUNCH OF FUCKWITS, PAYING £10 A PINT, FOR BLOWN OUT SOUND AND A POLICE DOG SEARCH ON ENTRY. Y’KNOW - THE PREMIUM EXPERIENCE…

SO DOES THE CULTURE AT LARGE NO LONGER WORSHIP THE VALUES OF GOING TO A SHOW AND DISCOVERING SOMETHING NEW? DO WE ALL JUST STAY AT HOME ISOLATED FROM OTHER PEOPLE AND WATCH FROM AFAR THROUGH THE COMFORT OF THE SOCIAL SCREEN?

- Words: Kieran T, Poole -

EVEN THE ROMANS HAD THE “FUCK IT, DO IT ANYWAY” MENTALITY WHERE PROMOTERS WOULD RUN MOCK NAVAL BATTLES IN THEIR AMPHITHEATRES TO TRY SOMETHING NEW, TO ENTERTAIN AND BUILD COMMUNITY.
BUT AFTER A FEW YEARS OF POORLY ATTENDED SHOWS, THEY JUST WENT BACK TO KILLING ANIMALS AND SLAVES TO ADORING FANS BEGGING FOR THE HITS! “YEAH! CUT HIS FUCKIN HEAD OFF!” AND SO ON...

SO, WHAT DO WE DO, GIVE THE PEOPLE WHAT THEY WANT? OASIS AND A BAG OF GEAR? IS THAT REALLY ALL WE CAN DO? DID SOMETHING CHANGE? AND WHAT THE FUCK EVEN IS DIY IN THE MODERN ERA?
FAR TOO MANY QUESTIONS, NOT ENOUGH ANSWERS.

DESPITE THIS SLOW EROSION, NOTTINGHAM SEEMINGLY RESISTS TOTAL ASSIMILATION. ITS STUBBORN REFUSAL TO FOLLOW TRENDS, AND IT'S STRANGE ABILITY TO ISOLATE ITSELF FROM THE GRAVITATIONAL PULL OF LARGER METROPOLITAN HUBS, GIVES THE CITY IT’S STRANGE UNIQUENESS—FEELING BOTH BIG AND SMALL, IN MINDSET AND LANDMASS. PROMOTORS STILL WILLING TO PUT GIGS ON WEEK AFTER WEEK PROVES THAT IT’S JUST THIN ENOUGH TO WADE THROUGH, LOOSE ENOUGH TO BUILD YOUR OWN SCENE WITHIN IT. AND THERE IS ONE—PEEKING THROUGH THE CRACKS IN THE SKY, YOU’VE JUST GOTTA KEEP PULLING AT IT AND LOOK TOWARDS THE NEW WAY.
BECAUSE WITHOUT IT, YOU HAVE NOTHING NEW REALLY?
JUST THE HITS PLAYING ON A LOOP AS THE TRIBUTE BAND SCREAMS OUT.... SUNSSSSSSSHINNEEEEEEE.

GO HIRE OUT YOUR OWN SPACES AND PUT ON YOUR OWN SHOWS. MAKE SOME MONEY, LOSE SOME, WHO CARES ANYWAY, LOB IT ON CREDIT. IF IT’S GOOD, PEOPLE WILL EVENTUALLY GET THERE.

PLUS IF YOU DON’T, **WHO ELSE WILL?**

SHOP LOCAL

SHOP LOCAL
SHOP LOCAL

Always Back In Town . Always At Your Door

SHOP

BLOODWORM

Nottingham three-piece Bloodworm have always made sure to keep their name at the forefront of the local consciousness since their conception four years ago – now they want to spread the vines of their success a little further afield.

Their years in the making have transpired to create a catalogue of pieces which are able to unfurl into spellbinding performances every time the band set the stage.

With their recent momentous run of live dates across the UK, it's fair to say they've hardly been working quietly. The band have managed to cement themselves as a standout act on the radar at the moment.

For Bloodworm, live shows are the vehicle that drives them. Starting their year off full throttle, their biggest show to date at Rockaway Beach Festival came as an undeniable affirmation of their growth as a band, and a well-deserved taste of what is to come for them in the near future.

‘We played for about two or three thousand people. The first five days of the new year. That was a massive confidence boost for the rest of the year. We don’t want anything less now, dya’know what I mean?’

Another highlight along the run was their support slot with High Vis in February. It’s moments like these which keep the fuel in their tanks running.

Checkpoints in their career which previously may have felt like distant hopes are increasingly becoming closer to touch. Splendour Festival and a show alongside Martial Arts, for instance, are great examples that the band are on the right trajectory. From here, it feels the only way is up for the band.

From our first few minutes of conversation, it has already become clear playing live is what has fuelled Bloodworm’s progression, yet there is still a balance to be struck between gigging and recording their tracks for all to enjoy. Part of Bloodworm’s appeal is their ability to replicate both of these sounds in equal measure, yet the process itself is not such an easy transition. Explaining that they don’t live track their songs, it can be quite the arduous experience in the studio – but it all pays off in the end.

‘We do enjoy it, especially at JT Soar – shoutout Phil Booth and Robin! They really get in there, they really get what we're going for. There’s a production aesthetic which is hard to get right because it’s not just the songs, it’s the songs in the right context production-wise to make them sound and feel how we want them to.’

With their latest singles Back of a Hand and Depths, the band have been able to finally slip into the mould of what has been a long time in the making.

‘These first two singles have just established the sound that we’ve been trying to achieve for a while but we’d never got right until now. With the music we play, there’s a lot of dissonance and very simple parts that in certain settings might not sound so good – but if you get it right it’ll sound really cool and atmospheric. I think people who have listened to us have understood that, and it’s helped pull people to shows.’

Again, the theme remains consistent: Bloodworm put the biggest emphasis on the live sound. They know what works for them, so you can hardly blame them for doing their utmost to get themselves out there. For George, everything they do both onstage and offstage is a well-measured endeavour to push themselves further.

“Everything we do is an attempt to create some kind of atmosphere, whether it’s through going nuts on stage or being really calm but tense, we try and create a mood. It’s about trying to build a feeling more than just playing songs.

There’s palpable excitement for the future releases which linger on the horizon, Euan offering assurance that ‘these next songs could be huge. If anybody comes to our gigs and knows those songs, in a studio setting they’ll be big.”

You cannot rush perfection, and with their upcoming works still just bubbling under the surface, the trio have so far excelled at maintaining momentum by gigging. Euan is clear in explaining precisely why this is vital for the success of any smaller band in today’s musical climate.

‘At the moment, releasing music is the least of our worries as long as we’re still playing. It’s the best way to get about, at least in music nowadays being independent. You get so much more out of playing a live gig. You don’t get anything out of recording really unless you somehow just blow up. It’s just nice when people just like the music. Playing gigs is what’s important, it’s the way to go.’

Bloodworm have undoubtedly done well navigating the challenges posed by the current state of the creative industry. Underpinning their success is the intention with which they approach progression. There is clear motivation and purpose in what they are pursuing now.

Looking back at their formative years, the band have shed various forms to get where they are today. Dynamically, their sound has taken the inevitable road of evolution trodden by many bands, but even down to the basics, their individual refinement as musicians is what truly lends to their own uniquely crafted sound and vision. Euan might've admittedly started off like Lars Ulrich – 'just smacking everything' – but with a little helping hand and occasional crack of the whip from George, he was soon knocked into shape.

'It's just time behind the kit. When I first met him, he didn't play drums right. He had lessons when he was a kid, he had a rotten drumkit. He just got awesome by playing gigs. The only way of getting good at any instrument is by playing on repeat. That's the only way you're gonna figure it out, getting thrown in at the deep end.'
Bloodworm are certainly swimming away from the deep and coming up to the surface now. With their years of experimentation, they have managed to establish themselves safely in their own desolate soundscape. One word which is commonly banded around to describe their sound is 'goth'. Whilst their influence certainly stems from the origins of the genre, it's a label the band prefer not to confine themselves to – for the purposes of musical growth more than anything.

I don't wanna stick to just goth because there's certain bands out there putting on this aesthetic of goth and they're ignoring the actual musical content. I'm not trying to do what's already been done before. Everything I've done on guitar is inspired by some of the older goth artists but also the pre-goth/post-punk stuff that I'm inspired by. I love the music, but we're not tied to that completely. I like songs which are dark or sad because I connect to them, but we're not necessarily always going to write songs like that. Whatever direction we feel like we want to go in, we're going to go in.'

The band's varied music taste as a collective certainly lends to their ability to expand away from the boundaries of their sound. This extra space has enabled them to create something fresh from the side of a genre which could easily become bogged down in heavy elements of nostalgia.

"We don't want anything less now, d'ya know what I mean?"
– George, Bloodworm

Although George's taste most closely aligns with the 'goth' range, the unconscious influence of external sources allows for something distinct to be cooked up on every new track.
'A lot of the time I'll try and write something in a different genre and it ends up sounding how we sound. I'm not trying to do one thing, I'm just writing songs. There's so much out there, so many bands that try and push out that they are a certain band but we don't want to do that, we just want to make good songs. That's all that matters.'

Looking at their back-catalogue, Bloodworm's sound deviates through numerous pathways, from pop to heavier rock. This lack of a linear theme makes way for anticipation and ambiguity in what they create next. Their lack of strict conformation to one style has been what's unified Bloodworm's audience, young and old. For George, it doesn't matter what goes into a song per se, as long as the outcome is what works for the band and can be enjoyed by an audience.
'I've been listening to a lot of The Smiths recently and if you didn't know who was writing all of the songs and know that it was produced in the same way, you wouldn't think they're the same band because there's so many different styles. The songs are very different, some are based on glam rock, then there are really folky ones and some really funky ones. I just want to write songs I like.'

Bloodworm are a breath of fresh air in a scene choking on the same old clichés. They're a sharp slap in the face, showing what's possible when you embrace an evolving perspective and keep authenticity at the heart of it all—something sorely missing in so much of today's noise. With every move, their confidence and commitment to the craft are only becoming more undeniable.

- Words: Alice Beard & Elias Serghi -

SILENT SUPPER

A silent supper with John Cage / his Bubblegum
Chewing for 4 minutes 33 seconds / waiting for that squeaky
Pop! Ripples in my wine from the vibrations of piano fingers
Conducts an experiment for a feast of one.

He Coughs / I awaken from dreary brain salad
A lack of dressing / A lack of inspiration
A boring chef gets nowhere if he's skinny/
A face gaunt from effort / obese from ideas.

Plates white / The glass half full
Waiting for the man to call / This is stressful / can he cook?
Dreams are filling depending on the proportion you intake

In spite of all / the time has come
Raise a glass / forget / forgive and go home
Full. The palace of access is my ticket to instant
Gratified excess of measures / A character is based on hosting/

Does this do him well / Wait for the pop / youll be surprised by it
The time it takes / thank you / goodnight / It never came /

Tonight was a game / He came to play without lifting a finger

- Words: Lewis Oxley -

CONTRIBUTORS

editor & design

Kieran T. Poole

words

Kieran T. Poole
Pages: 4, 22, 23, 24, 25, 31, 32, 45, 50, 51

Jimi Arundell
Pages: 6, 8, 9

Elizabeth May Clark
Pages: 12, 13, 46, 47

Dave Thomson
Pages: 15, 16

Jamie Thrasivoulou
Page: 28

Bo Keller
Pages: 31, 32, 33

Isabella Platt
Pages: 35, 37, 39, 41, 43, 44

Sophie Diver
Page: 49

Elias Serghi & Alice Beard
Pages: 53, 54, 55

Lewis Oxley
Page: 56

photos & artwork

Syd Shelton
Pages: 1, 20, 21, 24, 25, 26, 27

Art Institute of Chicago
Pages: 4, 45

Tom White
Pages: 7, 31, 32, 33

Joe Moss
Page: 36

Alexis Panidis
Page: 37, 38, 43

Piran Aston
Page: 40

Esther Roberts
Page: 38

Tasmin Nicole Stephens
Page: 41

Kieran T. Poole
Pages: 2, 5, 10, 17, 30, 34, 59

Gary Conway
Page: 40

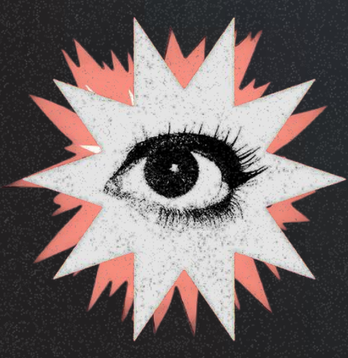
J A Mortram
Page: 29

Meave W.
Page: 53

Rachael Halaburda
Pages: 54, 55

John Cage Trust
Page: 57

Alice Rousana
Page: 60



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WITHOUT A SPARK

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